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RENDERING VISIBLE:

The underground organisational experience of the ANC-led Alliance until 1976

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

November 2005

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis could only have been prepared with funding that enabled me to travel and hear about struggles and issues and people whose stories would otherwise never be recorded. The Nordic Africa Institute in Uppsala, provided funding through SIDA, the Swedish Agency for International Development and Cooperation for my research over four years. That generosity enabled me to pursue my research with the single-mindedness that most scholars do not enjoy, given all their other duties.

For most of the period I was housed at the Centre for Policy studies. I benefited greatly from the insights of Steven Friedman who invited me initially and received considerable back up from staff, in particular Claire Kruger, Martin Ngobeni, Soneni Ncube, Rangena Mogale and Stella Tshona. These people continually collected library books and photocopied large documents for me, and helped in countless other ways.

In recent times I have also been attached to the History Department of University of South Africa and Unisa Press. I have benefited greatly from the insights and friendship of Greg Cuthbertson, one of the most selfless and dedicated scholars I have known, a person whose work deserves far wider recognition. I have also benefited from friendship and advice of Professor Abebe Zegeye. Although not involved in this thesis, he has published elements and encouraged me.

Many scholars have given of their time and corresponded on a variety of issues. In particular, Gail Gerhart and Tom Karis, with their customary generosity were of great assistance in criticism, encouragement, location of sources and generally providing mentorship in the earlier stages of this work.

Irina Filatova and Vladimir Shubin have read a great deal of this thesis and constantly provided rigorous criticism, pointed out inadequate sourcing and at the same time provided constant encouragement.

Dr P Sebate of the Unisa African languages department was helpful on certain linguistic questions, as can be seen in the body of the thesis.

At various times I benefited from discussion or correspondence with Christopher Saunders, Cynthia Kros, Shireen Hassim, Roger Southall, John Daniel, and Peter Hudson. William Beinart and Caroline Kihato each read one of the chapters and provided valuable comments. Michael Neocosmos and Peter Limb read much of the work and also provided me with some important theoretical insights and in the case of Peter, continued bibliographical assistance. .

I had the opportunity to test elements of this work at many conferences and seminars and thank all of these hosts in many places and institutions for providing me with the invitations, which helped provide the impetus towards the product that is now presented.

Some of the chapters draw on previously published work or work about to be published, mentioned in the bibliography in *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, 2003 and 2004, *South African Historical Journal*, 2003, *Social Identities*, 2004 and *Kleio* 2005. All are fully listed in the bibliography.

I thank my supervisors Tom Lodge, Eddie Webster and Phil Bonner for careful reading and constructive criticism, which has helped to make this what I hope is a clearer and more systematic work.

I thank my wife, Nomboniso Gasa. She is also a former underground operative, but also possesses a powerful intellect. This has meant that I have been able throughout this process, to have daily discussions on most issues. On the gender sections, on which she is a specialist, she always helped find ways towards resolution of the problems with which I grappled.

Finally, this work draws on the lives of very many brave and selfless men and women. They gave their time to tell of the complex, often unacknowledged sacrifices that they and others made in order to liberate this country. I hope that this work is a small contribution towards making what they have done better known.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.

Raymond Sorrel Suttner

_____day of _____2005

ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of underground organisation from the 1950s until 1976, though it also draws on material prior to and after these periods. It delves into an area of social activity that has been relatively invisible in scholarship on South Africa and resistance history. The study considers the concept of underground operations. It is taken to include not only the place where the 'final' activities may have taken place, but those countries where cadres were trained or housed, even if this would normally be characterised as located in 'exile'. It is 'outside', but it such activities are also treated as part of the underground phenomenon considered as a whole.

At the level of historiography the thesis is a re-reading of early ANC underground, partly giving a different interpretation to existing literature, but also relying on the insights of oral informants. The establishment of the SACP underground is fleshed out through interview material, but the thesis challenges the notion that the Party controlled the ANC, arguing in contrast that the conditions of the alliance demanded limitations on SACP's autonomy.

In the period after Rivonia the conventional historiography speaks of a lull and an absence of the ANC and its allies. The thesis provides evidence to contradict this showing that while there may have been silence, there was never absence. It also probes the relationship between ANC and Black Consciousness, where it shows far more overlap than much of the existing literature has disclosed.

The study is at once a historical narrative and also an attempt to characterise the social character of this area of study, the special features that go to make up clandestine organisaton. Within this characterisation of underground activity, the thesis also probes the gendered nature of these activities, the definite impact of concepts of masculinity and femininity within a conventionally male terrain. Related to these questions the thesis probes the relationship between the personal and organisational, both at the level of individual decision-making and notions of love and realising emotions.

The chapter on gender examines the denial of manhood to African men and considers ANC masculinities and assertion of the need to regain manhood in that context. The thesis also examines the entry of women into the male world of the army and underground, explaining many of the difficulties and the countervailing efforts of women as well as certain men to assert the rights of women to equal participation. The chapter on the impact of revolutionary activity on the personal examines the subordination of individual judgement to the collective and in the personal sphere, notions of revolutionary love, found not only in South Africa but in most revolutionary struggles, where 'love for the people' tends to displace inter-personal love.

The final chapter –by way of an epilogue- examines the outcomes of struggles after 1976, initiated by various forces including the underground organisation. In this period ANC hegemony begins to consolidate and the character of that hegemony is broken down into various components.

Chapter one

Introduction

This work started as a much broader project examining the culture(s) of the ANC, that is, the impact of a wide range of experiences on the character of the organisation today. The intention was to probe the imprint of exile, the ANC's military wing, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), prison, underground organisation, the United Democratic Front (UDF) and a variety of other influences upon the ANC's membership over time, in order to draw conclusions about the salience of these different experiences for the current character and potential trajectory of the ANC. The concept of culture that was deployed was intended to be wider than notions of political culture relating to an organisation's norms and modes of operation. It was intended to refer to where people 'come from' and what they are, in the widest sense of the term, relating in particular to the composite of belief systems that precede and coexist with their becoming ANC members. The motive behind such a conception of culture or more correctly cultures was that these beliefs systems interface with ANC beliefs making it important to uncover the character of that interrelationship. Although this work does not achieve that, except in an episodic sense in relating certain elements of ANC activity, I believe it is important that work is done to uncover the complex cultural character of the organisation. Much of this complexity has not enjoyed scholarly examination because it is expressed primarily in words, most of which are not recorded and even where they have been recorded the overall belief system of the persons concerned has been a subsidiary concern in a particular research project.[1]

As the title of this work suggests, its scope has been narrowed. But the previous intentions have not been entirely obliterated and indeed the definition of underground organisation that is adopted here is wide enough to incorporate several of the main original themes including elements of the early ANC and the 1950s, exile, prison and the influence of the UDF. Part of what was originally intended in the much wider

[1] A profound example is the hours and hours of interviews conducted by Peter Delius with Elias Motsoaledi for his work on Sebatakgomo. It is likely that the same material may contain within it a very complex philosophy, demonstrating a hybrid ideological system, where Motsoaledi combines Marxism with indigenous beliefs. This is beyond the scope of Delius's work, although a hint of the existence of these other cosmologies is found when he mentions that MK martyr and Sebatakgomo leader Flag Boshielo was also trained as a healer. (Delius, 1996, 102).

study remains in what is now presented. This is because there are many interfaces, overlaps and intersections between experiences. While not suggesting that every exiled person was an underground operative, exile as an experience is in many ways intimately connected to underground organisation, for it was in exile that many people were trained or briefed to perform the acts they undertook as operatives inside the country. It was often in exile that operations were planned, though the degree of autonomy allowed 'inside' would vary. It was from exile that many underground groups were supplied, and from where a variety of forms of logistical and financial support were provided. It was also in the interaction between the internal and the external that intelligence was gathered and evaluated on many important issues. Consequently, although that was not my original understanding, I have decided to treat elements of the exile experience as an integral part of underground organisation and activity.[2] This is in line with the logic that to understand any phenomenon it is unwise to isolate it from elements that underpin its operation, success and failure. (See further below)

The prison experience, part of the original conception, also fed directly into one phase of the development of the ANC/SACP (South African Communist Party) underground, especially in the early 1970s and also the later achievement of 'Congress hegemony' in the legal space that opened in the late 1970s. (See Chapter 8 below). In some cases, released prisoners were specifically mandated to join a particular underground unit before leaving prison. It was also within prison that many former Black Consciousness (BC)-aligned people 'converted' to the ANC-led liberation movement and were amongst those 'deployed' to underground activities or specific units.

The early ANC and SACP underground organisations were themselves important and lasting influences beyond what was achieved at that specific moment and the mode and level of organisation then reached. Early underground organisations inspired others with their example that it was possible to 'take on' the apartheid regime illegally. These moments in the existence of both organisations contributed towards the development of ideological coherence within what would become a formal

[2] This changed position is a result of correspondence with Professor Irina Filatova and is elaborated on later in this chapter.

alliance between the two organisations (and others who later joined or informally affiliated with them) and the building of a vision for an alternative, democratic South Africa. It is striking how ANC underground operatives, as late as the 1980s, continued in many cases to base their structures on conceptions developed in the 1950s, in particular the M-Plan. (Discussed in Chapter 2 and in Setsubi interview, 2004)

At the same time, one of the reasons for narrowing the scope of the research to a focus on underground organisation is that precisely because of its secret character, much of what was undertaken and achieved may never appear on the historical record, as its often-anonymous practitioners pass away. Some documentary evidence exists of those who were arrested (though much of this is truncated insofar as the activity was presented for purposes of the needs of court proceedings) but the same is not true of the many operatives who were never captured and remain unknown. Consequently, the extent of the phenomenon remains unknown. There is some urgency to recover the history of this aspect and period of history before it disappears without trace.

While underground organisation has a connection to other forms of struggle, it will be shown, especially in Chapter 5 where an attempt is made to characterise this mode of political operation, that it has specific ways of functioning that distinguish it from other forms of organised activity. It also raises complex moral, social and psychological issues that do not arise in the same way in other spheres of operation.

Some of what has emerged in the course of this study was not anticipated. In particular, the intersection of belief systems hardly surfaced in earlier literature in South Africa, despite being an important element in understanding the total picture not only of underground organisation, but a whole range of social activities in South Africa. By this phrase I am referring to the connection between ideological beliefs and obligations associated with ANC/SACP membership and ideas, beliefs, practices and obligations associated with other belief systems, in particular what may for convenience be described as ‘traditional’ belief systems. This intersection is

examined[3] and also related to the notion that a national liberation struggle comprises individuals with a variety of distinct identities, some of which have not been adequately recognised and factored into ANC thinking in the past. While these issues have received considerable attention in Zimbabwean historiography, it has been relatively neglected in writings on the struggle in South Africa. (For Zimbabwe, Terence Ranger was a pioneer, from the 1960s. (See e.g. Ranger 1967, 1982, and amongst others Lan, 1985, Bhebe and Ranger, 1995, 1996).

Another issue, whose salience for this study was not initially anticipated, is the question of gender, associated with notions of the personal, heroism, masculinity and femininity within the ANC and its allies. (See Chapter 6). This is related in the first place to the intersection of belief systems, where the practice of initiation is associated with transition to manhood, a conception whose meaning needs to be problematised and contextualised. Initiation, it will be shown is sometimes connected to joining MK. The question of gender arises again, more broadly in the context of the general character of underground struggle, and possibly a whole range of other revolutionary pursuits that tend to be treated as heroic (and in some literature, as therefore performed by men). It also arises in the context of women's involvement and deployment in MK and underground generally. The evidence that follows points to a complexity and conditionality that much feminist literature does not adequately acknowledge. (See Chapter 6).

The character of revolutionary work impacts on the individual as an autonomous person. Chapter 7 examines this relationship between the organisation and the personal in relation to questions of individual judgment and also how inter-personal relations, and conceptions of love tend to be displaced by revolutionary notions of 'love for the people.'

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[3] It is not thoroughly canvassed however and the treatment of initiation (though still limited) is more substantial than the question of access to sangomas/inyangas, which has periodically emerged in interviews, but has not been explored here. This is because adequate evaluation of both areas, in particular the latter require expertise that cannot be acquired in the period available for this research.

The word *inyanga* can mean both a herbalist and a diviner in Zulu, and it is the latter property that is primarily referred to here in treatment prior to battle or encounters with the enemy. The word *isangoma* is also used in Zulu to mean a diviner, and in conventional usage in South Africa referred to as a 'sangoma'. In Xhosa the words *sangoma* or *igjirha* are used to describe a spirit medium, who would be the type of specialist consulted in this situation.

The study does not purport to be an exhaustive account of the history of underground organisation, though it uncovers aspects of that history that have not previously been researched or documented. It is a re-reading of the early ANC and SACP underground organisation in the light of existing documentation as well as oral evidence. This is followed by a challenge to the prevailing historiography, which speaks of the absence of the ANC/SACP in the period between Rivonia and 1976.While conceding invisibility, which was in fact a condition for survival, the study shows that activity continued at varying levels of intensity.[4]

The study also suggests the possibility of a greater underground organisational presence than even official ANC documentation has claimed. This is because that ANC documentation relies primarily on reports from officially constituted units, while this study argues that 'free lance' but *de facto* ANC underground activities were mounted.

These have been accessed in the present work by oral evidence. A full account of these activities would require many years of further work. This study while making a great deal more use of oral sources than most previous accounts, is by no means complete. There are areas of South Africa where important events took place, that need to be researched and doing so requires extensive funding, much time for travel and interviews, and linguistic resources that are not presently available to this researcher. Indeed, but in a different way, that task is being undertaken in the wider South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) project. This project was commissioned by the government and is financed by some of the big corporations (SADET, 2004). The historical focus of that venture appears to aim primarily at documenting the history without delving into the ancillary sociological questions raised in this thesis. While issues of belief systems, gender, and characteristics of underground organisation as a special form of clandestinity may be noted as part of the narrative in the SADET project, it does not explore them.

[4] Karis and Gerhart (1997, 181,182,279,280) also indicate limited presence of underground units in the period immediately before the 1976 rising.

What do we mean by underground political activity?

By underground political activity this thesis refers to actions by individuals or organisations that are meant to be outside of the public eye, though these may be intended to achieve a public impact. This is not always the case, because mere survival, albeit out of sight, may, among other reasons, demand an underground existence that has no form of visibility.

Underground political activity or organisation refers to a wide range of situations, some of which may not constitute illegality. Subterfuge may be employed in order to achieve political objectives in conditions where openness would make this difficult or impossible. It may also be used to protect people perceived as liable to potential repression at some time in the future.

Underground work is political activity that is not open or openly declared for what it is. Under the cover of doing one thing, a person may in fact also be performing an activity below the surface and not visibly. Essential to underground action is that while something happens at the surface or nothing surfaces, the politically significant activity happens below the surface. Sometimes underground and above ground may coexist in another purely practical respect in that an 'above ground' person may suspect the possibility of being held after someone else's arrest or some other reason. That may lead that person to 'disappear' or have a low profile or stay at some secret place until it is clear whether or not the suspicion of danger is valid.

Where a person is in complete hiding, he or she does not surface at all. Everything that happens is invisible. Alternatively one may have a public face, but all that is quite distinct from the underground one that will not be seen publicly and will only be revealed in disguised form or to a restricted range of people.

Underground activity is not necessarily illegal because in some situations where one has rights or apparent freedom of political activity, one may nevertheless be under surveillance. For one or other reason it may be important that what one is doing or some of what one is doing is not observed by the police. In some situations the

activity may be illegal but the organisation may not have been banned, as was the case in the 1980s where the UDF and its affiliated organisations were generally still legal but the state of emergency prohibited certain activities. Continuing these activities underground was not generally seen as a prelude to permanent underground and illegal existence.

Furthermore, illegal underground activity often coexists with quite legal activities at the same period in time, though the manner of coexistence was substantially different in various periods. This was the case where the Communist Party was reconstituted as an illegal organisation, but its members simultaneously participated quite legally in the Congress Alliance. (See Chapter 3 below). Likewise, in the 1970s and 1980s some activists participated in legal organisations, including UDF affiliates while simultaneously performing illegal underground activity for the ANC and SACP.

A final question that arises, though it becomes more of a factor with the establishment of the ANC in exile, has been indicated earlier. What are the boundaries of underground activities? This relates to both place and time. The present work does not classify an activity as underground purely by the time and geographical area where and when it is finally executed. The preparatory phases form part of the underground work, even if these may well have been much earlier and in another country. Preparatory work, even if undertaken in London, Angola, Swaziland, the former Soviet Union or anywhere else may and generally or often were connected to the final execution of underground activities. In some cases it may have been impossible to perform such an act without a very specific and technical training, which may well have been undertaken long before the opportunity for its execution arose. The concept of underground work should include training or other preparations wherever these may have taken place. In fact, preparatory phases for entering the country often involved great danger and the establishment of a wide range of logistical arrangements or the acquisition of very specific skills. Their success or failure often related to the level of training undergone.

Who is the author of this thesis?

It has been suggested that I should provide some biographical information about myself since, as will be seen in the methodological section that immediately follows, who I am may influence the way interviews are conducted while the life experiences I have had affects choices I have made about who to interview and may provide me with insights that are not available to those who have not had a similar experience. Indeed, I do draw on that experience, especially in Chapter 5 where there is little available data reflecting on the sociological character of underground organisation.

Part of my background is provided in Suttner (2001), though it relates mainly to prison experiences. I grew up as a middle class white and considered myself a liberal for much of my early life. In 1968 I held my first academic position at the University of Cape Town where I entered into a correspondence with Professor Jack Simons, legendary Marxist theorist, but our relationship had little political content and related almost purely to customary law. As a liberal I gradually came to feel that I had reached a dead end politically and when I was awarded a scholarship to study overseas at the end of 1969 I was intending to find a way to return and participate in illegal activities. That gradually crystallised from vague ideas into recruitment by the South African Communist Party to work underground in Durban, mainly issuing pamphlets through posting in the conventional manner. In preparation for these activities I received some political training from Rusty Bernstein in a rather orthodox form of Marxism that seemed to be out of touch with what I had been reading in journals like *New Left Review* and *Monthly Review*. I received technical training from Ronnie Kasrils. My formal recruitment and briefing on my overall operations in the period of four years from 1971 until 1975 before my first arrest was under the oversight of Joe Slovo.

My training was fairly rudimentary –in surveillance and counter-surveillance, modes of secret communication and limited training in use of explosives. Its main orientation was towards a variety of methods of propaganda distribution. Because of the danger of the time and the fear of suffering losses when there were so few people of this type in the field there was great reluctance to have me work with others.

I was offered a temporary and later permanent lecturing position at the University of Natal in Durban, first in African studies then in law. Time was needed to settle into the illegal work. It was necessary to establish that I was beyond any suspicion and I also needed time to find the equipment and places most suitable for conducting the work. In fact such 'suitable conditions' were never found; the resources at my disposal led me to conduct most of my activities from my home. I had been given 200 British pounds and although I was content with that, this ensured that I could not entertain elaborate plans or operations.

Over the four years of my work I issued formal publications of the SACP and to some extent the ANC. During a visit to London in 1974, after the Portuguese coup, a more optimistic mood led Kasrils and Slovo to be more favourably disposed to recruiting others (a hasty decision that was ultimately to prove unwise. See Suttner, 2001) and to my producing a publication myself, enabling the liberation movement to react immediately to events with the sense of what was happening in the country at the time. It was called *Vukani!/Awake!*

At various times I was asked to perform other tasks, whose import I did not understand at the time. I had some years added to my prison sentence because I readdressed a letter to a particular person, who it later turned out was part of a group of guerrillas captured after landing on the coast of Natal. Under interrogation and torture I admitted to readdressing this letter. At another stage I was asked to gather information about the occupants of a particular house. It turned out that there was no house with the address that was supplied.

I was arrested in June 1975, and then spent a total of 8 years in prison, a period that – because of the discussions we held-enriched my political understanding a great deal. The practice at that point had been for many released prisoners to leave the country instead of being confined under house arrest and have their political activities constrained. As we observed the situation in the country change in the early years of PW Botha's leadership, the collective inside the prison decided that I should remain in the country.

Although I was part of this decision and agreed with it, it was not without a degree of dread that I anticipated returning into a situation that might (and did) lead to my rearrest. I kept a fairly low profile at first, but gradually after preparing a lecture on the Freedom Charter[5], I found myself drawn more intensively into the activities of the UDF.

The period from my release until the unbanning of organisations in 1990 was one where many people like me participated in legal activities but were in varying ways connected to underground organisation. From the beginning I participated in legal activities but also met separately sometimes as a small group, sometimes one-on-one without saying it as fellow Communists or Congressites. This implicit trust never led to my being part of a formally constituted underground unit, partly because my background may have jeopardised the existence of such a group. But I interacted with likeminded people as a formal unit might have done.

Also throughout this period I received 'emissaries' from leadership outside the country, sometimes asking me to do one or other thing such as start a theoretical journal, or telling the person who approached me to work with me. When a person was 'instructed' to link up with me or someone in a similar situation it was often also an instruction to break off links with a particular faction. The 1980s was a period manifesting serious factional divisions within the country, mainly related to control of resources.

In the middle of this period I was forced to go underground to avoid arrest, for a period of about 9 months in the first state of emergency of 1985/6, using some of the techniques that I had learnt from Kasrils but which I had never had the opportunity to employ in the 1970s. I re-emerged with the lifting of that state of emergency but from time to time it was habitual for people in my position to disappear temporarily where a possibility of arrest seemed to exist. I was however re-detained in the 1986 state of emergency for 27 months and released into stringent house arrest conditions in September 1988. One year later I defied these to attend the adoption of the Harare Declaration in Zimbabwe and remained out of the country for five months.

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[5] Suttner (1984)

On returning to South Africa at the end of January I did not know what fate awaited me but acted as if I was a free person. Fortunately, a few days later organisations were unbanned and restrictions such as I was supposed to be under were lifted. I was drawn into ANC and SACP leadership from 1991. In the course of meetings I saw something of the inner workings of the organisations, which also bears on what I reveal, for example concerning ANC attempting to veto Hani leaving to work full time for the SACP

In the period of the 1980s, while I attempted to depict myself as pursuing a purely legal course, this carried little weight with the security police but more significantly for this study, was not the perception of those activists who themselves wanted to engage in illegal activities. This meant that I was repeatedly approached to advise how or whether someone should join MK. While being careful not to be trapped in police set ups, this was part of my existence. Also, from the very early days of my first release from prison I was drawn into situations where young Africans, in particular, asked me to take them through various illegal texts.

More dramatically, on my release from detention and period of house arrest in 1988 I was one day taken to meet someone who turned out to be Mac Maharaj, leading the Vula operation[6]. It was difficult to operate actively in such an operation while being under the type of surveillance entailed in house arrest. But the process of people approaching me to get involved in illegal activities continued and in one case I was able to steer towards Vula a person who was able to offer access to and use of an entire factory.

In brief, then, the experiences that I have undergone have given me some practical insights into the types of problems, conflicts, and other issues that arise in an

[6] Operation Vula, under the command of ANC leader, Oliver Tambo and SACP leader, Joe Slovo, represented a qualitatively more advanced attempt to link internal and external leadership with a view to taking underground work to a higher level. In this context, NEC members, Mac Maharaj and Ronnie Kasrils were amongst those who entered the country in the mid to late 1980s. Some people worked underground for some three to four years, without being detected. The character of the advance that Vula represented was manifested for me by the appearance of the ANC January 8 anniversary statement on my doorstep, next to the morning newspaper.

underground situation and this background is a substantial factor informing the way I read literature and interpret interview material.

Literature review

Any review of the literature on underground organisation in South Africa is bound to be quantitatively brief, because it is a subject about which little has been written. There are obvious reasons some of which relate to professional orientations that predisposed studies to take a direction that marginalised underground organisation as a phenomenon.

Most obviously, underground organisation was by definition illegal or primarily illegal, because, as indicated, sometimes legally operating individuals adopted underground methods for security reasons or for one or other reason relating to a desire to hide what they were doing.

But when one is speaking about underground organisation one is speaking almost exclusively of illegal organisation and a type of activity whose practitioners do not want to be known to others. In other words, they would evade not only the police but also researchers. They would even evade or avoid disclosing their identity as an underground group to their own support base because that might endanger their existence.

In other words, the character of underground organisation was intended to make it inaccessible in a direct form to the researcher (amongst others), even had researchers wanted to break barriers and undertake such studies. Furthermore had an underground operative and a researcher collaborated on a study of underground, both would have courted the possibility of arrest and imprisonment, given the laws in existence until 1990.

Studies undertaken prior to that period thus relied on limited sources. These consisted primarily of the statements of government about ANC/SACP underground, books by defectors (Mtolo, 1966) or spies (Ludi, 1969), whose claims had to be treated with

caution. There was also evidence presented at court. Here some of what could have been raised in order to avoid conviction was withheld by accused people in order to safeguard the organisation. So while the courtroom was often a place to hear the authentic voice of the ANC or SACP it was not a place to learn about modes of underground organisation, since most of the information about recruitment and structures tended to come from the police side and the general tendency of accused was to withhold organisational information.

Finally some authors have relied on official statements of the ANC and SACP. It is important to stress that it has only been some authors who have done this. While those who were uninvolved in left politics could quote *Sechaba* or the *African Communist* with little fear of arrest, those involved in the struggle were not able to use these, if they were scholars, and had to conduct their research and publish their work much like the Mayor of Casterbridge in Hardy's novel, fighting with one hand behind his back (Hardy, 1974).

These sources revealed little about underground organisation or MK campaigns. In the main they tended to serve as morale boosters and were often generalised and not very credible. I recall reading an issue of *Sechaba*, in the late 1960s on the Wankie campaign where one could not make out exactly what had happened. Operational considerations and traditional secrecy in security operations led to a lack of specificity in accounts. Insofar as these journals interviewed living operatives they tended to appear like cardboard characters who revealed little about the actual fears and texture of working in great danger. This limitation is however partly overcome by Barrell (unpub, 1993,) who received unique access to strategists and other MK operatives.

Finally the literature relied on the conventional media and these had some journalists placed in the frontline states providing information with varying degrees of accuracy. Someone like Howard Barrell was in fact an ANC member at the time and he provided reports on the ANC. So the character of the media that could be drawn on had varying degrees of value, orientation and credibility for the researcher.

It is in this context that there was only a small body of literature concentrated primarily on underground in the case of police informer Ludi (1969), defector Mtolo

(1966) and rather limited scholarly work of Feit (1971). After that initial work, little more appeared with any reference to the ANC underground organisation other than stating that it had been crushed. The appearance of Tom Lodge's important *Black Politics in South Africa since 1945* (1983) filled some of the gaps about the M- Plan, the immediate transition to underground and armed struggle, some understanding of the exile experience and MK. But having little access to oral informants and the sites of their activity, the work could not capture the texture of the experience and he found it hard to verify the information that he could access. Not having access to the 'invisible' element, Lodge obviously had to rely on and could not always test as fully as he may have liked, what was visible and available.

Filling some of the gaps found in Lodge, were the account of earlier periods and the immediate period after banning by Dingake (1987) and Bunting's biography of Moses Kotane (1998). No study was however published of the SACP underground until after 1990. It was known purely through its theoretical documents and historical studies (e.g. Lerumo [Harmel], 1971) and the statements of defectors like Mtolo.

The main work of this period before 1990 is that of Lodge and while it has a richness as a general work of history and contains important local case studies, the underground may be where it is weakest, because of its innocence of what was actually happening not only in the period of illegality but also during that of the M - Plan.

For over a decade many of the myths of the pre-1990 period of an absence of the ANC were perpetuated and are still present in conventional history books, much of which is detailed in Chapter 4, with special emphasis on the period after Rivonia. It was only with elements of Peter Delius's work (1996, e.g. pp. 131ff.), that of Nozipho Diseko (1992), published work of Barrell (1990, 1992) and Everatt (1991, 1991a) that one started to get a glimpse of this underground world in general.

The record of underground activity in the rural areas is practically non-existent outside of the limited references in Delius's work (1996, for example at 133, 176ff) and the emergence of the first volume of the new SADET history (SADET 2004). Delius's work is a study of Sebatakgomo, a Communist-initiated organisation of

migrant workers in Sekhukhuneland. The importance of this study for underground activities was that the existence of these networks facilitated recruitment to MK.

There remained a considerable professional barrier, independent of legality and access, where scholars appeared predisposed to reliance on the written word. That restricted enquiries into illegal activities, knowledge of which was carried within people's heads and not recorded in documents. Nevertheless, Shubin's important study reveals much that was unknown but is drawn partly from his personal knowledge and mainly from documentation, which became available to the public after 1990 in the archives of the Mayibuye Centre of the University of the Western Cape and later in former Soviet archives.(1999).

Ellis and Sechaba published a work on the operations of the ANC and SACP, which needs to be consulted (1992). Its lack of sourcing makes it difficult to be sure how reliable some of the assertions are, though it often seems to have a ring of truth or at least point towards areas requiring further investigation, and this has assisted the conducting of interviews for this thesis.

Works appeared on MK by Davis (1987) and Barrell (1990), which were mainly concerned with strategic questions and thus differ from the emphasis on modes of organisation in this thesis, valuable as these (and Barrell's thesis, unpub 1993) are. Barrell's thesis derives from unique access to leading strategists of the ANC's armed struggle, covering the period 1976-1986, in the main beyond the scope of the time period of this thesis. But the main reason why Barrell's work is different is that while it is a history it focuses on strategic choices, changes of direction and other issues related to re-evaluations and shifts over time. Barrell is also continually preoccupied with the relationship between the military and the political, the extent to which political strategy tended to be displaced by military preoccupations. These broad strategic questions are not part of this thesis.

Official or semi-official histories such as that of Meli (1988) treated underground purely at the level of decisions, rather than as actual activities, Pampallis's history while not in the same category as Meli, was originally an official text at Solomon

Mahlangu Freedom College (SOMAFCO), but it contains nothing on underground organisation (1991).

The beginning of a literature on underground in the first place took the form of a spate of biographies and autobiographies from the 1990s. The style is often wooden and texture of the experience is hidden beneath formalities and elaborate descriptions of making, preparing and setting off explosives and similar practical elements of sabotage operations. Nevertheless, the autobiographical and biographical works of Mandela (1994), Middleton (1998) Sisulu (2002), Jaffer (2003), Bernstein (1999), Sibeko (1996) are written in an engaging style and provide data that had never previously emerged and from different levels of the ANC and SACP. Some works, whose authors could have had much to tell, are however empty of such information e.g. Kathrada (2004) or marred by inaccuracies (Turok, 2003, criticised in Suttner, 2004a).

These works as well as those commissioned in the SADET project, which was produced contemporaneously with this thesis, provide the basis for developing a future comprehensive history of underground activity. SADET, which is an ongoing project, is based on extensive archival as well as oral work, ranging very widely and covering a lot of interviewees and much documentation on struggles throughout the country, covering the period 1960-1990.

None of these works however attempts what this thesis aims at doing. The SADET work is the most important one to engage with, for it purports to cover the same events in many respects. And the SADET project does so in a much more comprehensive and detailed way than is done in most of this thesis. However the project is primarily a record and not a substantial reflection on the complex meanings of that record. It may argue over who did what first, between the SACP and the ANC, but it does not explore in detail relations between the ANC and SACP as is done for example in Chapter 3 of this thesis, raising questions about the independence of the SACP. The SADET project steers clear of such concerns.

It also does not attempt, as this work does, to characterise the activities it describes as a particular species of organisation with modalities quite different from that which

preceded it in the history of both the legal ANC and SACP and succeeded it in the period of legality after 1990. Some material for such a study is present in the work, but it is not explored.

In short, in order to undertake the type of study that follows, evaluating the M- Plan, the underground reconstitution of the SACP, both of which precede the period covered by SADET, I had to do my own research, primarily on the basis of oral evidence although some unpublished material could be drawn on.

In the case of the period between Rivonia and 1976, the SADET volume is useful and is drawn on, but very little else that is published could be used and again it has been necessary to build up data from interviews.

The chapters of this thesis that theorise or characterise underground as a phenomenon had no literature upon which to draw. The literature of underground struggles in other countries were consulted (e.g. Hermet, 1971, Michel, 1972, Merson, 1986, Eudes, 1972, Davidson, 1980,Saraphes, (1980)) but none of these raise the concerns that preoccupy chapters 5, 6 and 7 and much of that had to be developed from empirical material gathered, my own experience or deductions from what I recorded in interviews, especially in the case of chapter 5, and from general literature on gender applied to chapter 6 and 7.

SOURCES

This study could have been undertaken in a range of ways had it not been constrained by resources and time. This research has benefited from funding but it has not been the work of a team nor has the funding allowed for an open-ended time frame. Consequently choices have had to be made about what should be covered or investigated and how. The choices relate to the character of the sources available and their utility for the questions being asked, about what is a qualitatively and quantitatively ‘unknown factor’ that has suffered from a lack of documentation.

The literature on underground activity in South Africa, as indicated, is very limited, being mainly confined to pages or chapters of biographies or autobiographies, and primarily to leadership figures (e.g. Mandela, 1994, Bernstein, 1999). A small corpus of writings of underground workers below the level of national leadership has also been published (e.g. Dingake, 1987, Middleton, 1998, Suttner, 2001, Turok, 2004, Jaffer, 2003).

A wealth of material is deposited in archives throughout the country, especially in Mayibuye Centre /Robben Island Museum, Universities of Fort Hare, the Witwatersrand and of Cape Town. The records of many court cases can be found in some of these holdings as well as in court archives. All of these contain material of relevance to the study of underground organisation and many record elements of underground activity.

In particular, if 'declassified' by the ANC and SACP, the internal reports from underground units are important sources that can add considerably to our knowledge. Unfortunately, it is my understanding that much of this material is not yet available. It is also very time consuming to access the individuals who are custodians of such literature and in some cases to find the literature itself.

Given these constraints I had to decide, in addition to reading all or most relevant secondary material, biographies and autobiographies, whether to give primary weight to archival work or oral history. Both of these are labour intensive, requiring a great deal of time and travel, though oral work is considerably more taxing in that it also entails transcription, laborious checking of transcription against tapes, and exhausting personal encounters between interviewer and interviewee.

Much of the archival work, whatever its degree of accessibility remains partial insofar as court cases present evidence within the constraints of the court room. Similarly, official ANC or government reports refer to underground organisation in rather limited terms. The actual reports of underground operatives are important but, as indicated, are difficult to access. Nevertheless, none of these can provide the all-round focus and texture that this study is seeking and interview material is better able

to provide**.** Interestingly, Peter Delius initially pursued research on Sebatakgomo almost exclusively through oral sources, due to constraints on access to archival material. But his experience once he received that access confirms what has been said here about the difference in quality in what derives from each source:

> In the early 1990s, when the relevant files were finally made available, I was able to test this perspective against rich documentary sources and open some new windows on the past. When I examined detailed contemporary written reports on structures, meetings and events, it was striking how full the picture derived from oral sources had been. And while the written record provided a considerably clearer view of the workings of the official mind and the inner councils of state, it proved less eloquent on popular organisations, perceptions and explanations. (1986, 233)

Now that the danger of the apartheid period has passed things that could not previously be written, even in safe situations outside the country, may be revealed. This is not to deny that there still remains reluctance to speak due to habit or also because there may be sensitive issues that informants wish to suppress**.** One cannot underestimate the reservoirs of loyalty amongst ANC members sometimes leading to silence even about events that have hurt them deeply. This may mean we may never know elements of organisational history because potential informants do not want to harm 'the organisation'.

Emphasis on oral evidence

Given the limitations of existing literature it was decided to concentrate on relatively accessible primary literature and exhaustively examine relevant secondary literature. This is amplified considerably by conducting interviews with former underground operatives. Because this is not purely a historical study, but also an attempt at a characterising underground as a species of social organisation, it is necessary that evidence is gathered that is not constrained by being presented or recorded for very distinct purposes, as is the case with the court room and many other archival documents. These are generally unconcerned with extracting the social character and

meanings of how people were organised and what was done, though this can be deduced to some extent from documentation like the SACP's 'How to conduct secret work'[7]. (ANC, nd) The preference for oral evidence has been dictated by the following considerations:

a. Many of the people concerned are advanced in age and will die without their story being known if it is not now recorded. Already, there is only one surviving member of the Communist Party of South Africa Central Committee of 1950 (Brian Bunting, now 85), which decided on the dissolution of the Party. Especially poignant is that many people may die or may already have died without it being known that they had engaged in often-heroic underground activities.

b. The people who undertook underground activities are often unknown. Interviewing them, brings to the public domain the activities of those that would otherwise remain invisible. Such sources sometimes also reveal that certain people who were known as collaborators with the apartheid regime in fact also assisted ANC/SACP or MK units. (Interview with Paul Mashatile, 2003, regarding such collaboration). Many may well die despised as traitors, while if interviewed their stories of involvement in the struggle, under the most difficult of conditions, may become known and justifiably acknowledged. This will also add complexity to the historiography and sociology of the struggle.

c. As with all oral material, the researcher is offered an opportunity to interrogate the interviewee and obtain a response and question further where required. This option is obviously unavailable with documentary material, whose authors, if known, are generally not accessible, and whose work can only be interpreted, not further probed with a view to eliciting additional responses.

[7] First published in the SACP newspaper *Umsebenzi* in the 1980s, written by Ronnie Kasrils in Lusaka, it was tested in discussion with Franny Rabkin then a young teenager, to assess its accessibility and some of her insights were drawn into the text. Rabkin is the daughter of David Rabkin, a former political prisoner who died in Angola. It is currently available on the ANC website.

Dangers attaching to oral evidence in general and the evidence under consideration in particular

There are well-documented dangers in conducting oral work, against which the interviewer or researcher has to guard. (See e.g. Grele, 1985, Slim and Thompson, 1993, Thompson, 2000, ch 4 and generally). Some are common to all such research, while some may be more specific to the research under consideration. These include issues that arise in both oral and non-oral research, particularly, *how to verify the information*. Where there are few survivors, how does one test what the informant conveys? Where all others are dead and the surviving informant says something extremely contentious, what weight is to be given to such testimony? To some extent it has been possible to confirm dubious evidence through the corroboration of others or by documentary evidence. In other situations it has been necessary for me to make some assessment of plausibility and in most cases this has not been difficult in the light of the account fitting an overall pattern of conduct and patterns of behaviour in underground work, that has unfolded in the research.

Having said that one needs as an interviewer/researcher constantly and self-consciously to ask, if a pattern emerges how it was created, whether it emerged from the interviews or whether the researcher imposed it. If a pattern emerged, one has also to ask how it conditioned interviews that followed. If there had not been a conception of a pattern could alternative ways of understanding have found a space in the account or found it more easily? The interviewer has to be aware of this danger and if there were such alternative perspectives, create an interviewing environment where they are given a place.

In considering oral evidence there is sometimes a tendency on the part of respondents to exaggerate and even to invent an underground *persona*. Now that it is 15 years or more since people participated in underground activities there are many who claim to have been part of such organisation that may be inventing their role. Such claims may possibly be tested by the confirmation of those with whom it is claimed the informant worked, if that person does not claim to have worked alone. But ultimately, in many cases, the researcher may have to make a judgment call on the authenticity or otherwise of what has been told. This would be especially necessary where the claim

is made in regard to situations where there are no survivors or in a remote area where other sources are hard to come by.

A considerable temptation may exist in underground oral history for informants to resort to exaggeration. There may be a tendency to inflate the importance of one's role and that can again only be guarded against by a) confirmation from other informants or documentation- which is often not possible to obtain or b) the interviewer having a sound knowledge of how underground organisation operates and tests the extent to which the operative talks in generalised terms or displays an awareness of 'rules of the game' for 'professional operation'. That means that the interviewer needs some understanding of underground operation and variants within the 'genre', variants that may well indicate the extent of the training that a person may have received and how this corresponds with what the person claims to have done. For example, someone who claims to have been trained would not act in particular ways, unless for some reason they dropped their guard. But if they indicate no awareness of the need to check for surveillance or of how to do so, for example, that would indicate minimal training if any and could be a basis for casting doubt on the evidence.

Again, such a test would not be applicable to informants on the early ANC underground where many of the rules that were later developed had not yet been discovered or implemented. Ben Turok was convicted because he left fingerprints on newspaper in which a bomb was wrapped. Only later would operatives take extensive steps to prevent leaving fingerprints on incriminating material.

Alternatively, professionalism of another kind may have been acquired, a type of streetwise professionalism that can also be tested. There may be cases where people acted 'free lance' without training, but learnt to know the ins and outs of the terrain where they operated. That is a form of 'professionalism' that may be acquired without passing through any military academy. But it means that there ought to be people who can more readily confirm such environmentally bound activities if the account appears doubtful.

Luckily, in the evidence presented in this work, there are generally few cases, which appear to be uncorroborated or hard to believe. I have indicated that some claims may be exaggerations, but their general drift seems to be fairly credible and likely to stand the test of scrutiny. In any event, the claims made in this study are not beyond reasonable belief and what can only be asserted tentatively is stated as such.

Interview as a conversation between two people, whose mutual impact must be understood.

Another danger, which is returned to more broadly (in relation to the research as a whole) is the impact of the author's *persona* on the interview process. This is an issue on which feminist research and methodology has long been preoccupied. (Tanesini, 1999, ch 6, Ramazanoglu and Holland, 2002, Chapter 4, S. Harding, 2004). Any researcher in South Africa needs to be self-conscious regarding the impact of their own identity. Who they are, how they are located socially and in relation to the respondent, may influence what is said and not said or it may be said in a particular way that might not the be the case if there were a different interviewer. (Harris, 1985, 2-3)

As a former leadership figure in the liberation movement it may be that my own *persona* could have an impact on the answers of interviewees. The perception that the interviewer (still) occupies a position of power in the organisations may lead the interviewee, if placed lower in the hierarchies of the organisations to supply answers that please the interviewer or which they believe may enhance their status within the organisations. (Harris, 1985, 3).

Even though I am no longer active in political structures, someone who wishes to hold some position or be appointed to some or other job, may believe that pleasing me as the interviewer is a route to such advancement. This is part of wider ANC notions of hierarchies and seniority that persist even after formal status corresponding to such

hierarchies may have ended. It is especially the case with those who have been in military structures. [8]

Most of the respondents were, however, people unlikely to have such motives in mind and in many cases, very well established or semi-retired and in no need of supposed interventions by the interviewer.

In another respect the question of identity of the interviewer arises. Insofar as many of the interviews are with women, it must be asked whether certain experiences that such women may have undergone would be revealed more readily to a female rather than a male interviewer. I am conscious that I may not have heard the whole of every story, for one or other reason and in regard to women, that there are constraints that many may feel about relating certain incidents to a man. Should that be the case, it is hoped female researchers will take such issues further in the future.

There are other questions relating to the *persona* of the researcher that deserve mention and have relevance to conducting this research. I am a white South African who interviewed mainly Africans. All interviews were conducted in English, not the first language of any of the African informants. It is likely that this was less of a factor in the set of interviews used in this work, because most of those interviewed were very proficient in English and often held leadership positions where most of the key policy documents were available almost exclusively in English.

That I am a white South African may in certain situations have influenced the type of responses that I received, but almost all of the informants interviewed were not unfamiliar with whites and engaging with whites on political matters. Also, a measure of trust existed because of my political background and may have rendered it a less significant factor.

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[8] It was explicitly stated by the ANC provincial secretary in Limpopo, that although I am no longer in the formal leadership, he still regarded me as his leader. (Interview Cassel Mathale, 2004). In his words: 'But now we were taught that in the ANC you don't need to occupy an office to be a leader. What you do determines your leadership. Like now, I mean, as we sit here with you, Comrade Suttner, I would regard you as my leader despite the fact that you don't occupy a specific office, but I know when I came in to become active I found you there and that itself makes you to be part of the leadership that one will always look up to. That is what we were taught… '

How interviewees were selected

The way I decided on or found people to interview resulted from a 'snowball sample'. But the starting point was my own knowledge-as a former 'insider'. On that basis I knew or guessed who had worked underground or was likely to have worked underground and that led to a 'snowball sample' deriving from the people I had identified. Some scholars have pointed to the significance of this initial choice:

> Unlike their colleagues who use whatever happens to be available, oral historians select documents. In choosing the people they wish to interview, they necessarily introduce their own judgements about the historical process. Why men rather than women? Strike leaders rather than followers? Strikers rather than strike breakers? (Harris, 1985, 5. See also Grele, 1985, 131)

Obviously who was initially identified reflected my subjective tendencies and evaluations. Having played a part in the struggle and a very partisan struggle at that, I have a strong sense of who has been a 'tried and tested' comrade, who has been there when the going was tough. This has admittedly been a major consideration guiding the primary identification of informants.

As the research evolved, however, especially when unpacking notions like 'combatant', I have come to place greater weight on the small but vital contribution of those who may often be designated as minor players but whose role has nevertheless been vital in the execution of underground activity. Often those who are accorded the status of underground military combatants are incorrectly restricted to those physically engaged in military acts. Others, however, who undertook vital preparatory work were also exposed to great danger (See Chapter 6). Many such individuals were previously unknown to me.

A potentially sectarian element has also to be acknowledged. The weight that other researchers may place on the evidence of some individuals is not the same as someone who knows them from the struggle. *The sources for testing credibility are not the same*. A person involved in struggle may well be better able to assess credibility

through ‘having been there’, than someone who has the ‘advantage’ of non-partisanship and non-involvement.

In some cases, some people are ‘not taken seriously’ inside the liberation movement for one or other reason. This may have been due to proven unreliability, non-performance of tasks, inactivity or some other reason related to organisational activity. For outsiders, who are free of this knowledge (or prejudice), their evidence may be given a different weight. But the significance of the views of those who have been ‘inside’ the organisation is that such an assessment has been formed through observation in the course of political activity. The person who has been uninvolved relies purely on what is related by the inteviewee (corroborated as far as possible by others). While it can be tested in various ways it cannot be tested against the actual experience of which the person speaks. On the basis of such assessment, I may have decided not to interview or draw on certain individuals. The reason the choice has been arrived at is not because of a personal grudge or any conscious prejudice but through ‘participant observation’, though it was not conceived that way at the time.

Another related question concerns the evidence of people who have betrayed the liberation movement, by becoming informers or spies. In some cases such people have given state evidence in numerous trials. Some of these have written autobiographies. While I have not interviewed any, I have consulted Bruno Mtolo’s work, and interestingly, while not convinced by some of the content, found that it does tally with certain elements of the account of sabotage units in the oral evidence of Eric Mtshali and Billy Nair (Interviews, 2003. See Mtolo, 1966).

In every situation, an unavoidable political element arose in the process of selection of inteviewees. Where I did not know actors in a particular area, in some cases I relied on the assistance of ANC or SACP officials living in those areas. Clearly in such cases it was a very ‘structured’ snowball sample, determined by the considerations of importance that the persons who assisted attached to different individuals, (a variant of my own initial mode of selection).

In Limpopo, for example, such assistance led to some 30 people (more than I could manage to interview in the time available) becoming available. None of these were

women. In the situation of dependence in which I found myself (as all such researchers do), it was not possible to criticise the sample.

In reality, one cannot conduct interviews on a large scale in any part of the country, other than through those people whom one knows well (and others to whom they lead the researcher) and without the assistance of well-connected ANC or SACP individuals or officials of the organisation. In some areas officials have provided great assistance for this research, in others little or none.

This study does not, however, enjoy any official status or approval or backing, as is the case with the SADET project, which is officially initiated, though its content is provided by independent scholars. This official backing has helped in SADET securing availability of informants. That people had given such interviews to SADET researchers sometimes formed a barrier to my securing interviews. Some people said, 'but I have been interviewed already.' One scholar whose assistance I sought indicated that informants in Port Elizabeth were tired of being interviewed for this reason. (Personal Communication: Janet Cherry, 2003. The Secretary General of the ANC in KwaZulu Natal offered very little cooperation, for the same reason).

Conditions under which interviews were undertaken

Textbooks on research methodology often appear to envisage that the researcher can construct optimal conditions for an interview. In particular, the assumption is often made that a suitable venue can be obtained and that the times of meetings are regularly arranged and adhered to. Future meetings should be agreed on in advance and take place as arranged! Unfortunately the subjects of research in this study are extremely elusive and it requires very many attempts before interviews can be secured, and often these are not honoured. Consequently in making a research trip outside of my place of residence I assumed that there would be what the airlines call 'no shows', those who do not turn up. I knew this and organised more interviews than I would necessarily have wanted to undertake, on the assumption that I would end up seeing fewer than those arranged.

One can rarely determine the venue. In Limpopo, for example, most interviewees had been asked by my contact to come to the ANC provincial office, which was very noisy and which influenced the quality of interviews. The interviewer was not able to afford the expense of a special venue nor to arrange transport of individuals to his hotel. Also when one has people specially making a trip- often covering long distances- to be interviewed in Polokwane one cannot lay down such conditions. It might even have seemed discourteous to suggest this. One also cannot say that one is tired and has done enough for the day, when someone simply arrives for an interview and the interviewer has not been anticipating it. All such factors affect quality of listening, hearing and questioning, but are unfortunately part of the conditions under which such research has to be conducted and access secured.

To what extent informants 'revealed all' is not clear, for reasons beyond the loyalty to which I have already alluded. Habits of underground and conspiratorial methods of operation remain with many people long after they have stopped working in those conditions. Also, militarised notions or supposed protocols often prevail, where interviewees will sometimes not agree to be interviewed without first clearing it with their [previous MK] commander. The assumption is that the conditions of secrecy that bound them can only be broken –even in the present period- through recourse to the individual who had been in authority.

Character of the interview sample

a. Number of interviews

Some 53 interviews are listed in the bibliography, almost all of which were conducted specifically for this thesis between 2000 and 2005. Further interviews were drawn upon, which had been conducted by me at earlier periods and for other purposes. Some of these are listed and others are not, unless specifically used in the text. Although these others were pre-2000 interviews not specifically conducted for this project, they bear on the overall perspective that I have developed in approaching this research.

The first set of interviews for this project was conducted in Sweden in 2000, with three operatives. The rest of the interviews were undertaken after my return to South Africa in 2001, from August of that year until October of 2005. Earlier interviews that are drawn on in this text, although not all cited, have influenced the orientation that has been developed. They were conducted as part of research on the Congress of the People Campaign in 1984/5. Certain others were conducted later in the 1980s during the popular power period, around 1985/1986. Still others were conducted *ad hoc*, with people like Walter Sisulu or Chris Hani. After the assassination of Chris Hani a series of interviews were conducted about his life. One of these with female MK Commander, Dipuo Mvelase is drawn on extensively in Chapters 6 and 7.

Not all the interviewees were activists and two informants were former security police, one of whom wishes to be anonymous.

b. Gender

Of the 53 interviews that are listed, nine were with women, though attempts were made to secure interviews with others. One of the three conducted for earlier projects was with a woman, Dipuo Mvelase, already mentioned. It was only recently that I have been able to connect with networks of ex-MK women who are willing to be interviewed. Also some women who have been approached are reluctant to be interviewed. It is not always clear why this is the case. It may be that recalling their experiences fills them with pain. But in some cases it appears to be connected with painful romantic relationships in the period of exile and training, and not necessarily with the organisation *per se*.

c. Exile/internal?

Insofar as readers may be interested in the distribution of the sample between those in exile and those who were internally based it is hard to classify accurately. Many went out for training and returned to perform operations (e.g. Shirley Gunn, Shun Bolton, Solly Shoke, Petros 'Shoes' Mashigo, Totsie Memela, Dipuo Mvelase, Phumla Tshabalala and Chris Hani.) Others never left the country but spent much of their time in prison (e.g. Kathrada, Sisulu, Nair, Amos Masondo) or in Rhodesian prisons

(Ike Maphoto). Consequently I do not attempt such a break down. It does not seem possible to do so with sufficient accuracy.

Also the research in general has taught me to avoid neat dichotomies between exile and internal, where there are so many overlaps, so much that is both different and similar in the orientation and experiences. (See Chapter 2 below and Suttner, 2004c). The differences are often as clearly manifested within each experience as they are found as modes of differentiating the internal from the external. Apart from my sample not fitting easily into one or other categorisation, I am not at all convinced that the dichotomy helps rather than hinders our understanding.

d. 'Race'

The majority of those interviewed were Africans, only four being white, five being Indian and two being Coloured (though it is possible that one of these is 'classified' in apartheid terms as Indian).

e. Age groups

The age groups and periods and places of origin and activity of those interviewed varied considerably. Special efforts were made to track down older people for fear that they might not survive for very much longer.

Paradoxically, while I have interviewed some of the key participants in building the ANC underground during the period after Rivonia, like the late Elliot Tshabangu, Dorothy Nyembe and Martin Ramokgadi, I did so purely with regard to their role and understanding of the Congress of the People Campaign and the Freedom Charter campaign. (See Suttner and Cronin, 1986). Had I intended to research underground organisation at the period in which these interviews were conducted in the mid 1980s it would have been risky. The combination of a researcher with an underground background and an interviewee/underground operative, could have spelt dangers for both parties. The recording itself could have formed the core element of a court case.

Informants for many of these periods were both veterans as well as from a relatively younger generation, who were in many cases previously associated with BC. Interviewing this younger age group has served to underline the degree of overlap between ANC and BC. In this category of informants were Murphy Morobe, Barney Pityana, Ralph Mgijima and Nat Serache.

f. Geographical location

While most of the interviews were conducted in major cities like Cape Town, Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Pietermaritzburg, those interviewed came from a variety of places, including rural Transkei or North-West Province. Areas visited for interviews were Western Cape, KwaZulu Natal, North West Province, Limpopo and Eastern Cape. I am based in Gauteng.

History from the bottom and the top of the underground apparatus

Certainly underground work presented special and distinct problems for high profile and easily recognisable figures like Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu. It was obviously more difficult for them to make the transition from legal activity on one day to illegality the next.

While some of this has been documented, little has been written about the experiences of rank and file ANC/SACP underground workers. Some of the leadership sources may be very articulate, but not have been active in the actual building of structures. They may know the theory very well and provide good manuscript material. Those who engaged in grassroots work may, in my experience, sometimes be much less clear and systematic in presenting their recollections, yet know more of the specific dangers, problems and other practical issues that arose.

While trying to highlight the activities of grassroots operatives, there is, however, a danger of ignoring the crucial coordinating role of major leadership figures. Joe Matthews has suggested that the orientation of my work may be in danger of treating the contribution of someone like Moses Kotane as equal to that of ordinary

underground workers. (Personal communication, 10 August 2004). That is a balance that needs to be monitored, though my inclination is to try to play a part in remedying major historiographical gaps or absences and place weight on the contribution of those whose names do not usually appear in the history books

How does one make sense of this data?

At the same time as research for this thesis was being conducted, ongoing work by a large team of researchers has been underway on the previously mentioned SADET project to record resistance history from 1960 to 1990, the first volume of which has appeared under the title, *The Road to Democracy*. The work produced thus far is admirable and well researched, yet it raises the question of what else beyond what the authors probe, can be read into and from the data they uncover. Given their orientation, it is necessary to indicate the overlap and distinction between that work and a thesis of this kind.

Covering some of the same ground in this work, this study does not pretend to comprehensiveness in any respect, though it has more information than *The Road to Democracy* on the pre-1960 period, on which that work does not focus. In the post 1960 period, however, the SADET project aims at comprehensive, detailed, 'blow by blow' accounts of sequence and unfolding of events. For example, many pages are spent on how explosives were manufactured or whether it was the Communist Party or ANC who first decided on armed struggle. While the present study is a historical narrative it does not pretend to any such level of exhaustiveness, (though in some respects, such as the underground SACP, more is provided than is available in other studies).

Valuable as such an exhaustive history is, it leaves a great deal of room for making sense of the same data in other ways. In particular, the present study has developed a historical account, which appears to focus differently, in some ways dialoguing with concerns of the present and extracting different questions from the past. In other respects, this thesis has stepped back in order to theorise the significance of the data uncovered in underground organisation as:

a. A social and political phenomenon of a specific kind, as a particular species of clandestinity, resulting in modes of organisation, habits and practices that need sociological study.

b. A species of social organisation that raise particular questions regarding gender relations, manifestations of masculinities and femininities.

c. A species of social organisation that impacts in many ways on the relationship between collective organisation and the personal.

Period covered by the present study

The present study covers the period from the 1950s until just after the 1976 rising. At the same time I do not hesitate to draw on insights from earlier and later periods and other struggles, where these add to understanding of the period of focus, especially in trying to characterise underground as a phenomenon. The 1950s was the period when preparations for underground organisation were first initiated in the case of the ANC and first established in the case of the SACP. There was some experience and training in such organisation that precedes this period and that is referred to. The importance of the 1950s extends into later periods and in the case of the SACP showed that secret organisation was possible even under apartheid repression, and successfully established.

The period after Rivonia, it will be shown, has been inaccurately portrayed as one of the 'absence' of the liberation movement, in particular the primary organisations focused on in this study. This study provides a different picture with evidence to challenge the dominant historiographical treatment.

This study concludes after 1976 when the period of organisational setback of the Congress movement was replaced by developing ANC hegemony, which began in the late 1970s. The character of that hegemony is examined and it is argued that the underground experience was one of the key influences on the emergence and character of this phase.

The author and the subject of study

The identity of an author is supposedly irrelevant to the manner in which the community of scholars evaluates any work. The text is supposed to speak for itself. But in the real world that may not be so. Perceptions and preconceptions about the *persona* of the author insert themselves into the consciousness of readers

It has been suggested to me that there is a difference in perception that arises when a work is written by someone who has devoted their scholarly career to that alone, compared with someone like me who has had a partisan involvement in politics, including the type of activities that form the body of this study. There is sometimes an assumption that a scholarly background is rendered suspect where the researcher has also been an active participant in the activities about which he or she writes. One professor has suggested that my work comes under far greater scrutiny than that of people who have been less involved or 'kept their distance'. (Personal communication Professor Greg Cuthbertson, during 2004).

I am quite happy for this work to be subjected to the closest scrutiny. At the same time it is necessary to address the question of partisanship or 'positionality'[9]. There is a difference between partisanship (in the sense of believing in democracy, supporting national liberation and transformation) and a willingness to draw conclusions that are not sustained by evidence or presenting evidence that is false or otherwise flawed. These are basic scholarly canons all researchers have to abide by whether or not they have been or are politically committed or involved in advancing a cause.

At the same time, it is necessary to contest the idea that political involvement may be a *disability* that needs to be overcome in order to engage in serious scholarship. In fact, it is precisely because I have been an underground operative that it is possible for me to ask questions that do not easily present themselves to someone who knows little about such activity. Such innocence or inexperience makes it difficult to assess what constitutes an adequate underground operation or what is entailed in 'professional' or less well prepared and executed operations. It is undoubtedly true that this

[9] This is an issue that has received a great deal of attention in feminist research and methodology. See, for example, Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002), ch 4, S.Harding, (2004).

knowledge can be acquired but the study of underground work is relatively new for most scholars. Few know the short hand terminology that is used amongst operatives, what is meant by dead letter boxes (DLBs)[10] or military combat warfare (MCW)[11] or similar acronyms. In addition, few know the 'rules' of clandestinity whose observance and manner of execution or otherwise indicate the seriousness or otherwise of an operative. A degree of expertise in underground activity is required, on the side of the researcher, to know how to differentiate a well-trained operative from one who has had no training or only a short course. As indicated earlier, this may influence one's assessment of credibility of sources.

'Rules' of underground organisation exist that need to be observed and if the informant does not refer to them the interviewer needs to know what to ask in order to establish whether or not these were observed, the degree of care that was taken to protect secrecy or to ensure the successful execution of the work. One needs to ask whether all individuals were adequately protected against danger. Even if an act was successfully performed, were risks taken that could have compromised the operation or the security of individuals? Underground operatives tend to take some things for granted that have not been documented, about how they communicate, what they do and do not do, how they advance and retreat, what the range of options may be, how they collect weapons or dispose of literature. Many variations arise, but it is precisely in knowing what to ask in relation to these questions and choices, that having been an operative is an advantage. Knowing the 'tools of the trade' provides a basis for assessing the adequacy of performance of underground tasks.

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[10] A dead letter box or often abbreviated as 'DLB' is a 'place or container for hiding material. It is used between operatives to pass on money, messages, documents, weapons –without coming into contact, and thus minimising risk….' (Kasrils, 2004, 89). See also *How To Master Secret Work.* (nd)

[11] Although this concept is frequently used and was part of the training of many MK soldiers and other underground operatives, there seems to be no written literature on the subject in English or Russian. It refers to a combination of a variety of forms of struggle, legal and illegal, political and military and in various institutions and spaces. Dr Vladimir Shubin (e mail, 7 December 2004) writes: 'I've never read anything academic about the origin of the word…[Reconstructing the origins of the concept from discussions with those who taught it, Shubin continues:] Originally in the RSDLP [Russian Social Democratic Labour Party, predecessor of the Communist Party] in the days of the first Russian Revolution (the words "military work" meant the work in the Tsarist army, mostly "Propaganda and agitation"). Then, with the upsurge of the struggle, the term "combat" was added and it meant not just "propaganda" but actual involvement of the regime military into the revolutionary armed struggle.' Shubin believes that MCW was not initially used in training MK but was introduced in the late 1960s or 1970s, before the Soweto rising.

This emphasis on where one is located, one's position in relation to a particular category of activity, accords with feminist 'standpoint theory' which sees special advantages in seeing a phenomenon from a specific place and as a specific type of actor. It draws on Marxist insights on the location and insights of the proletariat, economically central yet socially marginal, contrasted with the insights of those who are involved in other aspects of the production process. (Tanesini, 1999, 138ff, Harding, 2004).

While arguing that my background has not been a scholarly disqualification or disadvantage, I do not deny that 'outsiders,' by virtue of having been uninvolved may see things that are not observed by 'insiders' who are or were very closely connected to the question being studied. My argument does not necessarily incorporate the claim of 'epistemic privilege' which feminist 'standpoint theorists' claim is attached to being placed in a particular social location, as women or workers.

Inter-disciplinary focus

This thesis is at once an attempt to document and explain a *phase* and also a *species* of struggle against apartheid covered by the ANC/SACP alliance. Underground activity occurred in the main in the period of illegality, though as will be seen, there were elements of underground organisation at earlier phases. It is also a very specific mode of organising people in dangerous political conditions.

It cannot be seen, therefore purely as a work of history, though it is presented as a contribution towards the recording of much that has gone unrecorded or been invisible. It seeks to explain elements of the past that have previously gone unnoticed or about which there has been silence or where the interpretation of its significance needs, in my view, to be reviewed.

But the study also interrogates this history as a pattern of social and political activity having impact on inter-personal relations of various kinds, modes of conduct in society, including gender relations. In trying to understand these, I have drawn on

insights from a number of disciplines or sub-disciplines, in particular historical studies, political science, sociology, gender studies and social anthropology. It is convenient to describe this in broad terms as a 'sociology of underground organisation', given the expansive way in which some definitions of sociology are framed. For example, Fulscher and Scott, write:

> Sociology is the study of societies and the way the shape people's behaviour, beliefs, and identity. Societies consist of the groups that people form, such as families, communities, classes, and nationals. They also consist of institutions, which are the established ways of organising the various activities such as education, health care, politics, and religion that make up social life. They also have shared beliefs, ideas and customs, which sociologists refer to as their culture (1999, 4).

While my personal theoretical orientation is primarily Marxist, it is not clear that Marxism can make much contribution towards understanding most areas of the work under discussion. Paradoxically, that holds true for some aspects of the development of the Communist Party, as documented for the former Northern Transvaal, where it is by no means clear whether African belief systems or Marxism were dominant in the consciousness of Communist leaders. (See Suttner 2004a, Turok, 2003). It is true that Marxist approaches to recording of history from below have been an influence on this study, but Marxism does not have much to say about the *sociology of underground organisation.* Marxist writings, or primarily Leninist literature form a significant part of the data on which Chapter 5 is based. But that is primarily an operational explanation not an examination of such organisation as a distinct sociological phenomenon.

Likewise insofar as Engels ventured into gender issues, this incursion has been of little assistance in discussing the type of questions arising within a liberation movement like the ANC.

Marxism tends to have certain 'no go' areas and these relate primarily to the subjective element, in particular the personal. It is not able to provide in-depth analysis of factors that combine in forming the identities of some people**.**

Many leading Communists were simultaneously involved in following other belief systems. Former Rivonia trialist, leading ANC and Communist Party member, Elias Motsoaledi was known to see off MK groups through performing certain rituals or have an *inyanga* do so. (Interviews, Mtshali, 2003, Sijake, 2000). Traditional Communist doctrine might well have treated this as 'backward'[12]. Yet they are part of the soil in which the Communist Party, including its underground organisation (and more so the ANC) was built. In this regard I have drawn on a wide range of other authors from a variety of disciplines and paradigms in order to try to contextualise and understand these interfaces between distinct identities.

The range of theories drawn on has been diverse. This is because the issues thrown up relate to a variety of issues: anthropological, organisational, belief systems, notions of revolution and elitism, questions of the personal and the political. Explanatory devices are not available from any one discipline or any one body of theory and I have used these fairly eclectically, depending on their efficacy in addressing whatever problem has been confronted.

Outline of the content of the chapters that follow

The first three chapters that follow represent a history, though as indicated not an attempt at a comprehensive account of the periods and organisational activity that is covered. Chapter 2 is a re-reading of the early underground experience of the ANC – the introduction of the M-Plan in anticipation of possible banning, following the then recent proscription of the Communist Party of South Africa. The Chapter shows that existing literature has underrated the impact of the plan in ANC history, considered beyond its immediate introduction, but also has failed to uncover the character of the organisational features, which it manifested. The chapter tries to unpack these and

[12] This tendency may be present in Turok's work. Turok (2003). See criticism in Suttner (2004a).

concludes with the banning of the ANC and rushed preparations for underground organisation.

Chapter 3 examines the almost contemporaneous reconstitution of the South African Communist Party underground. Because attention was focused on the aboveground legal activities of the Congress Alliance, police did not suspect that the Communists were establishing underground structures. Under strict security a relatively small and until 1960 invisible presence was set up. The Party emerged publicly during the State of Emergency and assisted in the establishment of the shortlived ANC underground, established immediately after banning. The Party underground was, like the ANC, decimated in the mid 1960s but the relationship between the two organisations was strengthened in the period of illegality. While the Party later initiated its own underground structures, possibly quicker than the ANC, in most respects, the chapter suggests that over the decades that followed the Party subordinated its independence to the ANC.

Chapter 4 considers the period, which is depicted in most texts as one where the ANC was absent from the political scene in South Africa. It provides evidence that there may have been a degree of silence, but almost from the early days of arrest of the top leaders, steps were taken to re-establish an ANC underground presence. The scope of these efforts was often limited and varied over time. But the release of Robben Island prisoners gave great impetus to this process. This was true not only in the urban areas but also through former prisoners banished to rural areas. In some rural areas people independently initiated such units or networks supportive of the ANC. The Chapter argues that while the ANC did not initiate the 1976 risings, it had an influence on the thinking of many of those who participated. It also shows that the tensions between Black consciousness and ANC may have been much less than that often presented and that there was a degree of overlap between the two tendencies.

Chapter 5 is the first of three chapters which steps back from the historical narrative and tries to analyse sociological and political features of the underground experience. This chapter examines the conspiratorial nature of underground activity, inherently incompatible with open debate. It discusses the vanguardist nature and other features characteristic of the operation of secret units. It shows that working underground was

a place where acts of great heroism could occur. It also created conditions where there were opportunities for abuse. This was inevitable in that ensuring accountability for resources was impossible to maintain in a normal manner, without exposing the security of operations.

Chapter 6 examines the gendered nature of the underground experience. The chapter critiques recent literature on African masculinity for failing to recognise that discourse referring to a denial of manhood did not necessarily bear on gender relations. These had to be characterised independently of the masculinist discourse. It referred to a real situation where men were infantilised and called 'boys'. Their manhood was denied. At the same time spaces and places where heroic acts occur – underground and in warfare are traditionally the terrain of the male. This is scrutinised firstly by flashing back to early resistance to conquest, in particular the language surrounding Makana's attack on Grahamstown and later surrender. It is then related to contemporary situations where some writings suggest that heroic activity relates to a male domain, while the woman remains behind to care for the home. The complexities of the ANC make such assumptions highly conditional. In the first place women being underground and soldiers raises the notion of a heroic female project, but their military involvement met with both resistance and support from MK men.

Chapter 7 focuses on the impact of revolutionary activities on the personal, the capacity of the cadre to make individual judgments in relation to the decisions of the organisation. It also considers the question of personal emotional fulfillment. The Chapter shows that the ANC and SACP tended to step in as family figures in relation to both men and women, as is characteristic especially of communist parties in many struggles. There is also a displacement of inter-personal love by 'revolutionary love' or 'love for the people', again a feature of other revolutionary situations.

Chapter 8 by way of an epilogue considering the developing hegemony of the ANC from the late 1970s onwards, which it is argued is partly a result of underground activity, though this also connects to international efforts from exile, MK, the role of Robben Island as a place which trained people for participation in the struggle, and continuing efforts to open legal space. The development of ANC hegemony is not

seen in purely numerical terms, nor in Gramsci's sense (though it is not incompatible with that). It embraces primarily symbolic and organisational elements, which lead to the displacement of other trends by those in support of the Congress forces.

Chapter Two

Early underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia

Introduction

This chapter covers an early part of the underground experience, reinterpreting some existing literature on the ANC's M-Plan and uses oral evidence to throw light on its meaning and the extent of its impact. The existing literature is given a different interpretation mainly because the present contribution places much more weight on the Plan than the cursory treatment it is normally given. It contends that the M-Plan was far wider in its impact, than most scholars suggest. In particular, it asserts that the M-Plan was the basis for establishing the ANC underground immediately after the organisation's banning. It also reappeared as a basis for organisation in later phases of the liberation struggle, right into the 1980s.

In addition, this chapter tries to show that the early underground experience, starting with the adoption and implementation of the M-Plan, is an important element of ANC history. It fed into an organisational culture in ways that are not usually recognised, in that many of the traits that are conventionally attributed to the exile experience, can also be found in this period. For example, it is fairly common to refer to the exile experience in contrast to that of the 1950s and 1980s as manifesting top-down, hierarchical forms of politics (Cf Suttner, 2003a, 2004c, 2005b). Yet, this chapter shows that from the early days of preparation for underground organisation, a similar orientation existed.

Also, the Marxist influence, which is often attributed to training in the Soviet Union or political education in MK, was already widespread in the 1950s. Indeed, when the M-Plan was motivated, the conduct of political education was seen as an integral part of the organisation's preparation.

Origins of underground activity in SA

Some activists envisaged the possibility of illegal action long before it became necessary. Ray Alexander Simons, when preparing to immigrate to South Africa in 1929 was trained by Latvian Communists for underground work (Alexander Simons, 2004, pp.44-46). They believed that while the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), as it was then called, was a legal organisation, preparation had to be made for the possibility of illegality. In addition, about 14 South African Communists were educated in Comintern schools or Universities, which ran a discrete and compulsory course on underground organisation. (Filatova, 1999, pp. 54-55, Davidson et al, 2003, vol 1, p. 6)[13] Amongst those trained in this manner were leading ANC/SACP figures like Moses Kotane, JB Marks and Communist trade unionist, Betty du Toit. (Davidson et al, 2003, vol 1 at p. 6). Comintern representatives also visited South Africa and interacted with South African Communists, while South African Communists visited the Comintern to consult, attend meetings or study. All of these activities were largely secret, underground operations. (Cf 'Introduction', Davidson et al, 2003, vol 1, pp. 8ff, Alexander Simons, 2004, for examples of such activity.)

The Comintern on various occasions urged the CPSA to prepare for underground organisation. (Davidson et al, 2003, vol 2, document 34, pp. 107ff). The advice/instruction was not acted upon. In general no underground activity or preparations of a serious kind by organisations as opposed to individually trained cadres took place before the 1950s.

In contrast, when the ANC was declared illegal in 1960, extensive experience in underground activity could be drawn upon inside and outside that organisation (in the reconstitution of the SACP) during the 1950s. It will be argued that it is necessary to revisit plans for underground organisation like the M-Plan, which have generally been characterised as having an essentially limited impact. (E.g. Lodge, 1983, p. 75,

[13] The Communist International (Comintern) was a worldwide organisation of Communist Parties, located in Moscow from 1919 until its dissolution in 1943. During its existence every Communist Party was described as a 'section' of the Communist International. On various occasions the Comintern intervened in the affairs of Communist Parties of various countries, including that of South Africa. (See further, 'Introduction', Davidson et al, Vol 1 (2003))

Mandela, 1994, p. 136, Sampson, 1999, pp. 81-2). This evaluation may derive from an excessively narrow focus, which concentrated primarily on only one phase of the ANC and M-Plan's history, the moment of its first attempted implementation. Had the enquiry been expanded, this chapter will argue, it would have found that the M-Plan was one of the more substantial sources upon which the ANC drew in establishing itself underground after banning in 1960. In fact, it appears to have remained a continuing influence surfacing at various moments during the period of illegality. At the same, time having a plan was insufficient for successful implementation. Without the organisational muscle of the SACP, then already enjoying some experience in underground organisation, the ANC underground may have taken off, with much greater difficulty.[14]

M-Plan

Claims have been made that the ideas embraced in the M-Plan were first advanced by A P Mda, who called for development of a cell system and preparation for underground, ideas that were in fact forwarded to Nelson Mandela and considered too dangerous for implementation, at the time of the December 1951 ANC National Conference (Gerhart, 1978, pp. 131-2, note 9, See also Karis and Carter, 1977, p. 36). Some members of the Pan Africanist Congress [PAC] claimed that the M in the M-Plan in fact referred to Mda and not Mandela (Personal Communication, Gail Gerhart, e-mail, 17.12.2002, a claim, which Joe Matthews, in interview, 2003, met with great scepticism.) It may well be valid, that Mda had these ideas first, but it was the conceptualisation later associated with Nelson Mandela that achieved the organisational significance that is considered here.

The M-Plan was conceived as a moment of transition or rupture within the decade of mass struggle of the 1950s (Mandela, 1990, pp. 40, 134ff, Karis and Carter, 1977, pp.

[14] Eric Mtshali expresses the view that it would not have succeeded without Communist Party involvement, interview, 2003, though Ahmed Kathrada, interview 2003 argues that while it would have been more difficult, the ANC would nevertheless have been able to establish itself underground. Vladimir Shubin, personal communication by e-mail 3 June 2003, also points out that there are many cases where non-Communists and anti-Communists have created underground organisation. He believes Mtshali's claim to be exaggerated.

35ff, Sampson, 1999, pp. 81-2, Lodge, 1983, pp. 75-6, Edward Feit, 1967, pp. 72-5, Walter Sisulu, 2001, pp. 80-81, Govan Mbeki, 1992, p. 74). The Defiance campaign was already seen as a break with the past, even part of a revolutionary break. Walter Sisulu said:

> It had the effect of making the people confident and fearless, prepared to defy the laws, to be prepared to go to jail and meet any situation. That was the importance of it. It was the beginning of a new situation, which led even to a person facing the death penalty with confidence. The Campaign brought about a situation in which people were not arrested just by chance, but by plan. This meant organisation…The movement called for volunteers. In the Eastern Cape, it was called 'Amadela Kufa', 'defiers of death'. You can see from this that a revolutionary situation was emerging. (Sisulu, 2001, p. 79.) [15]

If these tendencies have been correctly identified, then the rupture between mass democratic politics of the 1950s and underground and ANC revolutionary politics started earlier than 1960, however uneven the character of this break may have been.

As with the question of armed struggle, underground organisation was not only discussed as a 'last resort,' forced on the ANC, but was in preparation long before illegality and the formation of MK. Preliminary preparations for armed struggle, we now know, can be detected in the Walter Sisulu-Nelson Mandela arrangement that Sisulu should seek support for such activity while visiting China in the early 1950s, and the almost simultaneous discussions in Sekhukhuneland, influenced very much by the struggle of Mau Mau. Raymond Mhlaba was also making similar proposals at the time (Mandela, 1994, at p.146, Delius, 1996, at pp. 131ff, Mhlaba, 2001, p. 116. See also Magubane et al, 2004, pp. 53ff).

Likewise, the first plans for underground, in the M-Plan, were elaborated some seven years before banning (and almost at the same time as the reconstitution of the SACP).

[15] Xhosa translation corrected with the assistance of Nomboniso Gasa.

The interest of this study is not simply how successfully the M-Plan was implemented between 1953 and 1955. The ANC NEC in 1955 pointed to its general lack of implementation:

> The National liberation movement has not yet succeeded in the organisational field in moving out of the domain of mass meetings and this type of agitation. Mass gatherings and large public activities of Congress are important, but so is house to house work, the building of small local branches and the close contact with members and supporters and their continual education. (Lodge, 1983, p. 75. See also Feit, 1967, at p. 75).

Its focus is also on what practices and ideas regarding style of organisation and expectations of membership it embraced. This relates to whether the ANC underground experience might have had a more enduring impact on internal democracy and consequent general conceptions of what it meant to be a member of the organisation.

Conventional scholarly treatments view the M-Plan as petering out in the 1950s after some success mainly in the Eastern Cape. However, the broader question being asked here is in what ways did it help constitute the ANC underground in later periods in a number of parts of the country (Cf Sampson, 1999, at p. 81, Eric Mtshali interview, 2003, Noloyiso Gasa interview, 2002) and indeed impacted on the UDF people's power period? (Cherry, 1994, p. 404). To what extent were the ideas of the M-Plan *embedded in organisational consciousness after the period of its initial attempted implementation, and with what consequences?* This is a question to which the thesis returns later.

The M-Plan was prompted by a belief that political conditions were changing towards much greater repression. This had been manifested in varying ways including the banning of the Communist Party and the restriction of many leading figures in the Congress movement. Some felt it necessary for the ANC to organise itself in a way that adapted to these new conditions, that the assumption no longer held that its objectives could be achieved through public activity, in particular, huge rallies and very large branches. A greater sensitivity to security questions had to be displayed on

the assumption a clampdown might take place and that the ANC might be banned. It now needed to communicate, as an organisation, in smaller units and with a greater degree of secrecy. (Karis and Carter, 1977 at pp. 38-9, Mandela, 1990 at p. 40, 1994 at pp. 134ff, Lodge, 1983 at pp. 75-6, Feit, 1967, at pp. 72-5). In January 1953, Joe Matthews, then a young ANC leader, wrote to his father, Professor Z.K. Matthews, then Cape leader of the ANC, about 'a secret meeting…of the top leaders of both the SAIC [South African Indian Congress] & ANC, half of whom were banned.' They had planned the future with 'cold-blooded realism.'

> Broadly speaking the idea is to strengthen the organisation tremendously. To prepare for the continuation of the organisation under conditions of illegality by organising on the basis of the cell system. The continuation of the [Defiance] Campaign and its widening into the mass campaign and Industrial Action. (Karis and Carter, 1977, pp. 35-6, capitalisation in the original)

Matthews recalled that meeting, over 50 years later, saying, 'there were very strong feelings that sooner or later the organisation would be banned and that certain preparations should be made.' But the expected repression or the scale of repression that was anticipated, did not immediately follow:

> It took seven years before the bannings actually took place. But I think the reason people felt that bannings were imminent arose from the steps which the government was taking against the organisation, against meetings of more than 10 people that were banned in various areas. It turned out that that was temporary….
>
> But as a matter of fact, gradually after the Defiance campaign, things returned to what one might call 'South African normality'. Meetings began again, conferences were held again, the national conference of the ANC in Queenstown was held in 1953…. Life in fact went on. The Congress of Democrats was formed in 1953, meetings of the joint executives were held. The campaign for the Congress of the People proceeded. So the declaration of banning of ANC occurred much later but they had sort of prepared for it. (Interview, Joe Matthews 2003.)

The initial approval for the preparation of the M-Plan was taken in secret at the 1952 ANC conference, which Nelson Mandela was prevented from attending. [16] Mandela confirms the reasons for taking this step:

> Along with many others, I had become convinced that the government intended to declare the ANC and SAIC illegal organisations, just as it had done with the Communist Party. It seemed inevitable that the state would attempt to put us out of business as a legal organisation as soon as it could. With this in mind, I approached the National Executive with the idea that we must come up with a contingency plan for just such an eventuality. I said it would be an abdication of our responsibility as leaders of the people if we did not do so. They instructed me to draw up a plan that would enable the organisation to operate from underground. This strategy came to be known as the Mandela-plan or, simply, M-Plan. (Mandela, 1994, at p. 134)

While the decision may initially have been taken in secret, it did not remain so, and over the years that followed it was publicly known and debated.

The M-Plan embraced a number of features. On the one hand, it may have been conceived simply as a preparation for potential future underground existence for the organisation as a whole. It may have also had a more limited purpose, namely greater security to prevent falling victim to the mounting repression, manifested amongst other things by careless use of sensitive documents. (Karis and Carter, 1977 at p. 39). But it was also the extension of modes of operation that had already been adopted. Many of the leadership, despite being subjected to heavy banning orders, continued carrying out Congress activities in secret, meeting amongst themselves and with those of the leadership that were still allowed to operate legally (Mandela, 1994, at p. 136). . Walter Sisulu has said that the M-Plan was 'actually intended to go into effect when banning orders began to take place.' (2001 at p. 80.) Regarding Sisulu, the Security Police noted:

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[16] Raymond Mhlaba's interviews with Phil Bonner and Barbara Harmel, 1993, suggest that the proposal for the plan arose from the Eastern Cape. The interview is however ambiguous on whether or not the plan was already in operation prior to approval, though this can be one reading of the transcript, which unfortunately has many gaps.

> After Sisulu was restricted, his public activities decreased to such an extent that he no longer came into the limelight…However he has dug himself in (established his position) and there is plenty of evidence from utterly reliable and delicate sources that he is, in secret and behind the scenes, as busy as before with advice and guidance and instigation among the non-whites. (Walter Sisulu, Ministry of Justice files, quoted by Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 121.)

After Sisulu's banning, Oliver Tambo was made Secretary-General in 1955, but because of his work as a lawyer, he could not manage the full-time organisational work. Consequently Sisulu continued to work in a full-time capacity underground, but allowing Tambo the power to veto anything he did. In effect Sisulu remained *de facto* Secretary-General. (Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 121).

The plan was not a classic conception for a tightly knit vanguard type underground. Despite the tighter security involved, the M-Plan also envisaged expansion of membership and organisation. (Mandela, 1994, pp. 134-5, Sampson, 1999, p. 81, Feit, 1967, at pp. 72-5). It may be that one of the key distinctions between the Communist and ANC underground, despite the deep involvement of Communists in the ANC, was that the Communist underground was modelled on Leninist vanguard conceptions, albeit operating in a situation where much Communist effort went into building the ANC. This vanguard conception of the SACP is confirmed by its documents as well as by participants. (SACP (South African Communist Party, 1962. See Chapter 3 below), Kathrada interview, 2003, Brian Bunting interview, 2003.) [17] The ANC underground, in contrast, was envisaged as a way of enabling a mass organisation to operate in underground conditions. (Cf Shubin, 1999, at p. 11).

[17] It is interesting to note, however, that the Comintern 'instruction' to the Communist Party, to prepare for underground, mentioned above, includes advising that the 'mass character' of the Party should be safeguarded.

Top-down ‘transmission’ and elements of local initiative

As with all plans for underground operations, the M-Plan envisaged a hierarchical structure, with very clear ‘top down’ character. Thus Mandela writes that ‘[t]he idea was to set up organisational machinery that would allow the ANC to take decisions at the highest level, which could then be swiftly transmitted to the organisation as a whole without calling a meeting. …’(1994, p. 134)

He had used similar words in motivating the plan at the 1953 Transvaal Conference of the ANC, saying its aim was, *inter alia*: ‘to enable the transmission of important decisions taken on a national level to every member of the organisation without calling public meetings, issuing press statements and printed circulars.’ (Mandela, 1990, p. 40. See also Sampson, 1999, p. 81.) The same emphasis can be found in the description of the operation of the M-Plan in East London, given by Johnson Malcomess Mgabela:

> Going from house to house we spoke with the people *and gave them some orders*, trying to bring political understanding of what the ANC were doing. We had to organise small meetings because the government declared any meeting of more than ten people an illegal gathering. So we used the Mandela Plan: going to a house; staying there with ten people; giving them an understanding of what the ANC was doing; *giving them orders*; going to the next house. We tried to give people a message of what the ANC stood for and what its plans of actions were. You would tell people here, tell people there. You would even go to a public place like a shebeen or stand with a few people on a street corner. After a few days you would find that you had told a few hundred people about the policies and activities of the ANC. All of this was to be done underground. No name must be written down. Everything must be kept in secret. From the national level the *instructions came to us* through the leadership of the region. We had to *take these instructions to the branches*; *the branches had to take it to the area committees and the area committees*

> *had to take it to the street committees.* (In Coetzee et al, 2002, at p. 60. Emphasis inserted.)

At the same time, the plan had important features promoting local initiative and participation, which became one of the inspirations during the 1980s People's Power period, certainly in Kwazakele in Port Elizabeth. (Cherry, 1994, at 404, unpub 2000, ch 4. See also van Kessel, 2000, 135*).* This can be seen in Mandela's, elaboration of the aims, again showing its conception to be quite different from a 'vanguardist' approach:

> to build up in the local branches themselves local Congresses which will effectively represent the strength and will of the people;
>
> to extend and strengthen the ties between Congress and the people and to consolidate Congress leadership. (1990, at p. 40.)

These steps were seen as part of the consolidation of 'the Congress machinery.'(ibid.) This popular character is elaborated in Mandela's autobiography:

> I held a number of secret meetings among ANC and SAIC leaders, both banned and not banned, to discuss the parameters of the plan. I worked on it for a number of months and came up with a system that was broad enough to adapt itself to local conditions and not fetter individual initiative, but detailed enough to facilitate order. The smallest unit was the cell, which in urban townships consisted of roughly ten houses on a street. A cell steward would be in charge of each of these units. If a street had more than ten houses, a street steward would take charge and the cell stewards would report to him. A group of streets formed a zone directed by a chief steward, who was in turn responsible to the secretariat of the local branch of the ANC. The secretariat was a subcommittee of the branch executive, which reported to the provincial secretary. My notion was that every cell and street steward should know every person and family in his area, so that he would be trusted by the people and would know whom to trust. The cell steward arranged meetings, organised political classes and collected dues. He was the linchpin of the plan.

> Although the strategy was primarily created for predominantly urban areas, it could be adapted to rural ones. (1994, at p.135. See also Feit, 1967 at pp.72-73).

Thembeka Orie describes the role of the steward in the Port Elizabeth area:

> Each street had its own steward whose task was to recruit within the street. The steward had to inform on the types of people in each street, whether there were for example policemen. The most important task for the steward was to know everything happening within the street, be it a social event like a funeral, an initiation ceremony or a fight.
>
> These duties were crucial because when it came to organising meetings, the ANC could not risk holding a meeting of more than ten people in one street knowing that there were police in the neighbourhood. Social functions like African traditional ceremonies (initiation) or funerals for instance, were used by the ANC to advance its political goals. The street stewards therefore had to be always on the alert in order to organise properly and thereby utilise such occasions effectively.
>
> Mthuthuzeli Magqabi, who was in the branch secretariat of New Brighton in 1953, states that directives from the Congress whether locally or nationally were passed easily and more quickly. He would meet with the chief stewards and give information about certain events. The chief stewards would take the message to all zones. They in turn would pass it to the street stewards who would communicate it to the people either verbally or in writing. (Orie, unpub, 1993, pp.102-3)

The use of the concept of a 'steward' appears to have its etymological origins in the church, especially the Methodist church. (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*, Vol 2 (1986) (personal communication (e-mail 31 January 2003) from Professor Greg Cuthbertson, who writes that the word 'steward' is 'still used in Methodism to designate the function of material custodian in church affairs…. Primitive Methodism and to a lesser extent Wesleyan Methodism were significant feeders of the trade union

movement in Britain, and Methodism in its many forms in SA, including the AME [African Methodist Episcopal] tradition, has also played a part in liberation movements.' Joe Matthews suggests a similar lineage for this aspect of the M-Plan:

> Q:: When they use the concept 'cell steward', do you think the word 'steward' has a church origin?
>
> A: It could be because there was a very strong church influence in New Brighton. There was a very strong religious bent in that branch and it was Methodist and it was drawn from people like Gladstone Tshume, Rev Tshume. Gladstone Tshume was a Communist but he never missed a church service…. It came from that idea of a steward who not only is responsible for organisation but also for collecting the subscriptions and that of course is one of the jobs of the steward in the church. It's making sure that people are paying their quarterly subscriptions. (Interview, Joe Matthews, 2003.)

At this point in time the term was not widespread within the union movement in South Africa. Professor Eddie Webster writes:

> Shop-stewards were introduced into trade unions in South Africa in the late 19th century, by British craft workers. However, they operated rather weakly until the 1970s when, influenced by the growth of a shop-steward movement in Britain, the emerging industrial unions placed central emphasis on building a working class leadership based on the shop-floor…. (Webster 1992) at 7. A similar view is expressed by Dr Sakhela Buhlungu, Personal Communication by e-mail, 15 July 2003.)

If this is correct, it provides another illustration of the continuity of experiences, and influences, in this case Christian ones, from one phase of African nationalism into a quite different one (Cf Walshe, 1970, for other examples of continuities and ruptures in ANC history.)

One of the ironies of the implementation of the M-Plan is that it subverted or inverted Nationalist Party Government plans for imposing political control through the building of townships in the cities. Joe Matthews makes the point:

> Obviously it was a serious weakness in terms of rural organisation. It assumed funnily enough the classic township planning so you actually go to the city council and said can we have a copy of your township plan and you took the township plan and you divided the area, and you had the streets all there and it was quite easy to do it, following the traditional Verwoerd type organisation, concentration of a township. And I think it was utilising that which had been intended as a security measure, to have townships far from the white areas and which then was turned around and made to be an advantage to the movement, so you had the people not as prisoners of the regime but as people organised in certain strategic areas. And of course in the end people in places like Soweto and so on when they got organised later in the 70s and the 80s this was the system that was used. (Interview, Joe Matthews, 2003). [18]

Political education

Considerable weight was placed on political education, in motivating the plan (Mandela, 1994, p.135) and indeed throughout the 1950s. (Anon. 1984, Lambert, unpub, 1988, Everatt, unpub, 1990, pp. 99-111. Mtshali, Billy Nair interviews, 2003). Many people appear to have passed through some form of internal education where a common understanding of Congress politics was developed, through lectures and discussion. Those who participated at one level were expected to give the lectures at another. (Mandela, 1994, p.135.) Such processes were already in operation within the trade union movement, notably in Natal. (Interviews Mtshali, 2003, Ndlovu, 2003 L. Dlamini, 2005).

[18] Personally I was doubtful when I heard of the application of the plan during the period of the Soweto rising, but later interviews as well as documentation in Houston (2004, pp. 650-651) indicate the continued use of the M-Plan in later years.

Mandela explains:

> As part of the M-plan, the ANC introduced an elementary course of political lectures for its members throughout the country. These lectures were meant not only to educate but to hold the organisation together. They were given in secret by branch leaders. Those members in attendance would in turn give the same lectures to others in their homes and communities. In the beginning, the lectures were not systematised, but within a number of months there was a set curriculum.
>
> There were three courses, 'The World We Live In', 'How We Are Governed' and 'The Need for Change'. In the first course, we discussed the different types of political and economic systems around the world as well as in South Africa. It was an overview of the growth of capitalism as well as socialism. We discussed, for example, how blacks in South Africa were oppressed both as a race and an economic class. The lecturers were mostly banned members, and I myself frequently gave lectures in the evening. This arrangement had the virtue of keeping banned individuals active as well as keeping the membership in touch with these leaders. (Mandela, 1994, p. 135).

Inside and outside of these structures, many cadres saw political education as their key task during this period. Elias Motsoaledi recalls:

> We took those who understood into a house and continued with political classes in order to give the movement its impetus; you must have real members not only paper members. People did not know the history of the ANC so we had to impart this knowledge to them. Secondly, they needed to know the day-to-day issues which affected them; to make him understand exactly why he was treated the way he was treated. I had so many people from all over Soweto who came to me for political classes. I remember trying to impart this knowledge to someone who was far older than I was. I outlined the difficulties and then he looked at me and said, 'This is what I wanted to tell you, you can't tell me that.' In other words, you struck the chord and gained the respect of these people because you were able to interpret their

> aspirations. You were able to articulate all their problems. Then they started to respect you. . (Quoted by Philip Bonner and Lauren Segal, 1998, at p. 50).

An important element of these processes that appears to have been neglected in the literature thus far, is that members were not only inducted into the Congress movement, but were also constituted as a body of organic intellectuals. (See Suttner, 2005). This was something that would happen in a number of other structures –in the Communist Party, in the MK camps, in trade unions, on Robben Island and in the UDF.

Gramsci characterises an intellectual as a person not defined purely by the qualifications that he or she has obtained, but by the functions that the person performs and the role they play in relation to others (1971, at pp. 3-23.) In the case of the South African struggle, these internal courses saw people learning one day and becoming teachers at a later date. (Eric Mtshali describes receiving such lectures and Cleopas Ndlovu later reports on receiving lectures from Mtshali. See interviews with Ndlovu, Mtshali, 2003). Many of these people had little, if any, formal education. Yet they carried out an intellectual function. This was the case with Motsoaledi, and one informant told him that it was only when he got into exile that he realised that Motsoaledi was not 'an academician' (Interview, Williams, 2005. See also Suttner, 2005)

One significant aspect of this political education is that much of its content seemed to have been informed by a Marxist orientation. (Anon, 1984, Mtshali, Billy Nair, Cleopas Ndlovu interviews, 2003.)[19] Generally, the widespread diffusion of Marxist thinking within the ANC today, tends to be attributed to the exile experience, where some cadres were sent to Party schools and much of the political education had a Marxist orientation. (For that influence, cf Serache, interview, 2002, Sparg et al, 2001. See also Suttner, 2003a). But these Congress Alliance courses indicate modes of analysis already within that paradigm long before the period of exile. Even before the establishment of the Congress Alliance and South African Congress of Trade

[19] Some of the actual lectures, including those referred to by Mandela, can be found, in archival collections, including the University of the Witwatersrand Cullen library. See 'Notes for Lecturers. Elementary Course on Politics & Economics' and 'The World We Live In'.

Unions (SACTU) in particular, this was happening within the trade unions in Natal where many Communists occupied leading positions. (Nair interview, 2003.)

This also raises an interesting contemporary question. Given this Marxist orientation during the 1950s and the apparent popularity of socialism during the exile period and within the country in the 1980s, what has happened to that tradition *within the ANC* in the present period? Has it simply been obliterated from peoples' minds and if so, how was that achieved? Does it mean, for example, that the conviction and training was in fact very superficial? Petros 'Shoes' Mashigo who indicates some of the limitations, when he records keeping on trying- without success- to find out from comrades exactly what was meant by Hegel having turned the dialectic on his head and Marx turning it right side up[20] (Interview 2003)). Alternatively does this orientation, while in abeyance, still possess a potential basis for socialist support? If so, under what conditions can it be mobilised? Or, is Marxism now primarily a rhetorical device within the ANC, used to defend sometimes conservative macroeconomic policies and deployed against the left? (See e.g. Moleketi and Jele, 2002).

Extent of initial success and failure of the M-Plan.

Accounts of the implementation of the M-Plan generally refer to it succeeding mainly in the Eastern Cape, particularly in Port Elizabeth, though Tom Lodge refers to some degree of implementation in Cato Manor, without providing a source. (Lodge, 1983, pp. 75-6, Mandela, 1994, p. 136, Walter Sisulu, 2001, p. 81) Feit refers to limited attempts to implement the Plan in a number of areas in Eastern Cape, Natal and

[20] The relevant passage from Marx reads:

'My dialectical method is not only different from the Hegelian, but is its direct opposite. To Hegel, the life-process of the human brain, i.e., the process of thinking, which under the name of "the Idea," he even transforms into an independent subject, is the demiurgos of the real world and the real world is only the external, phenomenal form of "the Idea." With me, on the contrary, the ideal is nothing else than the material world reflected by the human mind, and translated into forms of thought.

'…The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general form of working in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be turned right side up again, if you would discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.' (Marx, 1970, pp. 19-20)

Transvaal. (1967, p. 75.) Eric Mtshali describes implementation in the whole of Durban. (Interview, 2003.):

> We were told about the M-Plan, in the Party and the ANC. In fact, the people who implemented the M-Plan in Durban, were mainly members of the Communist Party
>
> Q: In what parts of Durban was it implemented to your knowledge?
>
> A: In fact the whole of Durban, and that including the townships
>
> Q: By saying it was implemented you mean people established cell structures?
>
> A: Yes cell structures, but at the time M-Plan did not work effectively because ANC was legal
>
> Q: It was premature?
>
> A: It only worked effectively when ANC was banned…. (Interview, 2003).

The M-Plan also achieved considerable success in parts of East London. (Interviews with Mgabela in Coetzee et al, 2002, p. 60, Monde Colin Mkunqwana, ibid at pp. 77-78).

Archie Sibeko's autobiography indicates implementation in the Western Cape. He writes:

> It was becoming obvious to the ANC that bitter struggles lay ahead, and we prepared by improving our organisational framework. The regime had

> unintentionally made this easier by concentrating Africans in townships.[21] Nelson Mandela's M-plan-an ANC strategic document to work underground efficiently …built on this to create very efficient machinery. …[B]ranches were quickly divided into wards, zones and cells, each with its own leadership
>
> This structure enabled regional and branch leaders to communicate very quickly to all members. We could call a branch meeting on a Sunday morning within 30 minutes, or mobilise people to deliver leaflets to every household in the township in a short space of time. (Sibeko, 1996, pp. 49-50).

John Nkadimeng also claims that the implementation of the M-Plan at the early stages after its inception (as well as later, as a plan for underground when the ANC was illegal), was much wider than the areas conventionally named. (Interview, 2003). He insists that there was implementation in a number of areas of the then Transvaal and that it had had some role in the Pondoland and Sekhukhuneland risings. (Confirmed by interview with Henry Makgothi, 2003). This claim however needs further investigation and clarification.

But the success of the M-Plan should not be measured purely or mainly by the extent to which it was implemented at its inception, which seems to be the prime concern in Karis and Gerhart (1977) and in other works. This may be part of the reason for confusion or disagreement over its degree of success. In fact, it seems that it was implemented to a varying extent over the period immediately following its unveiling and then after unbanning.

For various reasons related to lack of resources as well as resistance to changes that did not seem immediately necessary, and fears of centralisation, many members were reluctant to make the organisational shift at the time. (Mandela, 1994, pp. 135-6, Lodge, 1983, p.76, Sampson, 1999, pp. 81-2.) Also, Joe Matthews, as indicated

[21] See similar point quoted from interview with Joe Matthews above.

earlier, argues that at the time of the development of the M-Plan, banning and increased repression appeared imminent. But this did not last and the country returned to some semblance of normality. (Interview, 2003)

Many did not consider it necessary to take the precautions where an immediate clampdown was not confronted. This recalls Moses Kotane's statement when asked why the Communist Party had not prepared for underground before it's banning:

> Kotane did not favour dissolution; but neither did he think it possible to have organised an illegal party before the Suppression [of Communism] Act became law.
>
> 'It is very easy to say we should,' he said later. 'But no person can react to non-existent conditions. Many romantic people say we could have made preparations, but I dispute this. You don't walk looking over your shoulder when there is nothing to look back at. Theoretically you can train people to be pilots when there are no aeroplanes. But the realities have to be there.'(Bunting, 1998, p. 179)

In the same way, many ANC people may have found it abstract to organise for illegality while the organisation was unbanned. (Cf Mtshali interview, 2003.) But once it was declared illegal that became a necessity.

Revival/implementation of M-Plan after banning

Some evidence suggests that the M-Plan, even if unevenly implemented in an earlier moment, was embedded in people's consciousness and that it was the basis for organising underground units. (Sampson, 1999, p. 80, Meli, 1988, p. 153, Benson, 1994, pp.76, 91-2, Noloyiso Gasa interview, 2002, Nkadimeng, Mtshali, Makgothi interviews, 2003, Setsubi interview, 2004).

A clear directive to implement the M-Plan was issued by the Lobatse conference held in then Bechuanaland in 1962. The final resolutions instructed all organs and units 'as a matter of urgency…to ensure the full implementation of the ''M- plan"… and its rapid extension to every area in South Africa; for this purpose to appoint special organisers to guide and supervise its operation.' (Meli, 1988, p. 153).

Gasa, whose parents were leading Western Cape ANC figures, Vulindlela [Welcome] Zihlangu, who died in 1965 shortly after being tortured and released from detention and Dorothy Zihlangu, Western Cape ANC, community and women's leader reports on the implementation of the M-Plan after banning:

> I only heard about that [M-Plan] after the organisation was banned. And then people were told not to meet in large numbers. That is when they began meeting in smaller numbers. When we used to ask why are the general meetings not there any more, because we used to enjoy them, they would say the securities have forced people not to meet in large numbers again. But we could see that people were meeting and you would gather from them that there was a plan that was proposed that people should meet in tens in separate venues. That is how I got to know about it
>
> Q: So you are saying the way they organised when the ANC was banned was based on that earlier M-Plan?
>
> A: Yes

After banning:

> People were in prisons, they were detained and after their detention they came back and they said they could not meet in large numbers any more so they met separately in tens. When you asked how did they work, they only met in separate venues but they discussed the same agendas. That is how we came to know about it, but I was never in those meetings.
>
> Q: So this was really the organisation operating underground?

A: I should think so (Interview Noloyiso Gasa, 2002.)

Frances Baard, speaking of Port Elizabeth, confirms this interpretation of the M-Plan forming the basis for underground organisation,

> After the State of Emergency we carried on working even though the ANC was banned…[N]ow we had to work underground. That was when we started to work with the M-plan. …. It worked very well. There were about 10 people in one cell and we were all from one place, one street and so forth. We would meet, just the few of us. The chairman of our group, he would have a meeting with other people, and so it would go on, small groups meeting all the time, never big meetings. (Francis Baard, 1986, p. 71).

In the early 1960s, underground units formed at Fort Hare were also organised on the basis of the M-Plan. Isaac Mabindisa relates how they followed the plan and 'wouldn't meet in big groups, but in small groups. We would divide ourselves into cells.' Ntombi Dwane attended secret meetings

> I was in Doreen [Ngumede's] cell…There was a hierarchy and your own connection was with your leader, your cell leader….There were about four of us in our cell…We'd have political discussions….We've got to do this now, we've got to go and scatter pamphlets, try and recruit a person, try and get somebody interested. …I took my orders from Doreen. (Massey, unpub, 2001, p. 214. Confirmed also in interview with Sigqibo Dwane in ibid).

At the same time, habits of organisation from the period of legality were carried over into the period of underground. One of the qualities of a good branch chair from the Xuma/Calata period (Walshe, 1970, pp. 389ff) was a person who kept records and other documents in good order and Welcome Zihlangu continued this practice after banning, though taking care that the records were hidden. Noloyiso Gasa reports:

In fact when people were detained and they started meeting in tens I was not involved at all except when I wrote notes for my father after he came back from meetings. He could write but he had a bad handwriting

Q: So he wanted it neat. But why did he want it in writing if it was illegal?

A: I don't know. Maybe to remind themselves

Q: Did he hide it then?

A: Yes at home we had a trapdoor where he used to hide these things

Q: What did you hide there?

A: Books, their membership cards, their minutes

Q: So they had records. . . But they did it secretly?

A: I should think so, my father was a chairman of a branch and he used to bring these things home…(Noloyiso Gasa, interview, 2002.)

Similar practices can be found elsewhere. Photographs taken by Nat Serache in Dinokana, a village outside Zeerust in the then Western Transvaal, show a woman indicating where she used to hide ANC membership cards during the period of banning. Many members wanted to retain the cards in some safe place. It was possibly a symbol of their continuing commitment to the organisation. When Ben Turok was canvassing for the Congress of the People in 1954, he encountered members of the CPSA, who had buried their cards in a tin box with plastic around it. (Everatt, unpub, 1990, p. 93, Turok, 2003, pp.53-4.)

ANC is banned: Development of ANC underground

The reconstitution of the Communist Party of South Africa as the South African Communist Party has importance for the later development of the ANC as an underground organisation. (See Chapter 3, below). It appears that the ANC drew on the experience and some of the facilities of the SACP in developing its own organisational capacity as an underground organisation. (Sampson, 1999, p. 138, Nkadimeng, Mtshali, Joe Matthews, Makgothi interviews, 2003, Davis, 1987.) By the time the ANC was banned the SACP had already had some seven years of experience underground. Many of the leading figures in the ANC underground were also members of the Communist underground organisation. All but one of the Rivonia accused are now known to have been members of the SACP, most in the leadership of the organisation.[22] (See also Chapter 3 below).

When the ANC was banned many of its leaders were in prison together, held under the State of Emergency. A meeting of the National Executive of the ANC was held- by those outside of prison- at which the decision to declare a day of mourning was taken. It was also resolved that in the event of the government banning the ANC, it would not dissolve (Govan Mbeki, 1992, p. 86. Mbeki does not provide the precise date of the meeting).

On April 1 1960, a statement was issued by the 'Emergency Committee of the African National Congress', chaired by Moses Kotane (Shubin, 1999, at p. 12) declaring, *inter alia*,

> The attempt to ban the African National Congress, which for half a century has been the voice of the voteless African majority in this country, is a desperate act of folly, committed by a Parliament which does not contain a single African.

[22] The one who was not a member is Nelson Mandela. Some scholars have suggested, informally, that this is not true, but there is no public evidence to the contrary. The most significant recent public acknowledgement of membership is that of the late Walter Sisulu, who was at the time a member of the SACP Central Committee. (Cf Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 122 and Walter Sisulu, 2001, p. 92).

> We do not recognise the validity of this law, and we shall not submit to it. The African National Congress will carry on in its own name to give leadership and organisation to our people until freedom has been won and every trace of the scourge of racial discrimination has been banished from our country (Karis and Gerhart, 1977, p. 572).

Likewise, a defiant statement in *African National Congress Voice: An Occasional Bulletin*, No 1, April 1960, also carried advice to those holding illegal literature. Such suggestions for security would become characteristic of underground publications over the years. It declared:

> We shall continue to work Underground until the unjust and immoral ban suppressing the ANC has been repealed.
>
> This bulletin, 'Congress Voice,' will be issued from time to time. Read it. Study it. Pass it on. But do not be caught with it, or tell anyone where you got it. (Karis and Gerhart, 1977, p. 574. Capitalisation in original.)

The new situation of illegality presented a challenge to the activists who had escaped arrest. The organisation's structure had to be changed to meet the new situation. Michael Dingake describes the atmosphere of the time:

> There was to be co-ordination of the organs of the ANC on regional levels as well as on the national level. There were fewer and less experienced hands to tackle the job.
>
> The abnormal times called for the suspension of normal procedures and practices. The democratic elections gave way to executive appointments in a hierarchical order. The task of operating the ANC underground was formidable after years of above ground existence. The State of Emergency threw the whole country into confusion. …. (Dingake, 1987, pp. 58-9)

> Organisational procedures underwent a dramatic change…. Annual conferences or any other conference as provided for in the constitution of the organisation were suspended. Democratic elections of national leaders and office-bearers became a thing of the past. It was part of the new spirit of discipline to accept the suspension of this crucial concept of the freedom struggle without reservations. . .. It was not easy and the morale of the masses was ailing. (Dingake, 1987, p. 64.).

> ….The National Action Council, led by Mandela from underground campaigned vigorously for the success of the general strike [called against the declaration of a republic, after a whites-only referendum]. Slogans were painted countrywide condemning the declaration of the minority republic. Leaflets and pamphlets were distributed on a nationwide scale to draw the oppressed into the campaign…(Dingake, 1987, pp. 65-66)

The state of mind of many of the members was, however, not conducive to this transition. Dingake indicates the difficulty in communicating with and coordinating the membership:

> Within the liberation movement there was much confusion. .. . Loyal members of the organisation, lacking close contact and guidance, swayed with the wind. The Emergency Committee had to work round the clock to bring about relative stability in the unfolding process. It was not easy. (Dingake, 1987, pp. 58-9)
>
> …
>
> The general euphoria of the pre-State of Emergency had been interrupted ….The experience was sobering to some of us who, for the first time, lived and worked practically under conditions of illegality. The task of organising and maintaining underground machinery was an uphill battle. Activists had to learn new methods and acquire different techniques of operation. Not only that, we had to change ourselves to adapt to new conditions.

An element of demoralisation was induced by the state of emergency. While the 'liberation struggle had not been crushed, …[t]he ban and the State of Emergency

undermined the mood of enthusiasm, disrupted the trend of mass political involvement in the fight against oppression and triggered minds in search of novel solutions to the political problem of the country. (Dingake, 1987, p. 62.).

Pointing to what would re-emerge as a greater challenge to the ANC during the Black Consciousness period and the later rise of Inkatha, Dingake remarked that 'Black organisations which had not been banned and others who claimed to represent the interests of the oppressed tried to cash in and fill the vacuum left by the ban on the PAC and the ANC.' (At p. 59)

The banning of the ANC led some to join other organisations. Ian Mkhize, a former member of the Pietermaritzburg ANC branch recalls:

> When the screws really did turn on the ANC, people were just nowhere to be found. I must say, it seemed for a while that the ANC had a demise- it seemed like it was virtually dead…. It was in 1963 that I joined the Liberal Party. It certainly, was, in my own view, going the same way as ANC at that moment…They were the only alternative that was available. I would have taken a stand against them being anti-communist, but we had no option. Somehow we had to get a political platform. (In Frederikse, 1990, p. 93).

Dingake comments on this trend, possibly over-optimistically but also indicating the special qualities required in order to work underground and break from existing organisational habits:

> What was interesting was that the majority of ANC members who joined other organisations did not do so out of disillusionment or rejection of the ANC. They regarded working through other avenues without prejudice. On investigating further, one invariably came up against the disinclination of people to operate underground. It is natural. Underground work is hard, demanding and pregnant with hazards. Only the truly dedicated, selfless and disciplined cadres are suitable for the underground. (Ibid. Cf Mtshali interview, 2003, for similar comments below.)

Cleopas Ndlovu makes a similar point. Many members of branches were reluctant to stop wearing Congress uniforms and to recognise that what had been their legal rights were no more. Nevertheless, in his experience, substantial numbers did still work in the underground organisation. By his estimation this amounted to about sixty per cent of the membership of the branches with which he was acquainted. (Interview, 2003).

Unlike the SACP, the ANC had not made serious preparations for working underground. While the SACP had not prepared adequately for illegality at the time of its proscription, and dissolved itself amongst much disarray, its reconstitution as an underground force was a gradual and carefully process. (See Chapter 3 below). The ANC had made some preparations. From the early 1950s, as we have seen, many people felt that illegality was inevitable at some point. The M-Plan was initiated as preparation for this eventuality, but not put in place on a wide scale. Consequently the moment of underground organisation found the organisation unprepared.

This Plan was the basis on which the ANC organised itself underground. But successful transition of a mass organisation to underground structures was much more complicated than mere possession of a plan. The expertise and facilities and active involvement of the SACP appear to have been crucial.

At the same time, some suspicion was felt towards the Communists. Mtshali says 'it was difficult to change ANC comrades, to adapt to underground conditions. Many of them left the ANC at that time because underground work was a foreign animal to them and many of them suspected that it was the Communist Party doing work.' (Mtshali, interview, 2003.)

While the ANC and SACP sometimes shared facilities, as was the case at Rivonia, there was never a merger of ANC and SACP underground. The SACP retained its vanguard and tightly knit small-scale character (Interviews, Kathrada and Bunting, 2003, Lerumo. [Michael Harmel], 1971, p. 88). Eric Mtshali speaks of the Party 'playing its vanguard role in the mass movement.'(Interview, 2003.)

Being a vanguard was not the ANC's self-conception, even underground. The ANC had the much more complex and difficult task of taking a mass, aboveground organisation below the surface. (Cf Shubin, 1999). Obviously, as indicated, this did not mean that every ANC member joined an underground unit. But the scale on which this occurred was much greater than in the case of the SACP and the security consequences more problematic than in the case of the SACP.

Tasks of the ANC underground

The main task of the ANC underground in this period appears to have been in the first place ensuring survival of the organisation under completely new conditions of illegality. While the ANC was illegal it had to try to exert influence both from the underground but also through influence on organisations that were still legal.

In Durban, Eric Mtshali relates how SACTU continued to function legally, though many of its members had been detained or were under restriction. The space that it occupied was used partly by the ANC to provide a platform for advancing its positions. Mtshali reports:

> The Party's big task was… doing ANC work, [building] the ANC branches using our experiences to build the ANC underground, also using SACTU, because SACTU was not banned and the leadership of SACTU were mainly Communists in almost all provinces. So we effectively used our experience, but we were not masquerading as members, because we were trade union organisers (and ANC members). (Cf Feit, 1975, Chapter 7).
>
> Q: You established quite a few ANC underground units?
>
> A: We applied the M-Plan, from street to street from area to area.
>
> Q: Did you encounter a lot of fear on the part of the people or were you able to get quite a lot of people to do it?

A: No we were able to get a few people to do it.

They first had to 'make sure that ANC does not die.' They also had to distribute whatever literature was produced 'on time and widely.'

Mtshali also recalls how the ANC in Natal tried to ensure the development of and influence Residents' Associations (Mtshali, interview, 2003). They had to 'work with them and say the same things that we were saying when we were ANC. But this time not as ANC but as members of the Residents' Associations and Ratepayers associations or as members of the unions. (Interview, 2003).

Much of the work of the underground structures was of a welfare character, finding and providing aid to relatives of detainees, organising legal defence and fines for those charged. (Dingake, 1987, pp. 59-60.) This would continue to be one of the clandestine ANC roles alongside the building of organisational structures, throughout most of the ANC's underground period. (Cf Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 244. See also interview with Phumla Tshabalala, 2003.) In addition, these structures facilitated recruitment to MK, exit from and entry into the country. (Interviews Phumla Tshabalala, Ralph Mgijima, 2003.)

ANC underground organisation starts to consolidate and then Rivonia 'disaster'

The process of establishment of the ANC underground organisation was almost simultaneous with the creation of MK, although the first acts of MK only took place a year later. The establishment of MK as an organisation independent of the ANC represented a compromise, which Joe Matthews claims, created its own problems. Being outside of constitutional structures meant that the normal checks on who was recruited did not exist and that MK acted on its own, sometimes leading to serious security problems. Cleopas Ndlovu, by contrast, insists that this is 'nonsense' and that structures of the ANC were in fact involved. (Interviews Joe Matthews and Cleopas Ndlovu, 2003). He claimed that because Matthews was then based in Basutoland (now Lesotho) he was not in fact familiar with what was taking place.

This is a question that does, however deserve further investigation, since the potential for the problems that Matthews claims did occur, must have been present if MK was in fact independent of ANC structures.[23] The extent to which the issue did arise may have related to the extent to which a *de facto* overlap existed between ANC and MK structures.

After a shaky start the ANC underground organisation started to function, consolidating its structures and work. It is claimed that MK performed well and, according to Michael Dingake, its call for volunteers had led to an 'unprecedented' response from the youth, the organisation being 'inundated' with applications for training abroad. (Dingake, 1987, pp. 68-9). But there were also serious lapses of security:

> The inauguration of MK brought a new spirit of 'derring-do' and readiness for extreme sacrifices. The successful sabotage operations of 1962-3 created extreme over-confidence with its dangerous corollaries of recklessness and complacency. Regions, areas, streets and cells, through their structures, exhorted the membership to observe some elementary rules of security: change venues of meetings, be punctual at meetings, don't discuss your role in the organisation with other members of the organisation who are not working directly with you, be careful whom you talk to and what you say, etc. These elementary principles were broken daily. The non-observance of the rules could never be regarded as deliberate and conscious. It was all the result of emotional fervour overwhelming common sense and mutual trust generated among the membership by the wave of spectacular achievements of MK. The optimistic side of the mood was good. The incipient complacency and recklessness produced by such a mood however was dangerous. (Dingake, 1987, at pp. 75-6)

Important logistical measures such as the transport of MK recruits out of the country were not always undertaken with proper security, with drivers sometimes shouting on the streets that they would be making such a journey. (Dingake, 1987, at p. 77.) On

[23] Phil Bonner believes, from research he has been conducting, that Matthews's point may well have validity (Personal communication).

other occasions, unscheduled accommodation of MK recruits would be imposed on cadres, endangering security of a wide range of people. (Dingake, 1987, at, pp. 77-78.)

Sobizana Mngqikana, while a student at Fort Hare, painted defiant slogans and helped with anti-Republic activities. Returning to his home city, East London, he was recruited to join an ANC underground structure:

> On reflection our East London underground …flouted most of the pertinent rules of conspiracy and clandestine work. And this inevitably was to lead to calamitous disaster, as we were to witness. For example, one of our leaders would boast to some non-ANC acquaintances that he had been reinforced by intellectuals in his organisation (ANC). This meant us ex-Fort Hareians. We would be confronted by individuals claiming to know our political affiliations and activities. Sometimes we felt honoured by this, not appreciating the grave consequences that could arise. Sometimes we had fundraising parties where freedom songs were sung.

At one point, as a member of the Border Regional Command Secretariat, Mngqikana experienced the input of more seasoned revolutionaries, bringing them to heel. The Border committee had written demanding a report back on the ANC conference in Lobatse without sensitivity to the changed conditions. In response a delegation comprising Vuyisile Mini and Caleb Mayekiso came to East London, and chided the East London comrades for their action, which in affirming the importance of constitutional report backs did not appear to place sufficient weight on the gravity on the new situation of armed struggle, where many lives would be lost. (Interview Sobizana Mngqikana, 2001, and see Chapter 5, below). This dressing down did not mean that that sense of gravity and need for security was generally appreciated:

> Later a group of some of us underground activists were summoned to a meeting where we were told about MK tasks and asked to join. Although I

> joined MK I had very little to do with it. I was more involved in political work and recruitment.
>
> Here again lack of underground discipline was to surface among MK cadres. You would get cadres berating people at bus ranks for not joining the struggle –very irresponsible and complete neglect of underground rules.
>
> Q: Partly a movement in transition from one form of struggle to another?
>
> A: No, it was either misplaced and misguided over-confidence or naked irresponsibility. No such thing would happen in Port Elizabeth where there were tighter and better organisational structures under the guidance and strict discipline of Govan Mbeki [former ANC and SACP leader, Rivonia trialist and late father of the current President of ANC and South Africa, Thabo Mbeki]….
>
> Disaster was to strike in early 1963. Some MK comrades started test-shooting revolvers at night, not far from the public location bus rank. One of them left the revolver at his uncle's place, not very far from the testing site. And the police got wind of this…. (ibid)

The period that followed, which is resumed in Chapter 4, was one where the top ANC leadership was either imprisoned or avoided arrest through crossing borders into exile. The ANC was no longer a mass organisation, even if it might have continued to enjoy an extensive following whose presence would only later re-emerge. All that had been done to transform the ANC as a legal organisational formation, as opposed to one that merely met for conferences on an annual basis, had come to nought. (On these organisational efforts, see Walshe, 1970, esp chapter 14) It would take almost thirty years before that task of re-establishing the organisation on the legal terrain with structures functioning at every level could be resumed.

In the meantime, the organisation found itself in disarray, leaders and members scattered in exile, prisons and in various places inside the country, mainly existing with little apparent political content to their lives. While this apparent organisational absence was

partly illusory, it gave confidence to the regime and it had dealt a devastating if not final blow to the organisation.

Conclusion

The literature on early ANC preparations for underground organisation may too readily have written off the significance of the M-Plan, which seems to have had a widespread influence, though not at its time of initial implementation. Also, the tendency to use epithets like 'amateurish' to describe the first phase of illegal organisation and MK activity after banning, may underestimate the difficulties under which the ANC had to operate. Without the elapse of time between illegality and underground organisation, enjoyed by the Communists, the tasks were much more difficult for the ANC. Of necessity, underground structures had then to be built immediately, in the main, by those who were known as ANC supporters from their previous above ground, legal work. Furthermore, there are probably very few examples of a mass movement, as opposed to a vanguard organisation or small numbers of units trying to establish structures underground. This would produce special problems of coordination and security, whether over a short or longer period. Given these adverse conditions, what was achieved may not be as limited or worthy of the ridicule that the characterisations of this period have tended to evoke.

In addition, this chapter also suggests that the 1950s were not only a period of mass democratic upsurge, but also one where top-down transmission, hierarchical organisation and widespread diffusion of Marxist doctrine within the ANC took place. The tendency to counterpose the exile experience to allegedly more democratic and grassroots phases of the 1950s and 1980s has tended to ignore the presence of similar organisational characteristics found, in varying degrees, in all phases. It may be better to see every phase of ANC history after the 1950s as containing to a greater or lesser extent both democratic and undemocratic elements, hierarchical and 'bottom up' features and that none deserves romanticism or any form of blanket characterisation.

It is interesting, as some of the evidence has indicated, that the M-Plan continued to re-surface in later underground activities. As late as the 1980s it was the basis for

organisation in Matatiele, a very important area of ANC underground activity. (Interview with Setsubi, 2004). It was also claimed by activists in the Northern Transvaal, during the 1980s (Van Kessel, 2000), though the extent to which this coincided with the plan as originally conceived is not clear.

Chapter Three

The [Re]constitution of the South African Communist Party [SACP] as an underground organisation

Introduction

Over 50 years ago the Communist Party was formally reconstituted as an underground organisation. It is a subject about which little is known. Yet it will be argued that the Communist underground, throughout its history, made a substantial contribution towards underground organisation in general, sometimes disproportionate to the number of people who were members of the Party. The manner in which that contribution was made may have also left its mark on the relationship between the Party and the ANC. That may have been quite different from the fairly common view of Communist domination (cf Mangcu, 2003) and the relationship may in fact have limited the extent to which the Party was able to act as an independent force.

Until recently those wanting to read about the dissolution of the Communist Party in 1950 (then known as the Communist Party of South Africa [CPSA]) and its subsequent reconstitution have had to be content with a few terse phrases in official publications. It is only the interview material in PhD theses and one or two other not easily accessible publications that have provided wider coverage of the issues. (See: Everatt 1991, 1991a unpub, 1990). In recent years, memoirs have reopened the question to a new generation interested in Communist history (Slovo, 1995, Rusty Bernstein, 1999, Kathrada, 2004, though he says surprisingly little of the Communist underground, and Turok, 2003), many of whom did not have access to the limited banned literature touching on such questions. (Cf Bunting, 1998). All of these sources tend, however, to be urban based and neglect processes that were in motion

outside the main centres. (Personal communication from Phil Bonner, 23 August 2003, indicating the existence of interview material showing independent reconstitution of the Party by groups in the former Northern Transvaal as well as in the Eastern Cape). The type of communism understood in some of these rural areas may also have diverged from the 'mainstream' urban conception. Some of the leaders mixed Marxism with African belief systems and practices, notably Flag Boshielo and Elias Motsoaledi and it is by no means clear whether it was the African or the Marxist that formed the foundation in their bodies of thinking. The urban bias cannot, however, be remedied within the scope of this book but will be pursued in continuing research.

This chapter is an attempt to present a broad account of the transition from the dissolution of the CPSA to the reconstitution of the Party, under the new name of South African Communist Party (SACP).[24] Unfortunately most leadership figures involved in both dissolution and reconstitution are no longer alive. A few interviews and other records that they left as well as a limited number of people survive, some of whom built the organisation at the grassroots level.

The reconstitution of the CPSA as the SACP has importance in its own right. But it also contributed to the later development of the ANC as an underground organisation. It appears that the ANC drew on the experience and some of the facilities of the SACP in developing its own capacity as an underground organisation (Sampson, 1999, p. 138, Nkadimeng, Mtshali, Matthews, Makgothi interviews, 2003). The Rivonia farm at Lilliesliefitself, where the top ANC leadership were arrested and subsequently jailed for life, was purchased by the SACP and was initially only used by the Party.

By the time the ANC was banned the SACP already had passed through eight years underground experience. It operated for 10 years before taking its first arrest. (Bernstein, 1999, p.132). Many of the leading figures in the ANC underground were also members of the Communist underground.

[24] In Everatt's view it was not a case of reconstitution but establishment of a new organisation, due to the different ideological basis on which the Party was constituted, compared with the CPSA. This relates in particular to the adoption of the Colonialism of a Special Type [CST] analytical framework. Cf Everatt, 1991, unpub, 1990. On CST see further below.

DISSOLUTION OF THE CPSA

Within two years of the Nationalist Party coming to power it had prepared legislation to outlaw the CPSA. Prior to its enactment, the Party's Central Committee [CC] met in an emergency session. The results were not immediately announced. Bernstein describes the anxieties felt by ordinary members:

> We had expected … a definitive plan for the Party after the Act, but all they brought back was the simple message: Continue the campaign against the Act to the bitter end! … But what we wanted to know was: What next? What will happen when the Party has been outlawed? They provided no answers.
>
> We were a disciplined body. We toed the line, even though we knew there had to be something to tell which was being withheld from us for security reasons. The CC *must* have decided on its future course. Steps *must* be under way and would be disclosed to us in good time.... (Bernstein, 1999, p. 118. Emphasis in original).

But the CC had decided to dissolve the Party. Many members of the organisation greeted the dissolution with disbelief and dismay. (Bernstein, 1999, pp.121 ff.) Some thought it was merely a ruse and that the real intention was immediately to re-group as an underground organisation. Bernstein said, 'People thought, this is a con-job. We're going to con the government into thinking we're doing something which we're not doing.' (Interview, Everatt, unpub 1990, pp. 89-90). But this was definitely not the intention. (Slovo, 1995, p. 83, Kathrada interview, 2003).

Bernstein describes the Johannesburg report back:

> Now unquestionably, the CC's plan for our own and the Party's future would be revealed. There had to be life after death.

> [Dr Yusuf] Dadoo took the chair; [Moses] Kotane, the only speaker, was as always blunt and direct, without visible emotion or resort to oratory. His address is best described as a communiqué from headquarters. …
>
> There were options, Option one: to do nothing and wait for the curtain to fall. In that event, the legal advice was that the Party would be deemed to have continued after it had been outlawed; and every member who could not prove to have resigned would become liable to criminal prosecution for remaining in it. The CC had not been prepared to take on the responsibility for that.
>
> Option two: to claim to have dissolved and to reconstitute the Party secretly for underground operations. The majority had decided against that, partly because almost all our members were known to the police, had no experience of underground ways of work, and would therefore have little chance of underground survival. It would be a defiant gesture but no more, with extremely serious consequences. The CC was not prepared to take responsibility for that either.

In the end, almost unanimously, the decision had been to dissolve:

> Kotane added a few low-key words of regret, and sat down. The meeting sat silent, stunned. We had been speculating about what we might hear, but no one had anticipated it would be no more than hail and farewell…. We had come expecting a message of courage, hope, perhaps defiance or confrontation; but not cold surrender without a whimper.
>
> Had we, even now, been told the truth? Was Kotane not covering the existence of an illegal successor to the Party which was already being developed? We all had questions, but not ones that could be answered in public. What we wanted to hear, what we hoped to hear could not be spoken. We knew that. There was nothing left to say. … We sang the Internationale without enthusiasm for the last time, and went out into the night as though from a funeral…. (Bernstein, 1999, pp. 121-122)

Extent of training and experience in underground struggle

Although some tentative steps had been taken to prepare for possible banning, these were insubstantial. Some activists had envisaged the possibility of illegal action long before it became necessary, as mentioned in the case of Ray Alexander Simons (2004, ch 2). In preparing to immigrate to South Africa in 1929, she was trained by Latvian Communists for underground work. Other Communists (we have seen) were trained in Comintern schools. (See Chapter 2 above).

As early as 1934 a Comintern resolution instructed[25]:

> The Congress …places before the Party, as an absolutely urgent and important task, to make preparations for going underground and to have a more flexible combination of legal and illegal methods of work.
>
> While insisting upon and protecting the legal possibilities in every way, the Party organisations should immediately develop intensive mass work in preparation for illegality, explaining to the members of the Party the necessity of illegal work, point out the forms of the Party structure in underground work, the forms and methods of Party work under such conditions, the duties of the members of an illegal party, etc., strengthening the Communist fractions in the mass organisations, collecting cadres for leading illegal work, creating an illegal apparatus, etc. The CC should instruct all the leading Party comrades on the methods of illegal Party work and point out that going over into an illegal condition should not be regarded as a technical, organisational task of reconstructing the apparatus and introducing conspiratorial methods, but as a change in the system of Party work.

[25] Davidson et al (2003), vol 1, at p. 1 writes: 'few would remember that each member party was, in fact, a section of the Comintern, that its official name was 'The Communist Party of [a country]. Section of the Communist International', and that Comintern officials at the centre often referred to it as "our party"'

> If the Party will be compelled to go underground, it must safeguard the cadres and the contacts between the Party organisations, must *preserve the mass character of the Party* and the main thing is broad contact with the masses. At the same time the Party should to a greater extent utilise all the legal possibilities of contacts with the masses along the line of utilising the mass national reformist and reformist organisations (Davidson et al, vol 2, 2003, document no 34, at pp.107ff. Emphasis inserted).

When the Party did go underground, we have seen that it did not conceive of itself as a mass organisation, unlike the ANC, which tried initially to retain its mass character even while operating underground. The SACP's self-definition was always that of a small 'vanguard' party and its membership in the 1950s was never more than 500 (Shubin, 1999, p. 12, which he says is based on a 'secondary source taken from notes from discussions of his predecessors [in the Soviet Communist Party] with SACP leaders.' Also personal Communication by e-mail, 29 September 2003).

Possibly because of the disarray within the CPSA, consequent on various factional divisions at the time (Simons and Simons, 1983, Chapter 19), *nothing was done to act on this CI directive and prepare the organisation as opposed to individuals for potential underground work.*

Also, in the period of World War II, the Party enjoyed considerable public prestige after the entry of the Soviet Union and this must have helped engender a sense that the government was unlikely to act against an organisation linked to one of the Allies.

Many did not consider it necessary to take the precautions where an immediate clampdown was not being confronted. As indicated, Kotane argued that preparation for underground organisation when the conditions were not there, made it unrealistic, akin to training as a pilot without aeroplanes. (Bunting, 1998, p. 179)

Appealing, as these metaphors may be, the reality as we have seen, was that the Party and some trained individuals (including Kotane) did have some experience of underground, even where there were no 'aeroplanes to fly'.

But the steps taken beyond that were insignificant. Bunting writes:

> Some amateurish attempts had been made in the Johannesburg district, following the 1946 miners' strike, to set up a second-string District Party Committee to function in case the elected DPC was incarcerated. But the second string was, after all, like the spare wheel on a car –an insurance against disaster seldom put to use. When they met they had nothing to discuss except the unknown future….
>
> Nor was it possible on the spur of the moment to build up a secret party membership, because cadres are only steeled in political action and the Party did not know how to operate a legal Party side by side with an illegal Party. Nobody had any experience of underground work, or how to combine legal and illegal activities. (Bunting, 1998, p. 178 and interview 2003. See also Meredith, 2002, p. 34, Everatt, unpub 1990, p. 91, Klingman, 1998, 187).

In this context, legal opinion carried great weight in the decision to dissolve. Vigorous opposition to dissolution from Michael Harmel on political grounds may not have been backed with a concrete political and organisational plan. (Bernstein, 1999, p.124). According to Bernstein and Everatt, Capetonians who appeared reconciled to dissolution, dominated the Central Committee, while the suggestion to take steps towards preparing for underground organisation came from the Transvaal, feeding into 'existing regional disharmony'. (Everatt, unpub 1990, p. 91, Klingman, 1998, 188).

Bernstein also suggests that the Party's history until then, was concerned largely with safeguarding its own legality and constitutional rights, and that

> safeguards against possible future illegality could have and should have been in place, but were not. Attention had been focused solely on open and legal activity…. Forty years of legality had coated its revolutionary edge with fat, and principle had been overtaken by pragmatism. By the time the CC met to see to its defences they had already fallen into disuse. It had clutched at the 'legal opinion' like a drowning man at a straw. (Bernstein, 1999, p. 123)

Kathrada recalls the atmosphere of fear engendered:

> Now my recollection is that people feared that the moment the Communist Party is banned there will be a general round up of members. So much so that some people left the country, some waited in Botswana [then Bechuanaland] and some went on from there and some never came back. (Kathrada interview, 2003)

Rowley Arenstein also says 'none of us knew what it meant-whether we were going to be picked up and put into concentration camps, we had visions of Nazi Germany.' (Interview with Everatt, unpub 1990, p. 88)

Jack and Ray (Alexander) Simons try to contextualise the decision, of which Jack, as a member of the Central Committee was a part, within the revolutionary traditions of the CPSA:

> They had to decide on how best to continue the struggle. Deep-seated loyalties, communist tradition and fierce contempt for the oppressor urged them to defy. On the other hand, could the party make the transition to illegality without being annihilated? The police were in possession of its membership lists, seized during the raids of 1946; attempts to create the skeleton of an underground organisation had failed. After years of activity in the full glare of publicity members could not be expected to adopt illegal methods overnight. Having joined a legal party, was it proper to expect them to incur the severe penalties prescribed by the bill without long discussion and preparation which were not possible in the circumstances.

They conclude with what may be the most important reason to justify the decision:

> 'Moreover, and this weighed heavily, the experience of the German communist Party under Nazi rule had shown the difficulty involved in passing from legal to illegal work without a pause.' (1983, p. 607).

Bunting offers similar justifications:

> The membership had been recruited during a period when the Party was completely legal and able to function openly…. Quite apart from the legal considerations mentioned in the statement of dissolution, the Central Committee felt that it could not go underground with the sort of membership it had, many of whom were totally unequipped both ideologically and practically for illegal struggle and all of whom were known to the police. A totally different kind of Party was required to face the sort of challenge which would be presented after the Suppression of Communism Bill became law. (1998, p. 178 and see also interview, 2003).

Only two members of the Central Committee dissented from the decision to dissolve. In later years the decision would be severely criticised in official documents, such as the 1962 Party Programme, which observed:

> Nevertheless, despite its great achievements and struggles, the Communist Party of South Africa proved incapable of surviving under illegal conditions. Legalistic illusions had penetrated into the ranks of the Party, including its leading personnel. The Party was unprepared and unable to work underground. These errors culminated in the dissolution of the Party …. (SACP, 1981, p. 310).

Michael Harmel, being a leading theoretician in the Party at the time may well have drafted this section of the programme. But writing under the pseudonym A. Lerumo restated and elaborated on this criticism. 'The Party revealed certain weaknesses which had developed in its ranks, as well as its indestructible virtues. …'. Its decision had been taken

> without consulting the membership to dissolve the Party. It was suggested, among other things, that the rank and file would not be prepared or able to face the dangers and difficulties of underground work.

> The fallacy of this argument was proved in the ensuing period, when the great majority of the Marxist-Leninists, including most of the leaders who had earlier voted for dissolution, showed their courage and devotion to the principles by successfully rebuilding the South African Communist Party in conditions of illegality. (1971, p.82).

Harmel's statement does not dispose of the Simons's argument that immediate transition from legality to illegality would have been difficult to perform successfully and indeed the time that elapsed between dissolution and re-establishment, was certainly an advantage in avoiding police suspicion, as will be argued below.

Some top Party figures do not join the underground

Bunting says that Kotane, 'together with the majority of the Central Committee members, automatically assumed that after the formal act of dissolution, the Central Committee would begin to reconstitute the Party on new lines suited to the illegal conditions.' But some of the leadership and membership were not prepared to join an illegal organisation. (Bunting, 1998, p. 179).

After the dissolution, Central Committee members had different understandings of their future role. 'Where some Central Committee members had seen dissolution as a tactical manoeuvre, for others it was final…' (Everatt, unpub 1990, p. 91) Some significant figures like the Chair of the Party at the time of its dissolution, Ike Horvitch and leading theoretician, Jack Simons, refused to join the underground SACP, although his wife, Ray Alexander, did. Alexander describes how Brian Bunting came to ask them to join the underground Party and she immediately accepted, but Jack walked out of the room and later berated her for not first discussing it amongst themselves. Jack Simons only re-joined the Party over 20 years later. (Alexander Simons, 2004, p. 276. On the small numbers who joined, see Klingman, 1998, 207).

According to Bunting, Simons's decision was not ideological but based on family considerations. He assumed that Ray Alexander would face arrest and one parent was needed in the house. He was a 'loyal Party member in his mind' (Interview, 2003). But his non-involvement shocked many, for as Kathrada says, Simons was regarded as a 'hero'. (Kathrada, interview, 2003).

According to Bernstein, Simons believed there was no longer a need for an independent Communist Party, given the rise of the nationalist movement. (1999, p. 128. See also Everatt, unpub, 1990). Unfortunately Simons appears to have left no testimony on his reasons. Because of his prestige it is a decision that continues to puzzle many Communists.

Everatt argues that the differences between those who joined and those who did not, related to different perspectives on the relationship between class and national struggle, and in particular, the emergence and advocacy of the theory of colonialism of a special type (CST) especially by Michael Harmel in the Transvaal. (Everatt, 1991, unpub 1990, pp. 95ff). This theoretical approach was an attempt to characterise the South African social formation through combining the salience of both race and class or national oppression and class exploitation. From this analysis flowed strategies and tactics which differed from organisations that favoured a more one-sided emphasis on one or other of these factors. The final programme of the SACP prior to its unbanning provides a succinct summary of this mode of understanding:

> Within South Africa, bourgeois domination and capitalist relations of production, which emerged within the context of colonialism, have been developed and maintained since 1910 through a specific variant of bourgeois rule –colonialism of a special type. It is a variant of capitalist rule in which the essential features of colonial domination in the imperialist epoch are maintained and even intensified. But there is one specific peculiarity: in South Africa the colonial ruling class with its white support base on the one hand and the oppressed colonial majority on the other , are located within a single country.

> On the one hand, white South Africans enjoy political power, racial privileges and the lion's share of the country's wealth. On the other hand, the overwhelming black majority of our country are subjected to extreme national oppression, poverty, super-exploitation, complete denial of basic human rights and political domination.
>
> There are significant class differences within both the white colonial bloc and the oppressed black majority. However, the effect of colonialism of a special type is that all white classes benefit, albeit unequally and in different ways, from the internal colonial structure. Conversely, all black classes suffer national oppression, in varying degrees and in different ways. (SACP, 1989, p,19 and pp. 18-32 generally, ANC, nd c. 1980. See also Slovo, 1976, pp. 118ff, Jordan, 1988, pp. 110-124).

It is this approach to understanding the struggle, as indicated, that may have been the basis for decisions on whether or not to rejoin the Party underground. This divergence over CST had a regional dimension, with those in the Cape allegedly being less sympathetic to the national struggle. Everatt quotes Fred Carneson, Cape CPSA secretary:

> Until the African National Congress, or the Congress movement, emerged as a real political force in South Africa, I think there was a tendency among the activists inside and outside the Party, to see things in class terms more than in national liberatory terms. Particularly so, I think, amongst some of the white communists, though it was not confined to the white communists by any manner of means. (Everatt, unpub 1990, p. 96. However, Bunting denies this claim of ideological differences. Interview, 2003)

The reference to the ANC as a 'real political force' is important to bear in mind. For most of the period of the Party's existence the ANC had been very weak organisationally and its activities mainly revolved around its annual conference. It was only under the Secretary-Generalship of Rev James Calata and Presidency of Dr AB Xuma that attempts were made to turn the ANC into an organised force. (See

Walshe, 1970, pp 389ff). This created a foundation for the later emergence of the Youth League [YL] and the implementation of its plans in the ANC's programme of action, thus turning the organisation into a mass force in the 1950s. Despite the initial anti-communist flavour of YL pronouncements, the turn to mass politics was one of the factors creating a foundation for alliance with the Party.

Insofar as there may be some truth in the argument, that the advancing of CST was crucial to the SACP's reconstitution, it was certainly a factor that facilitated the development of an alliance between the Communist Party and the national liberation movement, led by the ANC (Everatt, 1991).

Other members of the CPSA, Ismail Meer recounts with some bitterness, were not asked to join:

> We [ordinary members] were merely informed of the dissolution. The Party had for years given me a non-racial home. I had enjoyed the camaraderie of whites, Africans and Coloureds. We could continue the personal relationships formed, but those too were not maintained because there was an underground, secret formation that selected 'reliable' or credible comrades, and by that act dissipated the former unity. Whoever did the selection, they created suspicion and tension between the chosen and the discarded. I fell in the discarded category…(Meer, 2002, p. 124).

Billy Nair confirms that Meer was not asked to join, on the ground that a different type of cadreship was required to conduct underground work. It was one thing being a member while a student at the University of the Witwatersrand, quite another in an illegal organisation (Nair interview, 2003).

Factors favouring successful establishment of the SACP underground

Establishing an underground organisation is always difficult, but there were factors that aided that endeavour in this case. Some time had elapsed between dissolution of the CPSA and the moment of establishment of the SACP, which allowed Communists to become actively involved in other political activities on which the Security police

focused. Monitoring those non-Party activities absorbed the police and may have left them focusing on Communist influence in the various Congresses, rather than considering the possibility of the reconstitution of the Party itself. It also appears that the intelligence capacity of the South African state with regard to domestic affairs was, at that time, limited to the initially inept efforts of the Special Branch of the South African police[26].

Police intelligence is essentially operational, related to the apprehension or identification of potential offenders. Its scope and depth is consequently limited. No overall strategic intelligence capacity existed which might have envisaged the re-establishment of the Party.

The existence of legal organisations within which Communists participated also provided opportunities for Party members to identify potential recruits, conduct political education and access facilities. (Interviews Cleopas Ndlovu, Eric Mtshali, Billy Nair, 2003). It enabled Party members to interact with a wide range of people that they would not have been able to do had they remained in secluded units.

The sophistication and cruelty of the security police had not yet reached the level which it later did. Police testimony was repeatedly rejected in court cases, and the use of torture was then a fairly rare phenomenon. Legislation, which would create a greater barrier to public exposure, had not yet been set in place. (Slovo, 1995, p.86, Kathrada interview, 2003).

The dissolution of the CPSA and its apparent continued organisational absence, created a sense of complacency on the side of the authorities. That the party was relatively invisible in the sense of having no public profile, even from underground, until 1960, would also have reduced police attention and made detection more difficult.

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[26] Their ineptitude was illustrated during the treason trial of 1956-61, when their note taking was repeatedly shown to be inaccurate and ruled inadmissible in evidence. It was only after the establishment of the Bureau of State Security (BOSS) and possibly its immediate predecessor Republican Intelligence that there was an attempt to develop a national intelligence capability. But this may only have been realised in a professional way, separated from a police investigative orientation, following the creation of the National Intelligence Service (NIS) under Dr Niel Barnard in 1979.

How was the SACP underground constituted?

Great care was taken in observing security precautions in the process of the reconstitution of the Party under a new name. No precautions can ensure indefinite underground existence. But given the favourable conditions it worked under and with the high security it observed, the Party was able to operate effectively. Slovo writes,

> that the overwhelming majority of those who made up the underground membership had previously been publicly connected with the legal Party ….Almost all of us, members of the Central Committee and District Committees, were subject to bans imposed upon us under the Suppression of Communism Act which deprived us not only of the right to be active participants in a list of specified legal organisations, but also restricted our movement from one city to another and prohibited us from attending any 'gathering'. (1995, p. 85)

> But in spite of the fact that we were accessible to 24 hours a day police surveillance, we managed to organise regular meetings (sometimes more than one a day) and occasionally to travel illegally beyond the confines of the restricted regions. (1995, pp. 85-6)

The account that follows is based primarily on existing written sources and oral evidence relating to the main urban centres. It may be that further evidence will shift the emphasis found here, away from the predominance of the Transvaal, Natal and Western Cape, as indicated at the opening of this chapter.

In 1953, in conditions of utmost secrecy, a small working group of senior figures began to reconstitute the party, building up a new network of units or cells

> Their numbers were small-fewer than 100 members were at the core of Communist Party activity, most of them living in the Transvaal. They operated mainly in small units of four or five people, meeting clandestinely, often in 'unmarked' cars owned by friends and colleagues or in 'safe' houses….(Meredith, 2002, p. 42. Slovo, 1995, pp. 83-4. See also Kathrada, interview, 2003).

Bunting writes:

> Kotane and most of his comrades took immediate action to get the wheels turning again. Under surveillance all the time, Kotane had to act with extreme care, but step by step, he was able to establish contact with like-minded individuals and groups in Johannesburg and discuss plans for the launching of the new Communist Party. At the beginning, having no headquarters to operate from, he and his initial contacts used to meet at dawn, in the open veld, away from the urban centres, so that, hidden in the bushes, they would themselves be screened from observation while at the same time able instantly to detect the presence of any unwanted stranger. At each meeting they would make detailed arrangements for the next meeting, fixing the exact time and spot at which each comrade was to be picked up, and the time and spot at which he or she was to be set down. If cars were used for transport, they had to be changed from time to time. It was important that no regular pattern should be established; times, places and personnel were constantly varied. All written communication was banned.
>
> It was only after many abortive approaches and tentative discussions that the first group was established in Johannesburg. Meanwhile, in other centres, similar groups were being formed. In Cape Town they met sometimes in houses, sometimes on the slopes of Table Mountain or in the thickets of the Cape Flats. In Durban, Port Elizabeth and other areas other groups started to function. Taking the initiative, Kotane's group sent couriers to the other centres to find out what was being done, made arrangements for future contact and

> communication. It was all slow work, but Kotane insisted from the start that security was to be of the tightest, and personally checked on every detail. (Bunting, 1998, pp. 197-198, Bunting, interview, 2003).

The first task was obviously to ensure that reconstitution was sustainable, that structures created would endure, whatever pressures might arise. Recruitment was undertaken on a very careful and conservative basis. Someone might recommend a person and if found to be suitable the actual recruitment and placing of that individual in a unit would be carried out by someone else. (Nair, Mtshali, interviews 2003). The process of vetting was 'very strict':

> The unit would say well this is 'a potential'. It would not recruit him, but what the unit could do is if it is running some broader classes it could invite that person there in a broader class, not letting him or her know it is a Communist Party thing.
>
> The Communists would be watching who the 'potentials' were and the unit would then say that we think we should recommend A, B, and C. The District Committee would then go through very carefully and decide and the recruitment would take place but depending on where the person is going to be placed eventually then someone from that unit would then approach that person. (Kathrada, Interview, 2003).

Eric Mtshali relates:

> Those days…I was a trade unionist from the very beginning, so my task was to build the trade unions and my task was to identify good comrades who could be recruited into the Party. But my duty was not to recruit them, just identify them and tell somebody who would do the rest…. (Interview, 2003. See also Cleopas Ndlovu, Interview 2003).

Jean Middleton writes of a similar process at a slightly later period:

> Recruits to illegal organisations were discussed within the organisation and carefully watched, before they were invited to join. Finally, someone was assigned to speak to the recruit, someone the recruit already knew, and who belonged to the unit he or she had been assigned to. .. . (Middleton, 1998, p.12)

People would observe simple, elementary rules of underground, which despite their involving basic techniques found in detective novels, were what were required for secure functioning. These included participants in meetings never traveling together, documentation seldom if ever being carried to meetings and if needed for discussion, being destroyed there. As far as possible, venues were in innocuous places and constantly changed and members often did not know or never knew the venue beforehand but had arrangements for meeting that made this unnecessary, for example, being collected at some prearranged point. (Interviews, Nair, Kathrada, Mtshali, 2003).

The Party was organised at various levels –Central Committee, District Committees and units. The latter seldom comprised more than four people. In some cases it was considered more secure to segregate people and not mix white and black, since this could attract attention. (Middleton, 1998, for the Transvaal, though it was not universal there, see Kathrada interview, 2003.) In the Cape and Natal, however, mixed units appear to have been fairly common. (Bunting, Nair interviews, 2003).

Members usually only knew those in the unit within which they worked, again by code names unless they already knew the person's real name, which was fairly common in so small a party, especially at leadership levels. (Middleton, 1998, Nair interview, 2003). At a District Committee level individuals would also interact with units which they coordinated, though the District Committee as a whole, while knowing the numbers involved, would not know the actual names of members in various units. (Nair, interview, 2003).

Not everyone was organised into a unit. A category of members known as 'D' or recalled by others as 'C' category was safeguarded against exposure to the

membership. Kathrada describes them as 'underground, underground Communists'. This was sometimes because they had no record of previous involvement in the Party and were very unlikely to arouse suspicion, amongst them being Vernon Berrange′ QC.[27] (Kathrada, interview, 2003).

There were also people who were not members, some leading figures, who contributed funds or interacted on a close basis with Party members and leadership. According to Billy Nair, this was the case with Dr Monty Naicker, non-Communist and leader of the Natal Indian Congress, who interacted with Nair and one or two others who he knew to be Communists, through whom he made his financial contribution. Others made facilities available to the Party for various types of meetings (Nair, interview, 2003). There are numerous cases of meetings in doctors' surgeries or conferences at the back of shops of Indian traders, who were not present at the time. (Cf also Kathrada interview, 2003)

Chief Albert Luthuli well- known as a non-Communist Christian, became very close to Moses Kotane during the Treason trial, so much so that he never subsequently took any important decision without consulting Kotane, often bypassing other officials in order to seek his counsel. Bunting quotes an interview with the late ANC President Oliver Tambo:

> It is significant that Chief Luthuli, who was not a member of the Party, and not near to being a member, on difficult questions on which he wanted advice by-passed his officials and secretaries and sent for Moses because he had discerned his loyalty to him. He knew Moses was 100 percent a member of the Communist Party, in fact its general secretary; but he also knew him to be 100 per cent ANC, and this gave Luthuli great confidence in him. Even when Luthuli was confined to the Groutville area in Natal, he would send for Moses to explain or discuss some issue he was uncertain about. (Bunting, 1998, pp.236-7).

Walter Sisulu confirms this:

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[27] Berrange′ may, according to some informants, have been a member before the Party's dissolution.

> The friendship between Moses Kotane…with Luthuli was even better than friendships I had with Luthuli as Secretary General. Chief Luthuli said, 'Does Moses Kotane know about this?' He was never happy till he knows that he knows. Chief Luthuli gained confidence in the communist leadership in that [trial] because he came into contact with Bram [Fischer], Rusty, Joe [Slovo] and thought, well these people mean well. (Interview quoted in Magubane et al, 2004, p. 65. See also Callinicos, 2004, p.188).

He also relied on people whom he knew to be Communists for logistical support on occasions when he broke his banning orders. From the period of the treason trial he also became an avid reader of Marxist and SACP literature. Special arrangements were made to deliver copies of the *African Communist*, (at first published as an independent journal, but later to become the official organ of the SACP) to Luthuli in Groutville. This was in no way an indication that the Chief was becoming a Marxist, but he had an enquiring mind, and wanted to understand communism, which had been such a factor in the Treason Trial (Nair interview, 2003)

Tasks in the Congress Movement and the Party's 'leading role'

Interviews with Party members suggest that the main tasks of the underground SACP were directed towards other Congresses, as members, in building these into stronger organisations. Mtshali remembers:

> Well I don't know what other units were doing but ours I know was to work in the unions. We were given different tasks, build the unions, different unions, others to work in the ANC, build ANC branches, others in the Youth League.
>
> Q: But to build them in their own right, not to…?
>
> A: Not to make them Party satellites, but to strengthen them. (Interview, 2003)

Kathrada recalls that the Party dealt ' more with our work in the Congress movement. As to Party work, it was political education amongst ourselves and also to look for potential recruits.' (Interview, 2003). This would seem to have remained the prime emphasis of the Party throughout its period of illegality, working to strengthen the ANC.

At the same time members take pride in the Party having initiated the 'main decisions' in the organisations or having been crucial to the resolution of problems in all the Congresses. (Interviews, Nair and Joe Matthews, 2003). Matthews says:

> Remember up to 1960 the Party did not announce its existence. Although any intelligent person could have seen the coordination, not only in the Party but in the broad democratic movement. People spoke with one voice too often and it was obvious that there was a coordinating force. I must say that contrary to popular belief, every important decision was taken by the Party, not by the ANC.[28]
>
> Q: But won democratically in the ANC?
>
> A: Yes. But decisions were taken in the Party Central Committee. I became a member of the Central Committee and we took decisions there that affected everybody …(Interview, 2003).

Kathrada notes that concern began to be felt about Communists operating as a unified bloc within the Congresses. Dr Yusuf Dadoo indicated at a meeting that the Party had changed its strategy:

> Previously you would take decisions in the Party and go and implement them. That they said is no longer allowed. You can discuss but you don't take

[28] Shubin, personal communication, 29 September 2003, believes this is exaggeration.

> decisions and say this is a Party decision and we'll go to the Congress and try and push through a decision. .. . In other words for the Communists in the past, it was a rigid thing. You take a line, which you take to the Congresses and implement.
>
> Q: But that previous approach would still have been democratic in the sense that even if you had decided that, you would have had to win it democratically?
>
> A: You had to win it democratically, but it would have become very obvious that the Communists were coming with this line. After all there were many who were not Communists and some were anti-Communist so that even for the smooth running of the organisation you had to take care (Interview, 2003)

Ben Turok refers to this interaction between the Communist Party and the Congress movement in the 1950s as 'obviously undemocratic ' (2003, pp. 44-45). Is such a process, which Kathrada and Matthews have been describing, susceptible to so simple a characterisation? If people caucus and then put a position and win it democratically, that is not undemocratic[29]. It is what all likeminded people do in most organisations. *This is not to ignore the problems that Kathrada refers to in Communists arriving with common positions*. That is why Dadoo sought to stop it. *But the intervention predetermined as a collective in order to secure a particular decision is not in itself undemocratic*, by any manner of speaking.

We have seen the evidence of an overall Marxist content of Congress alliance courses (Cf Chapter 2 above). Clearly political education was a major arena of Communist input. The Party also distributed literature reflecting its position, but not then under its own name, for example the publication, *Inkululeko* (meaning freedom, and later to be the name of an underground Party journal in the 1970s. See Kathrada, Interview, 2003)

[29] Tom Lodge argues, however, that this was not simply a case of 'people' but an organisation within an organisation, deciding on a position and ensuring its implementation. (Personal communication, May 2005).

The Party's close interaction with the Congress organisations, as indicated, was also to identify potential SACP recruits. The South African Congress of Trade Unions [SACTU] unions used to hold large meetings and debates in Durban and Nair describes how they would identify from these discussions who could potentially be drawn into the Party. (Nair, interview, 2003).

Despite the extent of involvement in Congress organisations, some SACP members were reluctant to join the ANC. (Delius, 1996, p. 100, for the Northern Transvaal). After joining the SACP, Eric Mtshali was not a member of the ANC:

> I would attend ANC mass rallies. But I didn't find anything interesting. All I would hear, fighting for independence, which was to me far away. It did not answer my immediate problems, which were bread and butter issues, higher wages and better working conditions. So to me those ANC mass rallies did not make much sense.
>
> But later, again this comrade [in the SACP] said I must join the ANC. I said why must I join the ANC? I am OK. Then what I would call a second phase of my political education came in, so they were now introducing me to the real politics, the national question and so on. (Mtshali interview, 2003)

Underground conferences

The SACP held a number of conferences during this period. Kathrada recalls:

> The first conference took place at an Indian shop in the East Rand. There was a shop and a storeroom at the back. Now that Indian guy would have left for the weekend. Then there was a house too, I think, because we stayed there. All of us were taken there by car.

> All staying there for the weekend. On mattresses on the ground. It was not a very posh house. Some must have slept in the storeroom. The shop was closed. That was the first conference. (Kathrada, interview, 2003)

Slovo, making a veiled and given its sensitivity, rather convoluted allusion to the recruitment of top ANC figures[30], noted:

> Between 1952 and 1962 the Party had six underground conferences, and the last one, when the Party Programme was adopted after a thorough discussion in the underground units, recorded impressive achievements throughout the country after a decade of underground work. This conference was attended by delegates from every major urban centre and by historic figures whose relatively recent conversion to the cause of socialism and the Party was a positive sign that our roots were indeed spreading deeper in the indigenous soil. (Slovo, 1995, p. 84).

Internal party democracy

The 1962 Programme made no bones about the curtailment of internal democracy entailed in working underground:

> The structure of the Party is based on the principles of democratic centralism. While demanding strict discipline, the subordination of a minority to the majority and of lower Party organs to higher organs, and the prohibition of all factions within the Party, it upholds the principle of democratic election of all leading organs of the Party, collective leadership and full debate of policy. The curtailment of some aspects of democratic procedure is inevitable under illegal conditions; this temporary situation must be compensated for by all members, regarding it as their duty to participate in the formulation of policy and by the leadership, encouraging and making it possible for them. (SACP, 1981, p.311).

[30] That Walter Sisulu's membership was only announced in the last years of his life indicates the type of sensitivity that Slovo tried to address. Given that Sisulu was as Secretary-General and after banning *de facto* Secretary-General of the ANC may have made his membership of the SACP a controversial and divisive question, had it been announced, even after his imprisonment.

Slovo, likewise records that the demands of underground did not lead to the wiping out of internal democracy within the SACP:

> [W]e continued to practise a good measure of internal Party democracy. The rank and file had the opportunity of debating major policy statements before they were finally adopted by the Central Committee. An election system was devised which was designed to achieve a balance between the often contradictory requirements of security and democracy….(Slovo, 1995, p. 108)

Joe Matthews agrees. He claims that ANC preparations for underground under the M-Plan were essentially undemocratic, but insists the Party underground operated on a democratic basis, always giving members the chance to discuss questions before decisions were taken. (Joe Matthews, interview 2003). If this was true, it may also have had something to do with the conditions under which each organisation prepared for underground and the relative stability and slower pace of the process in the case of the Party underground.

The extent to which membership participated must have varied in different periods of illegality and the conditions of repression being experienced. Certainly when the 1989 Party conference was held in Cuba, a great deal of input was made from within the country towards the finalisation of the preparatory documents. This was also aided by the presence of then senior Party officials involved in Operation Vula, the attempt to return outside figures to join internal underground structures. (Braam, 2004, Jenkin, 1995, Shubin, 1999, pp332ff, Gordhan interview, 2003).

ANC is banned: SACP involvement in development of ANC underground

The reconstitution of the Communist Party has importance for the later development of the ANC as an underground organisation. The ANC drew on the considerable experience and some of the facilities of the SACP in developing its own

organisational capacity as an underground organisation (Sampson, 1999, p. 138, Nkadimeng, Mtshali, Matthews, Makgothi interviews, 2003).

Many of the leading figures in the ANC underground were also members of the Communist underground. Although there was a great deal of overlap in membership, and facilities were sometimes shared, there does not appear to have been any general merger. (Interview Cleopas Ndlovu 2003, but Henry Makgothi seems to think that the two structures were more or less indistinguishable in the early period after banning, interview 2003). As indicated, Kotane, who remained free, headed both the Communist underground and the Emergency Committee of the ANC. (Shubin, 1999, p.12 and personal communication 29 September 2003).

Unlike the SACP whose familiarity with underground work extended back to 1953, the ANC had not made serious preparations for underground. Illegality found it ill-equipped. (Shubin, 1999, p. 11). The basis on which the ANC organised itself underground was the M-Plan, developed in preparation for underground in the 1950s, but as we have seen not thoroughly implemented then (Chapter 2 above). But successful transition of a mass organisation to an underground one was very complicated.

The SACP role was first to ensure survival of the ANC under completely new conditions of illegality. Eric Mtshali relates this in Durban:

> The Party, but doing ANC work, built the ANC branches using our experiences to build the ANC underground, also using SACTU, because SACTU was not banned and the leadership of SACTU were mainly Communists in almost all provinces. So we effectively used our experience, but we were not masquerading as members, because we were trade union organisers (and ANC members).
>
> Q: Using the cover?

A: SACTU was not banned, ANC was banned, so we could call SACTU meetings and invite the ANC leadership to come and speak as guest speakers and address the meeting.

Q: You established quite a few ANC underground units?

A: We applied the M-Plan, from street to street from area to area.

But Mtshali claims:

> It was difficult to change ANC comrades to maybe adapt to underground conditions. Many of them left the ANC at that time because they felt the whole thing was run by Communists. (Cf also Cleopas Ndlovu interview, 2003). This was not correct because we were organising underground ANC as members of the ANC, who had an added advantage of being Communists, with this experience of underground work. As a result ANC did not die because it was banned. And Communists who were members of the trade unions were able to use the trade unions to further the work of the ANC and Communist Party without anybody suspecting. (Interview, 2003).

The turn to armed struggle

Almost simultaneous with the process of establishing an ANC underground, MK was formed. The decision to take up arms arose first in the SACP, though there had been talk of 'fighting back' in various parts of the country, throughout the 1950s. (Magubane et al, 2004, pp 54ff). Risings in Pondoland, Sekhukhuneland, Natal/ Zululand and other areas indicated that, as Nelson Mandela was to observe at the Rivonia trial, unless the ANC took steps to control and regulate the drive towards violence it would become uncontrolled. (Mandela, 1990, pp. 162-3). The burning of sugar cane fields in Natal had already started some years before the formation of MK. (Magubane et al, p 63, quoting Justice Mpanza and interview Ngcobo 2005).

Although the SACP had initiated the idea of armed struggle it knew that it could not be the driving force or organisation, especially given the need for support in Africa. (Mtshali, Nair and Kathrada interviews, 2003). An indication of the difficulties likely to be faced by Communists, especially non-African ones, was Joe Slovo later being declared a prohibited immigrant by the Tanzanian government, forcing him to relocate to London. (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 27).

SACP underground after the reverses of the mid 1960s

After the Rivonia trial, various ANC and SACP units remained at large for a few more years, but after the sentencing of Bram Fischer, in 1966, the Communist underground was effectively smashed. (Houston, 2004). Yet the 'political dormancy' or silence that is referred to in much of the literature, does not reflect the almost immediate, albeit small scale attempts to reconstruct. (See Chapter 4).

In the revival of the ANC underground, in the Post-Rivonia period, we will see that many ex-Robben Islanders, very often Communists, were heavily involved. It is not clear to what extent the Party existed at that time as an independent underground force within the country.

In the late 1960s and the 1970s, however a number of Communist-initiated propaganda units were established within the country, often through the recruitment of people who had been studying overseas. Amongst these was Ahmed Timol who was tortured to death in 1971. (See Cajee, 2005).

These units were responsible for distributing official publications of the SACP and also ANC, as well as sometimes producing other publications, such as *Vukani!/Awake*, written inside the country.

Their lifespan tended to depend on the extent of their activity; the more they produced the more likely that police could detect the pattern of their work and close in on the

unit. But in general, none of these groups appear to have avoided capture for longer than four years, though there may have been some that were never arrested.

These were strictly propaganda units, with instructions not to do anything attracting attention to themselves, as would have happened in inter-racial units or open, progressive activity. The units tended to be racially exclusive which conformed to the character of the times, that in so precarious an operation nothing could be done that would attract attention. (Cf Jeremy Cronin, interview in Frederikse, 1990, p.127. See also Suttner, 2001).

In the 1980s units were established with a more far ranging character, producing both ANC and SACP literature, acting as both ANC and SACP units and conducting a range of underground activities. This was the case in a number of provinces. Paul Mashatile in Alexandra, together with other members of the Alexandra Youth Congress executive was drawn into underground work. Significantly, Mashatile's unit stored their materiel in one of the premises of a 'puppet' councillor, who was so despised by the community that his house was burnt down. (Interview Paul Mashatile, 2003.) This type of phenomenon- a supposed collaborator, actually working with underground forces has been under-researched and obviously could not easily have been researched in the period when it happened. While the example given falls outside the period of this study, there need to be attempts to understand the extent to which variants of such assistance occurred throughout the period of illegality.

A similar far ranging contribution in the 1980s initially derived from informal groupings of the Catholic youth, who had been subjected to left wing as well as ANC influences within the church. The way in which members of units were inducted was a mixture of Marxist-Leninism and ANC political education. (Interview Robbie Potenza, 2003). Although it is not clear whether many or most were formal members of the Party, their main links within the liberation movement were through Party members, in Zimbabwe.

During this period considerable activity took place, which was initiated, outside the country, the most notable being Chris Hani's pioneering and difficult entry into South Africa, just after being elected Assistant General Secretary of the SACP, in 1974.

While Shubin is at great pains to assert that Hani was then in this Party position, the extent to which Party or ANC could be said to have initiated a particular activity was often blurred. After his return from South Africa he established a base in Lesotho and repeatedly crossed into the country and helped build units. Structures were established in the Free State, Transkei, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Border. (Shubin, 1999, p. 125). Hani's activities are one of many cases where the line between ANC and SACP underground organization were blurred.

Contribution and character of SACP underground

It is not known how many people engaged at various times in underground struggle for the SACP. They clearly consisted of only a few hundred in the 1950s and early 60s, but may have increased significantly in the preparation of MK people for underground work outside and inside the country in the 1980s.

The joint ANC/SACP Operation Vula of the mid- 1980s, coordinated by then ANC President Oliver Tambo and then SACP General Secretary, Joe Slovo, envisaged a qualitative shift in the character of underground work, returning significant leadership figures into the country so that interventions would not be from a distance, but on the spot. It was intended to merge internal and external underground organisation to a greater extent than previously. (Cf Interview with Pravin Gordhan, 2003). Most of those who entered the country or participated in Vula activities appear to have then been Communists. Following the unbanning of organisations and negotiations, this initiative was however overtaken by events.

ANC/SACP relations and the question of Party independence in the period of illegality

The period of establishment of the SACP underground was also the time when the ANC/SACP alliance was consolidated and a common analysis of national democratic struggle and the thesis of Colonialism of a Special type was emerging. But what did

the character of this alliance mean for the relative status of the two components and their independent character?

The conditions under which the Party emerged underground had some specific characteristics that may have left their mark on relations with the ANC throughout the period of illegality. Despite its reconstitution in 1953, it took seven years before the Party announced its independent existence a decision which some figures like Moses Kotane and Yusuf Dadoo, opposed, fearing it would compromise relations between the ANC and the Party (Shubin, 1999,14, Interview Joe Matthews, 2003). Magubane et al (2004, pp72ff, quoting interviews with Rusty Bernstein, Walter Sisulu and Ben Turok) confirm the hesitancy of Kotane and resistance to destabilising the relationship of Communists within the ANC. With characteristic bluntness, Kotane cautioned against the backlash that would be unleashed:

> Look, when you throw a stone at people they are going to come back and break your windows, just think about what you are going to do. Are we in a strong enough position to hold it? Are we going to be able to survive? The backlash will be fantastic. The police will go mad. (In Magubane et al, 2004, 73)

The decision to emerge appears to have been taken by the small group of CC members (its lack of representativity being one of Kotane's bases for objection), who were outside of prison, and was met with mixed feelings. (Shubin, 1999, pp. 14, 41.Turok, 2003, describes how this decision was taken).

While the relationship between national and class struggle was subsequently formulated as coterminous, it seems that, for many, the 'two stage theory' then prevalent, was initially interpreted as meaning a concentration on building the national struggle and in particular its main vehicle, the ANC. To some extent there appears to have been reluctance over the Party speaking in its own name.

It also appears that this was the pattern in exile. Oliver Tambo, initially, expressed reservations about Party people meeting as separate units. He phrased his notions of the relationship between the two organizations in inclusive terms, not wanting to think

of Party people as different from other ANC members. This obviously would also tend to obliterate the independent character of the Party.

This perspective of Tambo is well captured in quotations from interviews conducted by Bunting in regard to the role of Kotane. Kotane's position was critical because he was the key individual in forging the ANC/SACP relationship:

> I think Moses Kotane contributed more than anyone to this kind of collaboration between the ANC and the Party, to the unification of the liberation movement in South Africa. He could have used his position to underline attitudes, which were specific to the Communist Party, to speak from a particular position and remind everybody about the ultimate objectives of the Communist Party. But he never did that. *He debated from what seemed to be an exclusive ANC standpoint*, and from the point of view of building unity this was extremely important. I am absolutely certain that many people who might have been hostile to the Party were won over because they found a man like Kotane to be an ANC man second to none. [Emphasis inserted]

Tambo refers to no one being fooled by the dissolution of the Party, knowing that Party members never ceased to be members and that the Party contributed to the development of progressive policies in the ANC. [31]Then:

> Before 1950 there was the feeling that there were two camps; some belonged to one, some to the other. But after 1950 we were all together and *when we discussed policies we never thought of the differences in our philosophies*. We were all equals deciding what must be done. (Bunting, 1998, pp.236-7, citing a 1973 interview, which he conducted with Tambo. Emphasis inserted).

All together yes, but clearly it was under overall command of the ANC. When people were to be sent to the International Lenin School for studies, Tambo had to approve them. When Joe Slovo was chosen as General Secretary of the Party, Tambo's

[31] If he thought this, Shubin points out, he was wrong because after 1950 (as we have noted), many Communists did not join the underground Party. (Personal Communication, 29 September 2003).

permission was required to release him from duties in the ANC, enabling him to act as Party General Secretary.

Even in 1990, after unbanning, the legacy of these ANC claims over Party officials was seen when the Party wanted Chris Hani to be deputy General Secretary and released from his tasks in MK. (Personal participation of author in meetings of the Interim Leadership Core, established after unbanning and later on the National Executive Committee, where the issue arose in 1990-1991). The ANC was refusing to allow this and it was only when the Party conference of 1991 elected Hani General Secretary, without seeking permission, that this changed. According to Dipuo Mvelase, former MK camp commander and now Deputy Chair of the SACP, MK never forgave the Party for taking Hani away from MK because of the special concern, which he had for soldiers (Interview Mvelase, 1993). While relating specifically to concerns for the welfare of soldiers, the statement also reflects a sense of ownership over Hani claimed by the ANC army, a prior claim that they sought to have prevail over that of the SACP.

There needs to be a more careful examination of Party/ANC relations in the period of exile. Many top leaders were in fact also Party leaders at the time (though many allowed their membership to lapse in 1990). But having the presence of large numbers of Party members in leadership structures of the ANC does not mean the Party was necessarily giving it strategic direction.

Certainly key party strategic interventions were made at certain points in decision-making within the ANC, in particular the adoption of the CST perspective by the ANC. But we need to ask whether beyond that, the selection of top ANC cadres for Party membership was used to benefit specifically Party purposes, or whether it became primarily *a Party presence within the ANC*, carrying out almost purely ANC tasks.[32] Shubin refers to a Central Committee decision in the 1960s to set up Party organisations outside South Africa. The process was 'very slow', the main reason, apart from practical difficulties, being hesitation on the part of the leadership

[32] Shubin believes that the answer to this question is 'both', that it differed from person to person and from time to time. (Personal Communication, 29 September 2003).

'primarily by Moses Kotane'. Chris Hani, in an interview with Sonia Bunting in May 1974, expressed his concerns:

> After coming out of prison [in Botswana, after retreating during the Wankie campaign in then Rhodesia] I made a serious attempt to organise party life. I saw Moses was keen on preserving the cohesion of the national liberation movement. He realised there were enemies and he felt the party should never give them the excuse to destroy the good working relations between the two organisations [the ANC and SACP]. Because of his credentials he felt that he himself was representing the Party in the ANC and that therefore there was no need for the Party itself. In a way he succeeded, he achieved the respect of OR [Oliver Tambo] and indirectly OR's recognition of the Party is mirrored in Moses. But Moses went too far. (Shubin, 1999, p.112, and reservations of Joe Slovo, 1995, at pp.112-113).

This is not to question the large measure of convergence between ANC and Party goals, not only in a specific phase of the struggle, but even potentially in a conceivable transition to socialism. This is clearly manifested in the 'Green Book', the report of a Commission established after an ANC visit to Vietnam. (Cf ANC, 1979, 8-9). As part of the report states: 'It should be emphasised that no member of the Commission had any doubts about the ultimate need to continue our revolution towards a socialist order; the issue was posed only in relation to the tactical considerations of the present stage of our struggle.' The commission members and signatories were President Oliver Tambo, Thabo Mbeki, Joe Slovo, Moses Mabhida, Joe Gqabi and Joe Modise. Callinicos (2004, 526) remarks that Tambo 'obtained the agreement of Moses Mabhida [then General Secretary of the SACP] that the SACP existed to promote socialism. There was to be, therefore, no immediate subtext in the ANC's quest for broad, mass support.' This is a strange conclusion. It was hardly a concession for the SACP to promote socialism, since it was already in their programme. The significant passage quoted about all having an agreement that socialism is the ultimate goal, while not raising it then for 'tactical' reasons is not mentioned. Surely that is a very important sub-text?

The interrelationship between the ANC and SACP raises broader questions where the two independent organisations relating to one another in alliance, are unequal, and the one is the leader of a liberation movement. But was there only one way that this could have unfolded, in which Party leaders were praised for being indistinguishable from ANC or could a Party presence have been more independently manifested?

A rather uncomfortable question needs to be asked, which is whether the Party did not allow itself to become a 'route to greatness'. In the exile period, the Party commanded various resources and networks through which people could have access to superior training and various opportunities for advancement. The Party was regarded as an 'elite' organisation. In consequence of such recognition as membership entailed, there was an association between recruitment as a member of the Party and the possibility of rising in various other structures, in MK and the ANC broadly.

In short, this had some of the characteristics of a patronage network. In such situations, the temptation was present for people who were able, to take advantage of these resources and to seek Party membership–to do so, as much for the benefits that accrued as for whatever ideological convictions were supposed to accompany them. We need to ask whether the post-1990 defections have not partially confirmed this.

Finally, all of this has contemporary significance. When Jabu Moleketi and Josiah Jele issued a long pamphlet, filled with voluminous quotations from classic Marxist and Leninist texts, one of the objectives they declared was to advise that the Party remain the 'Party of Kotane'. (Moleketi and Jele, 2002). This pamphlet was distributed at a time when the SACP with COSATU, in the new conditions of the post-apartheid dispensation, had taken independent stances on macro-economic and other policies, breaching the 'unity' of the alliance on these issues. Invoking Moses Kotane, who is undoubtedly one of the greatest figures in South African revolutionary history, whose contribution spanned decades, is to treat him as representing a particular view of the relationship between ANC and Party. [33] As we have seen, his

[33] I sincerely hope that none of the remarks I have made in relation to Kotane's perspective on the Party/ANC relationship are understood as disrespectful of the giant that he was. He just happens to

approach is open to the interpretation of tending to dissolve the Party as an independent organisation or at least maintaining it mainly as a symbolic force without establishing its own structures on a formal basis. Obviously that tendency must be read in the context of underground existence and the need to build both ANC and SACP underground organisations, a situation that did not make for purist solutions on questions of Party independence.

Conclusions

There is no doubt that Communists either in the Party or in the ANC played an important role throughout the history of underground organisation, establishing the initial underground units of the Party and playing a major part in enabling the ANC to survive banning and establish itself underground. Individual Communists were also in the forefront in re-establishing ANC units after Rivonia, sometimes on a very small scale, sometimes on a larger basis. They were also represented in large numbers amongst those who entered as MK operatives carrying out daring missions.

Within the overall history of liberation, the Communist underground needs to be seen as opening a new phase, showing that something that had not previously been done, could be successfully embarked upon. Continuities and ruptures mark the history of the national liberation movement. When the Indian Passive Resistance campaign

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have been the prime and leading exponent of a perspective that set the alliance on a particular trajectory, which needs to be openly and critically examined.

was undertaken, it impressed Sisulu and Mandela –people were prepared to go to jail, a fate that still carried a stigma for many Africans. Mandela and Sisulu saw the Defiance campaign as representing a break with that past. (See Chapter 2 above).

Likewise the Communist Party establishment of underground organisation represented a new phase. It showed that illegality did not preclude organisation and the creation of structures. The Party showed it could be done. Even when these structures were later crushed, steps were later taken to re-establish organisation under new conditions, carrying out a variety of functions during the entire period of apartheid. For a people suffering under apartheid, to read or hear of what underground operatives were doing was a source of inspiration and courage. If some could do it, others felt they could follow and certainly the experience of the Communists in blazing this trail made it easier for the ANC to follow.

Chapter Four

The African National Congress (ANC) underground between Rivonia and 1976

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with an especially important phase of the underground experience of the ANC and to some extent that of the SACP. It has special significance because the arrest of a substantial part of the ANC national leadership at Rivonia in 1963 was a calamity for the organisation. It also led to a widespread belief on the part of commentators and scholars that a period of 'political dormancy' or 'quiescence' had been inaugurated or that a 'lull' ensued, in which the ANC disappeared from the public view. The importance of the present enquiry lies partly in challenging or unpacking that characterisation and opening up the significance or otherwise of an ANC underground presence in the period prior to the 1976 rising. It may be that a similar enquiry into the South African Congress of Trade Unions, ANC and Communist influences on the 1973 Natal strikes is needed (See interview Barney Pityana, 2003. See also Webster, 1979, pp. 51-2), though that has not been directly canvassed in this work. The investigation is also important as part of an explanation as to why the prime beneficiaries of the 1976 rising turned out to be the ANC, that is, it may be part of the explanation as to why those who had been in the black consciousness movement [BCM] became associated in varying ways with the ANC. (See Chapter 8 below).

This underground presence was created in a period of contestation, during which alternative political movements had emerged or were in the process of emergence, in particular the BCM. This sometimes constituted a challenge to the claim of the ANC to political pre-eminence within the liberation struggle. If this can be described as a

struggle for hegemony, it occurred under conditions of inequality insofar as BC and other organisations were free to operate publicly, while the ANC was publicly gagged.

In arguing against the versions of history that omit ANC activity from accounts and explanations of this period, it is not suggested that the organisation instigated or directed the 1976 rising. The significance of the ANC 'presence' through formal and less formal underground structures or other manifestations in various parts of the country, may have primary relevance as part of the explanation for the subsequent re-emergence of ANC symbols and organisations supportive of the 'Congress movement'. This development was consolidated also in prison, primarily on Robben Island (see Buntman, 2003) and in exile (See Bernstein, 1994, Suttner, 2003, Interview with Serache, 2002, Mandubu, 2004. See also Chapter 8 below).

Underground between the 'dark' period after Rivonia and 1976

ANC underground organisation passed through many different phases, involving activity of differing types and scope. This was affected by variations in political conditions within the broad liberation movement and also by the conditions created over time by the apartheid state.

While activity of the regime received publicity, some or most of that generated by the ANC-led liberation movement received little public attention. This was because of its inherent secrecy and also due to conscious media/ editorial decisions and laws of the apartheid state prohibiting publication. (Sparks, 1990, p. 242)

This contributed to a sense of absence, which was really an absence from public or official knowledge. But there was also invisibility due to lower levels of activity for some time. This did not necessarily mean there was no ANC presence. Very often people met as ANC supporters, but did little more than exchange views and interpretations and 'spread the word,' and kept up one another's spirits. Such was the case in the 1970s and later in Ntshingeni, a dusty village adjoining St Mark's mission,

in Cofimvaba in the Eastern Cape. (Interview Noloyiso Gasa, 2002, reported on below). Many of these people were not members in the technical sense of having 'signed up'. But that is of little significance where the conditions for joining were absent. What needs to be recognised is that individuals, without membership cards, in some cases did everything else that a 'properly' recruited member would have undertaken in a formally mandated and constituted underground unit. The notion of underground work needs to include a variety of manifestations, which entailed a great deal of 'free lance' supportive activity, or spontaneous responses to requests, to hide people or provide other forms of assistance. (See interviews with Prema Naidoo, 2003, Noloyiso Gasa, 2002).

After the Rivonia arrests, ANC activity of any kind was liable to incur heavy penalties. However, the combination of a variety of ANC presences sometimes small and sometimes larger in numbers and in impact helps explain or is part of the explanation of what is generally described as the 'sudden re-emergence' of the ANC in later decades, as well as the capacity to weather the storms of the difficult periods.

The later re-appearance of Congress symbols and activity represented both continuity, for the organisation was never entirely absent, and discontinuity, in that it also undoubtedly spread amongst people and to areas that may not previously have supported the ANC. Failure to note the element of continuity may relate to a tendency amongst scholars to focus on what is visible in institutional structures. This links to a consequent failure to interrogate absence and silence, to dig below the surface, even a surface calm, to look how and where the 'invisible' associations and formal and informal organisation and other ANC-supporting networks were located. (See Webster, 1979, pp. 51-52,63-64, 2004, pp. 31-32).

Existing published histories or allusions in other works to the period after Rivonia until 1976, almost universally implicitly or explicitly deny the presence of the ANC within the country and, in particular, of underground organisation[34]. This assumption, for it is an assumption rather than a result of investigation (which one acknowledges

[34] The last year has seen publication of a work that departs from this trend, part of a broad general history of resistance, involving leading historians. See SADET (2004) and the chapter by Houston (2004).

may have been difficult to carry out), is not restricted to one or other school of thought or political orientation within the disciplines of history and political studies.

The starting point of much of this writing is that the powers of the apartheid state were so overwhelming and the likelihood of infiltration by informers so strong, that the possibility of successful and sustained ANC underground organisation was not seriously entertained. The works concerned are suffused with phrases connoting this absence and the overwhelming power on the side of the state.

The literature on the 'lull'

Thus seasoned historian Phil Bonner, with Lauren Segal, wrote six years ago, 'by 1964, black political resistance in South Africa had been crushed. What followed was a decade of black political dormancy in Soweto and further afield….' [35] (Bonner and Segal, 1998 at p. 56). Writings of other historians are littered with similar phrases. Thus M.W. Swanson refers to the 'decade-long quiescence of the 1960s….' (Swanson, 1982, p. x). Gregory Houston refers to the banning of ANC and PAC leaving an 'organisational vacuum' that was filled by BC. (Houston, 1999, p. 1). Clive Glaser refers to school students, inspired by black consciousness, occupying the 'political vacuum' left by the outlawed Congress movements. (PhD thesis, quoted, Seekings, 2000, p. 11).

Tom Lodge writes of 'the relative tranquility of the 1960s' and speaks of the 'suppression of the nationalist movement.' To this end, the police 'recruited an army of informers, whose activities promoted a climate of fear and distrust, effectively paralysing any political initiative amongst Africans.' (1983, p. 321). Leonard Thompson claims that, by the end of 1964, 'the first phase of violent resistance was over and, for another decade the country was quiescent.' (2001, p. 211. See also Gerhart, 1978, pp. 257-9, Hirson, 1979, pp. 6-7, Beinart, 2001, pp.191, 228-9, 232,

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[35]. This is a view that subsequent research has caused Bonner to revise (see Magubane et al, 2004, Chapter 2, and I am sure that is also true of Lodge, Glaser, Houston, 2004, (one of the SADET contributors). Bonner (2004a, p. 33) appears to have suffered a 'measure of relapse' to previous positions (unless the work was published long after its preparation), referring to popular resistance having been 'broken in the early 1960s' and the 'quietness and submissiveness of Soweto's residents during the 1960s'

Price, 1991, p. 24, McKinley, 1997, p. 34. Walshe, 1973, p. 38). And Saul Dubow writes that 'for at least a decade after 1964 the ANC virtually ceased to exist in South Africa and the prospects for liberation appeared more remote than ever.' (2000, p. 7. See also Glaser 2000, p. 160, Ross, 1999, p.131, Marais, 2001, pp. 28-29, Brewer, 1989, p. 187.)

Worden (2000, pp.128ff) qualifies the characterisation of 'quietude' for the period as a whole, but appears to accept the general assumption that the ANC had been crushed inside the country. Steven Mufson refers to the 'docile 1960s' and speaks of underground groups being 'uprooted' (Mufson, 1990, pp.65). Nelson T Sambureni refers to the apartheid state gaining 'control of the situation' during the 1960s and the ANC and PAC sinking into 'dull passivity.' (1997, p.37). Referring to a slightly later period, Karis and Gerhart write that in 1970 'the ANC still lacked underground structures.' (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p.29). But they qualify this in other parts of the work, indicating initiatives by underground groups, especially those connected to former political prisoners. (See Karis and Gerhart, 1997, 181, 182).

In saying that 'the number of new recruits involved in underground activities within South Africa was small, probably numbering no more than 200 countrywide', as Barrell (1990, p.32, documents), they are in fact quoting a number that is *high* for this type of activity. Underground organisation, as will be argued more systematically in Chapter 5, was essentially the work of small groups. The earlier attempt of the ANC to take more or less the whole organisation underground was exceptional and repetition of that approach was not attempted in later periods.

Scher, writing of the period after Rivonia in a still widely-used textbook, gives expression, albeit in extravagant terms, to the belief in the almost invincible powers of the apartheid state and the consequent immobilisation of the ANC:

> Given the vast powers enjoyed by the security forces and their willingness to use them… the mobilisation of the urban Africans became an awesome task. Harassed by the authorities and hit by continual financial and organisational crises, the ANC and PAC movements remained vulnerable to all kinds of pressures. Matters were not helped by the predilection of leaders and members to

> indulge in hair-splitting doctrinal disputes, which too often created cleavages and dissipated political energy[36]. Crushed by government action and sapped by internal divisions, the ANC was in a parlous position. As Grobler writes, 'It is certainly true that while the foundations of white supremacy in South Africa were not in the least shaken…the ANC found itself on the verge of annihilation.'
>
> After the crushing of the ANC and PAC in the mid 1960s African political resistance all but ceased . . . Within the country an atmosphere of fear and insecurity pervaded African life, which perpetuated political apathy. (Scher, 1993, pp.408-9, quoting Grobler (1988, p.133).[37]

Even a school text (repeatedly reprinted after 1996), written explicitly to correct previous versions of the South African past, which denied a place for resistance, repeats the sense of overwhelming apartheid power, crushing resistance after Rivonia. Hanifa Dhansay writes, that the 'South African government managed to suppress opposition in the years that followed with its tough security measures.' (Dhansay, 1996, p. 18. See also Bonner, 2004a, in note 2 above.)

When the ANC opted for armed struggle, Allister Sparks concludes that this 'meant abandoning domestic political activity and placing all the eggs of the black liberation movement in the revolutionary basket, as it were.' (Sparks, 1990, p.269). By revolutionary, Sparks here refers only to externally initiated activity. He spells this out:

> It is not just that a strategy of violence conflicts with a strategy of political and diplomatic advancement. Whether intended or not, the decision of June 1961 [to adopt armed struggle] meant that for more than a decade black politics virtually ceased in South Africa. A silence fell over the black community more complete than at any time since before the formation of the ANC in 1912. It entered a period of deep demoralisation and malaise as the

[36] Note the lack of evidence or sources to support these claims, or if true, any causal significance they could have.

[37] Grobler himself adds: 'While the ANC, the PAC and other organisations were busy establishing extraterritorial bases in the 1960s, a political calm took hold of Blacks inside South Africa-especially in the wake of the Rivonia Trial….(Grobler, 1988 p.160).

> Verwoerd government forged ahead with the implementation of its grand apartheid schemes….' (1990, p. 271)

And after the Rivonia arrests, in 'one stroke black opposition was annihilated' giving the government a 'clear decade' to implement its apartheid schemes.' (1990, pp.272-3. See also von den Steinen, unpub 1999, pp. 3, 49, and quotations in Houston, 2004, pp.601-2. Buntman, 2003, pp. 4, 20, and 21,115 appears also to accept these assumptions for the period prior to the release of a substantial number of political prisoners in the 1970s.).

With more caution, Marks and Trapido speak of the 1960s as a decade of '*apparent* political quiescence' (1988, p.12. My emphasis.). Swilling uses almost identical and qualified phraseology in referring to 'a long period of apparent black political quiescence…' (1988, p.1). In a later contribution, of Marks and Trapido, there is a more definite acknowledgement of the underground factor (1991, pp.4-5, and see Diseko, 1991).

Contesting the logic of these assumptions

While underground organisation during the State of Emergency was challenging, after Rivonia it became still more difficult. The Rivonia arrests were a 'major breakthrough' for the police who now 'gained the upperhand in the contest'. (Dingake, 1987, p.75). Stephen Davis writes that a 'titanic leap of faith would have been required in 1963 to believe in the ultimate resurrection of the ANC….' (1987, p.22). The question that arises in this context is whether the reverses suffered after Rivonia meant that the ANC disappeared, as seems to be implied by much of the literature that has been quoted here. Houston (2004) provides evidence of the reconstitution of the MK High Command[38] and describes Bram Fischer's attempts to hold the SACP underground together. While that is a valid and important qualification on the historical record, which he sets out, the writers previously quoted may well be primarily concerned with the period after the jailing of the second High Command and the arrest of Fischer. (See Klingman, 1998). What follows is aimed

[38] After the arrest of the High Command at Rivonia, Wilton Mkwayi managed to escape from the farm and headed what is called the second High Command.

mainly at questioning whether even after these early attempts at continuation of the earlier political underground MK activities were crushed, there was still an underground presence of some kind. Given that an element of 'lull' may have set in, did this imply absence of the ANC?

It is true that there was little armed activity immediately and only sporadically during this period, but that is of the nature of underground preparatory work, which whatever its immediate scale, requires patient rebuilding and that by definition is outside of the public eye. Quiescence is not the same as lull in that while there is no doubt that the scale of activities dropped, the evidence to be presented shows that activity never stopped though it was only later that it would find expression on a substantial and more overt scale. Every revolutionary struggle passes through setbacks or changes in emphasis as in the case of China when there was a change from a worker-led to peasant-driven revolution. These disruptions do not necessarily mean that nothing is happening in the periods before the results of new factors become evident at an overt level. Here it will be shown that there was a force being trained for underground activity outside the country, which however high its level of training may have been was not able to be deployed for much of the period of exile. At the same time, people within the country from very quiet beginnings, gradually developed a 'sea' within which the MK guerrillas could more easily swim as well as independently initiating their own activities –armed and unarmed- that made life difficult for the regime.

Even without presenting any evidence one has reason to doubt the conclusions that were drawn, arising as they did from an apparent absence, from invisibility. Should it have been concluded that the elimination of thousands of leaders and cadres meant the uprooting of its support base? And if a support base may logically be assumed to have remained, what were the potential routes that it might take, apart from the only one that appears to have been assumed, that of passivity? Alternatively if there was no support base, that needed to be argued and evidence assembled.

Peter Limb articulates the logic of such an alternative reading, without delving into the empirical answers that may be yielded by research:

> In part '1960s' [i.e. referring to continued ANC activity in this period] is a logical deduction: if after the ANC is banned in 1960 and then, as the normal narrative goes, it 'disappears' from the scene until the 1980s in the form of the UDF, what happens to all those thousands of people involved in the ANC, in the Defiance Campaign and the Congress of the People (and SACTU). In fact, those people do not disappear; they continued to live, to talk, to remember, and in the oral record we might find out what they said, to who, and how. In other words, ANC traditions, various symbols were kept alive…

This statement is important in confirming an element central to understanding the ANC, that popular association was more than a formal political act, but part of a cultural link for very many people. It was often a connection passed down from parents to children in a variety of ways or part of a cultural environment where values were transmitted through a variety of means (See also, Webster, 1979, pp. 51-2,63-4). Limb continues:

> Also if we look at the NLM [national liberation movement] in historical perspective, everything has its ORIGINS. So…it is important to look at the foundational work done by the ANC in exile in the 1960s. Similarly, what sort of foundations might have been laid for, say, the Durban strikes of 1973 or even for Soweto '76 in the 1960s? This is clearly less pronounced in a structural sense of open organised opposition, more in developing techniques and practices of underground or surreptitious communications, even the safeguarding of traditions, legacies, heritage…through oral means or informal networks. What do we know about community protests in the 1960s, if only of a minor status?' (Personal communication by e-mail 12 December 2002. Emphasis in the original).

Nomboniso Gasa supports this impression from personal experience in the rural Eastern Cape:

> Every day, in our families and households, people undermined the state, even as they feared it. Even when there was no mass struggle, there was song and

> mothers crooned and sang to their children. They whispered the names of Nelson Mandela, Govan Mbeki and Walter Sisulu, Robert Sobukwe, Lilian Ngoyi and Albertina Sisulu in their prayers behind closed doors.
>
> Much of this consciousness remained with the supporters of the 'absent' liberation movements….(Gasa, 2003)

The period after the arrest of the national leadership at Rivonia was a very difficult one for the ANC. Not only had the organisation suffered a serious reverse in its attempt to move from legal to underground existence, but the state also exerted every effort to ensure that people believed it was dead. Newspaper coverage of the ANC in this period was not only miniscule, which may partly be accounted for by restrictive legislation. But where there was it was extremely negative or dismissive in tone, reflecting the bias of white-owned newspapers. Insofar as the ANC existed outside the country, that was not covered in the media, except in order to imply squandering of funds or idle feuding. (See also quotation from Scher earlier). The Wankie campaign of 1967, for example, received little mention except to refer to MK's failure. It might have raised spirits at home to know that, as conceded by Major-General Ron Reid-Daly, later to form Selous Scouts[39], MK and ZAPU [Zimbabwe African People's Union, then in alliance with the ANC] inflicted heavy losses on the Rhodesians. (Karis and Gerhart, 1997, p. 29. See also van Driel, unpub, 2003).

Insofar as the ANC was building a presence within the country, its existence depended on highly secretive and unobtrusive organisational activities. The stakes were very high; the odds were stacked against such efforts. Any publicity would have doomed these attempts. The conditions of underground operations in general *facilitated the process* whereby historians of the period have concluded that the ANC was absent. In a phase where one is rebuilding or trying to reconstruct on a new basis, these efforts usually do not show immediate or visible results for some time.

[39] Rhodesian commandoes deployed against guerrillas

Before an operative can begin to work, having made an often difficult entry into the country, if coming from outside, he or she needs to establish that their presence has not been detected and 'lie low'. This is often part of the instructions given to members of a mission. This may mean waiting for some months before even starting with reconnaissance or acquiring material for pamphlets or whatever is required for the person's activity. There are a variety of logistical necessities which are more or less time consuming, depending on the extent to which a support network is present, and has prepared in advance for the cadre's entry. In the early years, many MK fighters had to fend for themselves and were not met by an internally prepared underground apparatus. Linus Dlamini, who was highly trained primarily in intelligence, entered South Africa without papers and traveled as a stowaway for 11 days on a ship, not eating for the whole journey from Dar –es-Salaam to Durban. Amos Lengisi and Matthews Ngcobo –also very highly trained-spent a longer time in similar conditions leaving and entering, also without papers from Mombasa to Cape Town in 1966 (Interviews, 2005).

Returning finally to Karis and Gerhart's remarks on the absence of underground structures in 1970, able to adequately support MK, which Barrell claims, is not the same as the absence of an underground at all. In fact, an underground presence, whose significance may have been substantial, can be quite unrelated to military activities or insufficient to give the full level of support required to mount and sustain an MK presence. Alternatively it may have been largely geared to sending people out to MK rather than having a capacity to sustain MK cadres on their return from training. (Interview with Anton Qaba, 2004, and Sisulu, 2002, Houston, 2004 regarding the focus of the underground on sending people to join MK. On the alleged failure to create the type of underground organisation that could sustain MK, see Barrell, 1990 and unpub 1993).

The Evidence: Rebuilding the ANC underground and the rise of BC

This work does not pretend to do justice to or to provide a substantial assessment of the contribution of BC, though I do believe that it is an influence that has continuing significance, even if it is not organisationally strong. (On BC, see the significant thesis of Craig Charney, unpub, 2000 and the important earlier work of Gerhart, 1978, and Karis and Gerhart, 1997, chapters 5, 11, Pityana et al, 1991, Anthony W Marx, 1992, Nolutshungu, 1982)

The BC/ANC relationship during this period may warrant re-reading. This is often depicted as being in tension and hostile. Research for this thesis suggests that patterns of relationship were much more variable.

While ANC had to lie low, the late sixties and early seventies saw the emergence of BC, especially amongst students and young intellectuals. As BC first enjoyed a relatively high measure of freedom, some ANC members feared that it would seek to supplant ANC. Yet many of the mature ANC cadres engaged with BC, included amongst whose ranks were often their own children. Elinor Sisulu writes:

> Despite Albertina [Sisulu]'s concerns about the BCM, she was supportive of [her daughter] Lindi's involvement. Lindi appreciated the fact that her mother did not patronise her during their political discussions: 'She did not say her way was better. She took all the time to discuss and explain. She had more time for me than ever before. In a way I was her conduit for what was happening out there. She was not hostile to Black Consciousness, but she was aware of its limitations and she associated it with the radicalism of the youth.' (Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 235, Strasburg DVD, 2004 and see below).

Albertina Sisulu later played a similar, albeit more active role in the political transformation of the thinking of her son Zwelakhe, then a leading journalist:

> I had to educate Zwelakhe back from BC. He had been influenced by his journalist friends.[40] I had to sit him down at the kitchen table and teach him about history and about his family. [I explained that] not every white is responsible for repression, but just a few. Whites were born here and have a right to be here; many have no other place to go….I sent him home with some books on Marx and when he came back, he said, Mom, you were right. (Anthony W Marx, 1992, p. 100)

Many of the young generation of BC activists were contemptuous of the slow efforts at rebuilding ANC structures, insofar as they were aware of them. Lindiwe Sisulu when attracted to BC, was aware of her mother's activity in the ANC underground:

> Lindi meanwhile knew that her mother was politically active but did not think much about what she was doing: *'I felt that mama, [John] Nkadimeng and company were just concerned with setting up structures. They were not involved in any action. Their lack of activity confirmed my idea of a dead organisation.'* (Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 235. Emphasis inserted)

Likewise, Amos Masondo explains how he was aware of underground ANC worker, Elliot Tshabangu's activities, but thought of him and other ANC underground workers as 'slow coaches.' (Interview, 2003). Nkosazana Dlamini [now Dlamini-Zuma] when joining the ANC from the BC camp, still thought of the ANC as moving too slowly:

> When I say we wanted to meet the ANC, we wanted to join the ANC, it does not mean that we didn't have any reservations-we did think they were a bit slow. Even after having spoken to them and appreciating the problems they were facing, we still felt that. But we felt that to make them fast we had to actually help them: join the ANC and try and put our enthusiasm into the ANC. (In Frederikse, 1990, p.115)

[40] To this day the black consciousness trend remains very highly represented in the country's media and also academia.

What is interesting about this perception is that it highlights the appeal but also the central weakness of most BC activities and the reasons for the relative long-term survival capacity of the ANC. The ANC built structures and did not rely on its message or in the BC phraseology 'consciousness raising' alone. The key to that survival was organisation, which was relatively neglected by BC. (See Suttner, 2003). Jeremy Seekings emphasises this in regard to Joe Gqabi's role (to be discussed below) in influencing figures that would later lead the UDF. 'Gqabi's approach…emphasised careful organisation building, the importance of broad unity, the need for collective action and effective if clandestine co-ordination. This contrasted starkly with the former BC approach described as "all talk and no action".' (Seekings, 2000, p. 31, quoting Khetsi Lehoko from Anthony W. Marx, 1992, p.101).

At the same time, many or most people involved in BC, may not have seen it potentially supplanting the ANC and were simultaneously involved in the ANC underground and connected in other ways. (Morobe interview, 2003). In the black section of the University of Natal in Durban in the early 1970s, Ralph Mgijima, acted as a 'librarian' distributing ANC and SACP literature amongst fellow students. (Interview, Ralph Mgijima, 2003). Barney Pityana, (together with Steve Biko, a key ideologues of BC), came from an ANC background. He kept regular contact with ANC figures, though he was never a member of an ANC underground unit. He says he never saw BC as supplanting the ANC. (Interview Pityana, 2003. See Mufson, 1990, p. 191 who confirms this, though he claims that Pityana was a member of an underground cell in the early 1960s).

Reconstructing the underground

From early on, individuals like Albertina Sisulu sought out other known ANC figures in efforts to rebuild the organisation. Although it was difficult for her to meet with people like John Nkadimeng, because of banning orders and house arrest, they developed modes of working together, while resisting suggestions to engage with what they considered risky participants in their units. (One was an initiative from Winnie Mandela, described in Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 215, and Houston, 2004, pp.644ff). Elinor Sisulu writes:

> During this period Albertina struck an uneasy balance between keeping a low profile politically while at the same time working to construct some semblance of ANC underground machinery….
>
> After his release [from Kroonstad Prison] in 1966, Nkadimeng was placed under a banning order that confined him to Orlando. He knew that he had to lie low for a while because the security police maintained strict surveillance over ex-political prisoners. After careful enquiries he managed to establish that Albertina was one of the few ANC leaders still active…. Their main activity was to facilitate the passage of ANC members who wanted to leave the country for education or military training. Albertina and Nkadimeng made contact with [Martin] Ramokgadi [a former Robben Island Prisoner] and Manci (Malume)[41]. Together they managed to develop a formal working committee that managed to operate, albeit with difficulty. They had to develop links with other provinces, a difficult task because they were unable to hold formal meetings.
>
> Because they were both banned, it was illegal for Albertina and Nkadimeng to communicate with each other. However, they mastered the art of surreptitious meetings. (2002, p. 215).

Here Elinor Sisulu does not distinguish the different phases of these contacts. The Nkadimeng connection, for example, was earlier than that with Ramokgadi who was only released from prison some time later. The first part of this enquiry is into the earliest and limited attempts at rebuilding underground organisation, and therefore prior to the release of short term political prisoners, that is, in the early to late 1960s.

At the time of the Rivonia trial an ANC National Secretariat was functioning, but was frequently disrupted through members being detained or leaving the country. (See Houston, 2004, p. 603). In this period, the early underground structures were still being constructed. Its members were very low key in their activities. But their main

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[41] According to B. Manci (Malume) he did not actually have contact with Albertina Sisulu, for reasons of security, not wanting to risk one another. The only link between his unit and MaSisulu was through Nkadimeng. (Interview, 2003).

achievement was to endure as structures and also to continue many of their functions. Significantly, many of those involved were women, especially the wives of those in detention:

> Albertina Sisulu, Gertrude Shope, Greta Ncaphai, Hunandi Motsoaledi, Irene Mkwayi, Tiny Nokwe, June Mlangeni, Beauty Makgothi, Rita Ndzanga, Eufenia Hlapane and others worked closely with some of the leaders who had not been arrested. These women performed various special roles, such as organising safe accommodation for those who were on the run, finding safe storage for propaganda and publicity equipment, managing an elaborate communications system and courier network for the underground, and undertaking routine political chores such as gathering information about and attending to the welfare of victims of the struggle. (Houston, 2004, p. 603, citing various communications with Michael Dingake. See also at p.617 regarding the continued role of those who remained at large, after the arrest of the second High Command).

The ANC underground organisation was closely involved in assisting families of members who had been imprisoned, providing money for their daily needs. (Houston, 2004, p.605). Underground activists would also attend the shanty clinic, where Albertina Sisulu worked, 'as patients and while Albertina was taking their case histories, they would exchange political information.' (Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 206). In the period before the arrest of the second High Command, in late 1964 this underground network was centrally involved in finding accommodation and other safe houses for those on the run. (Houston, 2004, p. 605).

At this point recruitment for MK became prioritised. Some people were unhappy about large numbers leaving the country, but the leadership felt that working conditions in the country necessitated military preparations outside. (Houston, 2004, p. 605, quoting interview with Dingake). Thus, in October 1964, Albertina Sisulu was probably involved in arranging for people from Soweto to leave the country for military training and for those returning from receiving training to instruct others inside the country. (Houston, 2004, pp. 605-6, citing testimony of a state witness.

This is stated as a fact by Houston, and from what emerges in Sisulu, 2002, appears to be likely).

By late 1964, MK cadres were beginning to return, five being sent separately into the country. They were specifically tasked with training others and while linking with the Second High command, were not directly implicated when they were charged and continued their work after their arrest. Others were taken out of the country by this group in order to receive training. (Houston, 2004, pp. 612-613).

At this point underground workers had to capitalise on the slenderest of opportunities to be able to organise, especially when placed under house arrest:

> Like most houses in the area, the toilet of Albertina's house adjoined that of Metty's [whose nickname was Gogo Mangongomane] in one outside building at the end of the garden. The wall between the two toilets was so thin that one could easily conduct a conversation with the person next door. Albertina's colleagues from FEDSAW [42]would pretend to visit Gogo Mantongomane. They would then go to the toilet and have a 'meeting' with Albertina in the toilet next door. Gogo would keep a lookout for the security police while pretending to be busy in her garden. (Elinor Sisulu, 2002, p. 206).

The early phase immediately after Rivonia was thus a case of patching together what could be joined, reconnecting with old comrades who were not too afraid to engage in illegal work, especially drawing on the veterans who remained outside of prison or prisoners released after relatively short sentences.

In the late 1960s despite heavy repression, underground work continued. From mid-1965 until the end of 1969, at least 452 people were 'convicted under the Suppression of Communism Act, 245 under the Unlawful Organisations Act, 54 and the Terrorism Act (from 1968 only), and 80 of sabotage under Section 21 of the General Laws Amendment Act of 1962.' (Houston, 2004, p.640). The type of activities for which

[42] The Federation of South African Women, launched in 1954, was aligned to the Congress movement, whose organisations were its most powerful affiliates. It was responsible for drafting the 'Women's Charter'.

people were charged included continuing to be a member of the ANC, taking part in organisational activities, holding ANC meetings, contributing or soliciting funds for the organisation, conspiring to commit sabotage, recruiting for military training and undergoing military training abroad. The statistics reveal anything but inactivity, 831 convictions being recorded in the period mid 1965 to the end of 1969, (the period of greatest 'silence'), compared with 1604 convicted after the 'waves of mass arrests at the height of political activity in 1963 and 1964.' (Houston, 2004, p. 640, note 178). John Daniel has, however, cautioned that some of these may have been the same people who had previously been convicted, facing 'further charges'. (Personal Communication, September 2004).

In this period, the unit involving Albertina Sisulu, John Nkadimeng and others was involved in sending people out of the country, the distribution of ANC and SACP leaflets, recruiting people to carry out these tasks and maintaining underground structures.

> Contact was established with ANC members in Natal, the Free State and the Western Cape by couriers. Meetings were held twice a month in any one of four meeting places in central Johannesburg. People who had established underground cells or networks would contact the Soweto cell, which maintained contact with the ANC leadership on Robben Island, and also those in exile through the courier, Nathaniel Nkosibomvu. The cell would also receive reports about the situation on Robben Island from newly released political prisoners. Another key task was to assist the families of political prisoners, particularly in regard to their financial needs. (Houston, 2004, p. 641, citing interviews with Albertina Sisulu and John Nkadimeng)

An important indication of underground activity outside Johannesburg emerged in the 1969 Pietermaritzburg trial of ANC cadres who entered the country after training abroad. One of those convicted was Dorothy Nyembe, who was sentenced to 18 years imprisonment. She had not been trained trained abroad but was one of those deeply involved in underground activities of various types including providing provided logistical support to the guerrillas (See Interview Linus Dlamini, 2005, regarding

assistance to him, from Nyembe, functioning more or less full-time underground, when he entered in 1966).

> One of the main tasks of the guerrillas on the mission that formed the basis of the charges was to identify secluded sites where they could provide military training to people once arms and ammunition had been smuggled into the country. Themba Dlamini put it as follows: 'One of my jobs was to look for a place so that when guns come here, I would organise from inside people that will be able to do mission[s] with them, that was my mission….'(Houston, 2004, p. 641, citing interview with Themba Dlamini. See also interview General L.Dlamini, 2005).

Members of the group, entered the country in various ways, including by ship, and made their way to the former Transkei, Western Cape, Natal, former Transvaal, Eastern Cape and the Free State and set up structures in many of these places. In the case of Amos Lengisi, before his arrest he and his team had 'offered basic military training to a number of recruits. Each batch of newly trained cadres was expected to set up their own structures so that they could provide support for returning guerrillas.' (Houston, 2004, p. 643, citing interview with Lengisi. See also interview with Linus Dlamini, Amos Lengisi, and Matthews Ngcobo, 2005). Some of those who formed part of this Pietermaritzburg trial had been part of the Wankie campaign. (Houston, op cit). The degree of preparation for the mission seems to have varied, with little logistical support in some cases (for example no documentation), very difficult modes of entry (in the case of Linus Dlamini, Matthews Ngcobo and Amos Lengisi they traveled depending on whether it was between Dar es Salaam and Durban or Mombasa and Cape Town, for between 11 and 20 days as stowaways, most of the time spent in a wardrobe) (Interviews General L Dlamini, A Lengisi and M Ngcobo 2005). Significantly, in the case of this group, their organisational reach was very wide, including establishing structures in the rural areas of Natal in the case of Ngcobo.

At the same time as Albertina Sisulu and Nkadimeng were establishing a cell with reach beyond Soweto, another organised by Winnie Madikizela -Mandela was in

operation. Albertina Sisulu and also Lillian Ngoyi were reluctant to link up with Winnie Madikizela- Mandela, whose style of operation was considered risky and likely to attract the attention of police agents. (Houston, 2004, pp.645-6, note 208, citing interviews with Joyce Sikhakane and Nkadimeng.) Nevertheless many of those involved in the Winnie Madikizela-Mandela unit were well-established ANC figures like Elliot Tshabangu, Samson Ndou, Rita and Lawrence Ndzanga (later killed in police detention) and they also drew in young people like Wally Serote and Snuki Zikalala. (See Houston, 2004, pp.645-6). Ndou remarks that underground work never stopped, there was no 'lull', just that general meetings were stopped. (Houston, 2004, p. 647). The group conducted extensive political education amongst the younger members on a wide range of aspects of ANC history and Marxism. They were organised on the basis of the M-plan in order to avoid arrest of one group implicating and leading to arrest of another. (On the M-Plan see Chapter 2 above).

Ndou, who originates in the Venda-speaking area of Limpopo, but was based in Johannesburg, formed units in the Eastern Cape, linking up with Congress veterans such as Caleb Mayekiso. (Houston, 2004, p. 648). In their subsequent trial it emerged that an oath was administered to those recruited, very similar to that used by Raymond Mhlaba, one of the Rivonia trialists. Ndou set great store on this oath, which he administered, in various parts of the country. (Houston, 2004, pp.652-3, citing interview with Ndou).

While these groups were not formally linked to the underground propaganda units, which emerged in the late 60s and early 70s, they did appear to acquire and use the documents distributed. Houston argues that there may have been informal links between the two sets of groups. (Houston, 2004, p.653). However, the evidence he presents, of a pamphlet in possession of one of the group or members of the group having got hold of such pamphlets does not clearly confirm such a link.

The continued underground ANC presence, after the Rivonia trial is confirmed by N.A. Mhlebi, a former security policeman, who operated in Moroka and surrounding areas of Soweto during this period. (Interview, 2004)

Release of prisoners in the 1970s

Gradually prisoners released from the Island started to surface in larger numbers in various townships and rural areas, although they were closely watched. In many cases they were given a specific mandate to join structures or engage in one or other activity upon their release. (Buntman, 2003, pp.4, 20, 21, 149ff). This was not peculiar to ANC, but as Tshepo Moloi shows, was also found amongst PAC returned prisoners like Simon Ramogale in the township of Tembisa in the East Rand in the late 1960s. (Moloi, unpub, 2005, pp. 65ff and also Stephen M. Davis documents the role of Zeph Mothopeng in reconstructing a PAC cell in Krugersdorp in 1974, 1987, pp. 31-33).

Henry Makgothi explains that when he left the Island in the 1970s, he knew exactly what he had to do, and with whom he had to link up. (Makgothi interview, 2003)[43]. Morobe confirms this for the 1980s, when he was 'mandated' to join the trade unions. (Interview, 2003). A group of ex-political prisoners, based in Soweto and Alexandra, worked together under heavy security in this period – in particular, Makgothi, Gqabi, Ramokgadi, Manci and Nkadimeng, though their time of operation did not always coincide. (Manci, Nkadimeng, Makgothi interviews, 2003).

What is interesting about these underground workers is the element of mutual trust, respect and understanding that was developed and continued to develop among them, first in the 1950s, then in prison, in MK, in the underground and for some in exile. Some of those in this Johannesburg grouping who have not died or been assassinated, are presently working together in a business in Braamfontein, Johannesburg.

Their reach extended beyond the African townships. On release from prison in the 1970s, Indres Naidoo, one of the first members of the Indian community to be convicted of MK activities (a group referred to by the Security Police as the

[43] The concept of mandating prisoners on release was also true of the relatively small number of white male political prisoners. (Marius Schoon, in Frederikse, 1990, p.151, Suttner, 2001). I do not have information on the even smaller number of female prisoners, though it is not mentioned in works covering their experiences.

'dynamite coolies'), returned to his family home in Doornfontein. He was contacted by this group and worked in their underground network. (2000, p. 268).

A number of former political prisoners were also active in establishing an ANC presence in Natal, amongst them Griffiths Mxenge (later murdered by an apartheid death squad, as was his wife, Victoria) and Mandla Judson Khuzwayo.

The role of Jacob Zuma (currently ANC Deputy President and formerly national Deputy President) on his release from prison seems to have been crucial in building the ANC in Natal. He speaks about the situation on his release in the 1970s, contesting the claim that there had been a 'lull'. He said he didn't 'think there was any stretch of two to three years that there was no ANC trial.' Zuma refers to

> a lot of ANC people who were not arrested or sent to prison, who were lying low-many of them were the fathers of these comrades who were emerging, who had been whispering and talking to them about the good old days.[44] So when the BC movement emerged, in so far as our analysis was concerned, it could not escape the influence of the deep rooting of the ANC. (Frederikse, 1990, p.124).

On release from prison Zuma immediately made contact with other comrades and indicates awareness of the type of activities conducted by people like Ralph Mgijima, mentioned above. Zuma also joined others who connected with BC members:

> We regrouped and started operating again, and they actually received us with enthusiasm. They wanted to help politically. Some of them began to belong to the ANC underground inside South Africa whilst they were in the BCM- they were actually in ANC units inside the country….

The rising of 1976 did not just happen on its own, Zuma claims. He believes you cannot exclude the ANC from 1976:

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[44] Frederikse refers to the father of Diliza Mji, the last SASO President, having been a figure in the ANC Youth League. Cf also Nomboniso Gasa, op cit, earlier about learning in her childhood through whispered conversations.

> Certainly the students were demonstrating, but the students had had contact, and they always went back to the ANC to say, 'What do we do?' The ANC people, people like Joe Gqabi at the time, were actually playing a key role in that struggle. (In Frederikse, 1990, p. 124)

Pravin Gordhan speaks of the impact of released political prisoners on the thinking and culture and as role models for young activists in mid-1970s Natal:

> They were bearers of history, bearers of experiences, bearers of anecdotes, bearers of the Congress culture, 'this is how you do things, this is how you say things, this is how you analyse things', they were bearers of inspiration, because you could relate to them as heroes, and there were not many heroes at the time, and each of them had a different quality because they each played a different role…. (Interview, 2003)

Barney Pityana speaks of the exemplary character and conduct of people like Griffiths Mxenge and Joe Gqabi. Terrence Tryon, then a young South African Students Organisation (SASO)[45] official, speaks of MD Naidoo, also a released political prisoner, teaching him how to operate with underground methods in the early 1970s. (Tryon, interview, 2003). Murphy Morobe relates how most of his meetings with Joe Gqabi were conducted through exchanging written notes (to avoid bugging), which Gqabi burned. On rare occasions, where this was impractical they would carefully arrange how to meet at some spot where they could talk unobserved. (Morobe, interview 2003).

Gqabi and Martin Ramokgadi, released from prison in the early 1970s (though Ramokgadi was to serve a second term) were crucial figures in building underground structures as well as indirectly influencing black consciousness activities in the then Transvaal. Nat Serache, then a journalist on the *Rand Daily Mail*, offers an insight into Gqabi's role. On going to interview him for the newspaper, Serache says Gqabi

[45] The founding BC organisation, established as a breakaway from the National Union of South African Students (NUSAS) in 19697.

turned the interview into 'political education' and introduced him to ANC. From that day onwards 'I worked with him very secretly.'

> He was a banned person so we used to meet at secret places at night. Sometimes he would come with documents or asked me to go and deliver this at such and such a place. If you had to deliver to someone, you didn't have to meet that person, drop it at maybe a dead letter box[46] and just disappear. The owner will know how to collect it. That is how I got to know about MCW[47] and so on. He was a very good instructor. So I can safely say I was actually trained as MK inside the country before I left, before I went into exile. (Nat Serache interview, 2002)

Serache was then a part of BC structures, though these were loosely defined at the time. While he was ready to abandon these and concentrate on ANC, Gqabi encouraged him to remain within BC and to influence its direction. In fact, Gqabi was indirectly to influence some developments during the 1976 rising. (See also Morobe interview, 2003). At a meeting, which Serache attended with the late Tsietsi Mashinini, a key figure in the rising, it was decided to 'go and close down all the shebeens [formerly illicit liquor outlets and favoured social haunts of many Africans in South Africa] in Soweto because they were distracting people from taking part in the struggle.' Serache reported this to Gqabi

> He said Ja, it is true liquor is destroying our people, but I wonder whether if we go and close the shebeens the way you are preparing to do we would not be driving both the patrons and the shebeen owners to the side of the enemy?
>
> Because what will happen if the police see this as the opportunity to come and defend the shebeen owners? Are we not going to become the enemy, he asked, and this immediately opened my eyes. He said: 'obviously we need these people, they are our people. We want to involve them in the struggle but is this the right

[46] See Chapter 1 above
[47] See Chapter 1 above

way of doing things because once the police come and protect them we become the enemy and the police become their friends?'….

Serache did not go back to his BC comrades and say he had been speaking to Joe Gqabi, but presented the arguments as his own. He argued that the proposal was possibly counterproductive, and they accepted this position.

Serache says Gqabi did not have any direct contact with BC people[48], but continued to advise through indirect methods. The relationship with Serache developed according to strict rules of security:

He did have a lot of material; he did have a lot of documents, which he never gave to me. If I wanted to read we would sit down, read those things, and leave them there. If I wanted to read, I would go back and read in that hidden place. If it was like a document that was quite hot you see, like how to make a Molotov cocktail, a pamphlet bomb, we would just read that. Go through it, ask questions and then he would destroy it.

Q: He did not want fingerprints?

A: Absolutely (Serache interview, 2002. See also Seekings, 2000, 30-31).

Such experiences were replicated in many other parts of the country. Nise Malange, who was sent for schooling from the rural areas to Cape Town, became re-acquainted with an elderly relative after he was released from Robben Island. His influence was towards a nonracial, ANC perspective:

I heard about the ANC from my mother's uncle. He was one of the guys who was in Robben Island, so when he came out in 1976 he was the one who enlightened me, telling me about his involvement in those days and how he was detained, and telling us about Mandela, Sisulu, Sobukwe. So I have become

[48] Though Barney Pityana did have some contact with him, of which Serache was presumably unaware. (Pityana interview, 2003)

more and more interested. So he's the person that guided me up to this stage, 'Rev' Marawu….

He didn't say that he was fighting whites. He used to tell me, 'Look, baby'- because he used to call me 'baby'- 'I'm sure you don't have the right direction and I feel from the songs that you sing here that you are really anti-white. You know, we've got our brothers in Robben Island, but we've white brothers, too.' …

You know, there's this song which said, 'The Afrikaners are dogs –Amabhulu Izinja'. That was the song we used to sing in 1976, and he said, 'You must stop singing this because not all of them are dogs.' So I used to listen to him. (Frederikse, 1990, pp.162-3. For similar examples, see von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, pp 39-40)

Mkhuseli Jack, initially an Eastern Cape Black Consciousness leader, who became part of the Congress movement, relates similar experiences. After first being released there was a 'general lull' amongst these ex-prisoners. Then they started 'to give direction to the youth.' (Frederikse, 1990, p. 170). This points to regional differences, which have not been fully investigated in this work. It may be that the Eastern Cape was hardest hit by the repression of the 1960s and that cadres there may have been slower to recover and rebuild.

Despite the emergence of BC as a public force, some of whose leaders may have wanted to 'sideline' the ANC, there is evidence in the 1970s that the ANC presence was recognised and ANC literature read widely in these circles. (Interviews with Pityana, Morobe, Mgijima, 2003). Papi Mokoena, a SASO activist expelled from Fort Hare University in 1973 recalls:

> I think contact with the ANC was growing. More people from outside were coming into the country, books were coming from outside. There was a dearth of material at that time: published material of the ANC was particularly valuable and one treasured it as if it was gold. We even had a 'mobile library'- books which moved from hand to hand amongst selected people.

> You see, we knew the ANC was underground, but the problem was finding the underground members of the ANC. At that time more and more of them were coming out of prison and coming to see us, SASO, to see who we were. We used to listen to Radio Freedom[49] every day when there was broadcast.
>
> We were not anti ANC's political ideas at that time-never-because we felt that it is a liberation movement, we are a students' movement, and these are the people we need, we want to have the material they are giving us. That is why SASO became so receptive to ANC ideas later on. The situation was constantly developing; we were meeting hard practice, which could not be fitted onto those ideas, which we had developed in college. (Frederikse, 1990, p. 114. Also interview with Ralph Mgijima, 2003,).

Court documents in the case of State vs Sexwale and others (1977) also refer to leaders of the 1976 rising in Soweto, such as Murphy Morobe, Super Moloi and Billy Masethla seeking a meeting with Tokyo Sexwale, who had recently entered the country as an MK guerrilla, in order to get military training. Some of these received training from Sexwale. Morobe was himself first jailed for refusing to give evidence against Sexwale on this charge.[50]

The general sense of the data so far processed seems to indicate that the degree of overlap between ANC and BC was much greater than is generally acknowledged. This is not to suggest, however, that the BC organisations were lacking in autonomy or that belief in BC ideas was ephemeral. Individuals like Pityana and Biko saw a need for BC, though there was extensive contact with ANC and general acknowledgement, especially on the part of Pityana, but apparently more generally in BC ranks, of the pre-eminence of the ANC as the country's liberation movement. (Interviews, Pityana, Mgijima, 2003).

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[49] Radio Freedom was the broadcasting programme of the ANC beamed to South Africa from Zambia, Angola, Ethiopia and Madagascar. Morobe also reports that a group of trusted comrades involved in SASM (South African Students' movement, the black consciousness movement that played a major role in the 1976 rising) used to listen together to Radio Freedom (Interview, 2003).

[50] He was subsequently charged again and sentenced for sedition. (Interview with Morobe, 2003).

Radio Freedom

A constant and important factor in the ANC presence within the country was the daily broadcasts from Radio Freedom, started in 1967 from outside the country. The lineage of these broadcasts can, be traced to the earlier broadcast from an illegal radio station within South Africa, 'ANC Radio' made by Walter Sisulu, before his arrest and the subsequent Rivonia trial. (Karis and Gerhart, 1977, pp. 759-80). On 26 June 1963 Sisulu broadcast:

> Sons and Daughters of Africa:
> I speak to you from somewhere in South Africa.
> I have not left the country.
> I do not plan to leave.

Later, Wilton Mkwayi made a similar clandestine broadcast, after the Rivonia arrests. (Houston, 2004, p. 612). For over 20 years Radio Freedom, described as the 'Voice of the African National Congress and the People's Army Umkhonto we Sizwe' was broadcast from outside the country. It started from Lusaka, Zambia in 1967 and at its height, broadcast daily, at staggered times and frequencies from five African countries: Angola, Ethiopia, Madagascar, Tanzania and Zambia. It is not possible to gauge how wide its listenership was, but as resistance intensified, tuning in to these broadcasts became a daily ritual or duty of those who considered themselves part of the struggle. Listening to these programmes was illegal and construed as 'furthering the aims' of a banned organisation, which could have resulted in a prison sentence. It was thus a form of identification with the ANC, in situations where people were already members or were sympathisers but had no opportunity to join. That this was recognised by the regime is illustrated by a 1983 South African commando raid, which targeted and destroyed the Radio Freedom Madagascar facility, forcing it off the air for a short period of time. (CD: Radio Freedom, 1996, insert).

The broadcasts inspired defiance. They always began with a round of shots from AK 47 assault rifles and the revolutionary song 'Hamba Kahle Umkhonto we Sizwe-go

well Umkhonto we Sizwe'. The sound of gunshots potentially and actually used to attack police and other apartheid targets were very inspiring to many people and prompted men and women to seek out the ANC. Gwendoline Sello explains how she joined MK and went to Angola:

> I knew exactly now what I was doing, because inside the country there are places where we could listen to Freedom Radio. And I used to ask, 'What are these mothers with green blouses and black skirts?' 'No, they are Congress.' And then they told us that Congress, it's coming to liberate us, ja. So I grew up hearing about this Congress, ja. (In Bernstein, 1994, pp.148-9. Others who listened to these broadcasts included Setsubi, interview, 2004, while at Fort Hare).

But the broadcasts also sought to assign concrete tasks –for the youth, women, workers, civic organisations and others, especially in the January 8 message, broadcast on the anniversary of the founding of the ANC. It also helped coordinate the strategies of the ANC internally and externally, ensuring that there was 'one line of march' or that they all 'read from the same prayer book'.

In some ways, Radio Freedom was able to achieve these tasks more effectively than many other liberation movement media. In a country characterised by high levels of illiteracy, many people rely on the radio for their information. In addition, commentaries were broadcast in most if not all of the languages of the country, something not achieved in any other medium. (See also Callinicos, 2004, pp.383ff).

Propaganda units

From the mid 1960s into the mid 1970s ANC and SACP propaganda sporadically appeared within the country. Much of this was initiated by the Communist Party and some of those responsible were non-South Africans recruited from solidarity movements and the British Communist Party. (Houston, 2004, pp. 632ff).

The initial recruits were not involved in establishing long-term units but acted as couriers who carried propaganda into the country, hidden in false bottoms of

suitcases, prepared by the London office of the SACP. British dockworkers also sometimes put leaflets into the cargo of ships heading for South African ports. (See Houston, 2004, p. 633, citing Ronnie Kasrils interview with Howard Barrell). It appears that the material was activated or posted by these couriers but also may have been supplied to existing underground units. (Inference drawn from information in Houston, 2004, p. 633).

The distribution of leaflets was also sometimes accompanied by other methods of making the ANC presence felt. In 1967, huge banners proclaiming 'The ANC lives' and ANC flags were hung from buildings in prominent positions, while thousands of leaflets showered down on the streets of central Johannesburg and Durban.

> The leaflets were enclosed in a folded ANC banner, which was unfurled when a timing device, a key ring with a powerful spring, was released. A razor-blade was affixed to the key ring, which would cut through string around the folded banner, releasing the banner to unfurl against the wall of the building and allowing the leaflets to float into the street. (Houston, 2004, pp. 634-5).

Other methods were adopted for achieving the same objectives. (See Houston, p. 635, note 157). At the same time as these operations, thousands of stickers bearing the ANC initials and the slogan 'Inkululeko Ngesikathi Sethu-Freedom in our Lifetime', were attached to lampposts, walls and shop fronts. At other times painted slogans referred to the ANC being at war with the regime or similar sentiments. (Houston, 2004, p. 635).

The distribution of pamphlets sometimes took the dramatic form of a pamphlet bomb, that is, a series of pamphlets exploding into the air from a bucket, often simultaneously with a tape-recorded ANC message, set off by a timing device. The location was usually a busy concourse. The tape recorder was hidden in a place, which would be hard for the police to find, so that the broadcast could be repeated for as long as possible. (Cf Kasrils, 2004, ch 8, Alexander Sibeko [Kasrils], 1983, 203ff, Houston, 2004, pp. 635ff) Houston describes the development of the 'bucket bomb' by Jack Hodgson, a leading Communist:

> [It] was a time-delay rocket that released its payload of leaflets from a respectable height. This consisted of a small explosive charge from a maritime distress flare, placed at the bottom of a bucket that catapulted a wooden platform, covered with a pile of leaflets, 30 metres into the air. The leaflets were printed on fine rice paper, designed to catch the wind for the widest possible distribution….' (Houston, 2004, p. 635)

Robert Resha, then an ANC leader, delivered the tape-recorded messages, and Freedom songs were played. (Houston, 2004, pp. 635-6, quoting interview with Ronnie Kasrils). The first such broadcast was on 26 June 1968 in Johannesburg, and was repeated there as well as in Cape Town, Kimberley and Port Elizabeth during 1969 and 1970. These messages and the pamphlet distribution evoked some consternation in government-supporting, Afrikaans-language newspapers. (Houston, 2004, pp. 636-7). Because of their dramatic nature it was hard for the newspapers to ignore such activity and the news consequently spread amongst those who had not seen the pamphlets or heard the broadcasts.

This continued to be a feature of Communist-initiated ANC/SACP propaganda in the 1970s. What distinguished the late 1960s and the 1970s from the earlier period was that it also entailed more use of local cadres, mainly recruited while outside the country, but aiming to constitute units, albeit ones with limited scope. As far as can be ascertained, these units dealt almost entirely with propaganda distribution, though their reports on the prevailing situation in the country may have assisted ANC intelligence and strategists. (Discussion with R. Kasrils, 16 July 2004).

Evidence suggests that such propaganda had some impact. Reverend Fumanekile Gqiba describes their impact in Cape Town in 1975 and 1976:

> I remember some of them at Mowbray bus stop. They used to refer to them as 'bucket bombs', pamphlets that were just blown during the pick-up hour, right in the heart of town, in the main streets. They did a good work, I must say it-they really worked. There was also a heavy publicity on it, press and the like, and blacks again discover, look the ANC's alive. And the method which was used was really sophisticated –as a result, it was said these are well-trained

> people. People said, 'Ah, our boys have come back,' because we were told that there are some people who went outside to train and they'll be back one day. (In Frederikse, 1990, p.128)

Propaganda was also occasionally distributed in more conventional ways. Some of this was smuggled into the country under false covers, containing official publications, like *Sechaba* or the *African Communist* or comics propagating the ANC. But a series of units established in this period, also produced propaganda, distributed either through pamphlet/bucket bombs or through the post. In many cases the literature was official literature of the ANC or SACP, sent from outside but produced within the country. In other cases, pamphlets without the official imprimatur of either organisation but supportive of broad lines of the ANC/SACP alliance, were written and produced by these units. In this category was the publication of *Vukani! /Awake!* (Suttner, 2001, Legassick, 2002, p. 31. See also interview with Setsubi, 2004, below).

The early units were comprised mainly of Communists as far as is known[51], one of whom, Ahmed Timol, was killed in detention in 1971. (See Cajee, 2005). Many if not most of these units were externally initiated. As indicated in Chapter 3, these operatives had to avoid attracting attention to themselves by doing anything that would arouse interest in their lives. Curiosity may have been aroused for various reasons. For example, infringing the Immorality Act, which prohibited sexual relations across the colour line or arrest as a result of enforcement of other apartheid laws that led to search of one's possessions, could in fact have led to the discovery of the unit.[52] Jeremy Cronin recalls:

> I was instructed not to have any contact with black people-which was terrible, because I hadn't really had that possibility beforehand, and now I was being told not to do it. Now [in the mid 1980s], with the development of non-racial mass organisations, contacts between blacks and whites on the left are frequent and daily, but at that stage they weren't, and to be going into townships or whatever

[51] All of the court cases of this period were trials of Communist or Communist-initiated units. This is not to say that others who were never captured were unrelated to the Communist Party.

[52] This is not to say that every unit abided by such instructions. There was one, of which I know, where both its white members were involved in relationships with black women at the time when the Immorality Act, proscribing inter-racial sexual relations, was in force.

> would have marked one out and could have led to one's detection and capture. It was quite a lonely experience. Underground operatives do have the temptation of getting caught, because then all the mysteries can be revealed: friends that you've annoyed or hurt will understand all those uncomfortable kinds of psychological dynamics. (In Frederikse, 1990, p.127. See also Suttner, 2001, chs. 2, 3).

Insofar as such groups or individuals played an organisational role it was through issuing propaganda. This effort to foster organisation, was illustrated in *Vukani!/Awake!* of July 1976[53]:

> Each of us can play a role in distributing and making propaganda. You can help distribute by showing the revolutionary pamphlets you receive to your trusted friends. You can also leave these pamphlets in public places where others will find and read them.
>
> Slogans are a simple but highly effective way of making propaganda. A well-placed slogan can reach hundreds of people. Slogans can be spray-painted or chalked onto walls in places where people come together-in subways and bus shelters, in trains, factories and schoolrooms. If you use spray paint, wipe the can clean of your fingerprints afterwards and throw it away, but not near to the place where you've used it. (In Frederikse, 1990, pp.127-8. See also Sibeko [Kasrils] 1983, p. 204 and *How to Master Secret Work* , cited above, Chapter 1)

These early units of the 1970s were generally very small in number. Recruitment took place on a very limited basis and expansion was discouraged. (Suttner, 2001, chs. 2-3).

As was suggested in the issue of *Vukani!* just quoted, ANC propaganda activity was often spontaneously organised by or included people who were not members of the ANC or SACP. After the ANC's banning and in subsequent years there was periodic spray painting of ANC slogans by informal groups, sympathetic to the organisation.

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[53] Issued by the unit comprising Cronin, the late David Rabkin and Sue Rabkin

The officially constituted propaganda units coexisted with 'free lance' activities of people who supported ANC and SACP, who sometimes devised their own pamphlets or painted slogans on walls. (Interview Prema Naidoo, 2003). It is also likely that what was done in the bantustans happened with little outside publicity, though there appears to have been a continuous presence, at least in the former Transkei. (See below).

This tendency towards spontaneous propaganda activity was heightened during and after the Soweto risings. The rise of mass action then was accompanied by 'a spectacular outpouring of agitational leaflets' (Sibeko/Kasrils, 1983, p. 206). The Johannesburg *Star* of 16 October 1976 comments:

> Circulating mainly in Black urban areas and varying widely in quality of writing, production and thinking, their very number sometimes gives the impression that everyone with access to a typewriter and a duplicating machine has rushed to propagate his own views'. .

Sibeko/Kasrils indicates that the importance of the propaganda units, formal and informal, lay in the context of the post Rivonia reversals, where the liberation movement battled against invisibility:

> At a time when our movement has been battling to reconstruct an underground apparatus, so seriously damaged by the mass arrests and 'dispersal' of the 'sixties, our propaganda has often been the only visible expression that we survived the terror and continued to grow. (1983, p. 204).

An interesting point made in Luli Callinicos's biography of Oliver Tambo, arising from an interview with Pallo Jordan, is that the organisation did not only issue directly ANC propaganda. It also distributed other more general material, for example a bumper sticker that said: 'Ban apartheid, not people.' Jordan says this was

something ‘anyone could use. It wasn’t seen as ANC and anyone could be saying that. But it was injecting a certain mood into the country.’ (Callinicos, 2004, 387).[54]

Outside the main cities

Before the Rivonia trial, Welcome (Vulindlela) Zihlangu, while banished to Kingwilliamstown, had used the headman’s *imbizo* [traditional meeting] to propagate ANC, with the result that his banishment from Cape Town was revoked (Interview Noloyiso Gasa, 2002). Although falling outside the post-Rivonia period, this is mentioned to indicate the unexpected location of some ANC activity, in places often regarded as inherently hostile to such work.

Around the time of the Rivonia trial the community of Dinokana, a village forming part of Lehurutshe near Zeerust, in the former Western Transvaal (now the North-West Province), had just emerged from intense conflict with the government over the Bantu Authorities system, attempts to depose their chief and later the extension of passes to women.[55] (Cf Manson, 1983, 1983a). Some of the chiefs in the community had sided with the women and also decided to throw their weight behind the ANC. They had set up underground structures, which they linked to MK and its recruitment machineries. Referring to the decision, Victor Moche says

> But being chiefs they had then called village councils, *lekgotla* as it is called. … After persuading the villagers that this was the right thing to do, they had then levied a ‘head tax’ on each household in terms of providing human power to

[54] This example may have been in the period slightly after 1976.

[55] Initially passes, that is documentation required by African adults to control their movement, were generally only carried by men. Various attempts were made from the early years of the century to extend this to all women, leading to widespread resistance, (Wells, 1993). In the 1950s however more concerted efforts led to eventual implementation, although there are some women who never took out passes.

The Bantu Authorities system, introduced in the early 1950s by Dr H.F Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs, was the predecessor of the bantustans or ‘homeland’ system, encouraging Africans to ‘develop along their own lines’ in their ‘historical homelands’. In cases where hereditary chiefs would not cooperate they were replaced by government nominees. One of these was Chief Moilwa of Dinokana. One of the allegations against him was that he was reported to have said, ‘Who the hell is Verwoerd? He is just a minister and there will be other ministers after him. I am not afraid of him, and Dinokana will stand here forever.’ (Fairbairn, 1958, p.31).

> join MK. So if you had a family of four young men, the eldest would be told, you will go to Gauteng to work for the family and you will send number two to school, number three is too young so he will stay at home and he will look after his parents and the cattle and number four will go to MK. So they allocated the family in this way. (Interview, Victor Moche, 2002)

This was referred to as the 'decision under the tree', a tree opposite the current offices of the chief's councillors.[56] (See further discussion in Chapter 6 below.)

In another remote area, Ntshingeni, a village, adjoining St Mark's mission, which forms part of the larger area of Cofimvaba, attempts were made to keep the ANC alive during the 1970s and 1980s, including activity within the women's organisation of Kaizer Matanzima's party [Matanzima was president of the Transkei 'independent' bantustan]:

> In the 1970s there was an idea about the ANC in the village because I used to meet with [a group of three] people … about ANC. We used to talk generally about the situation in the country, and then we could say this one is ANC and this one is PAC, after the banning of the organisations….
>
> Q: Did you mix with a lot of other women?
>
> A: We usually had *mgalelo* [a type of *stokvel*, an informal savings scheme, found in South Africa]. We used to meet in the stokvel, and there we made each other aware that they should not be treated the way they were treated by the Matanzima government. We organised people. We tried not to hit [get caught by] Matanzima's laws. When the organisation was unbanned now, all those people joined the ANC.
>
> Q: In the 1970s, how did you operate, since you had to keep it secret?

[56] As with many physical objects to which ritual significance is attached, this tree has peculiar qualities in that- as I have seen- its branches fall off at the slightest touch. I mention that I have seen this happen because a reader of an article where this was mentioned suggested insertion of the word 'appear', implying that the phenomenon was an illusion.

A: We used to go to stokvel meetings

Q: Were there no *impimpis* [informers] there?

A: There were a lot. We used to discuss in front of them and they used to nickname us communist and *abanqolobi* [terrorists]. All those names. So that is how we met with them, and we even joined, there was a women's organisation in Transkei, which was called TUWO, Transkei United Women's Organisation. In the true sense it was TNIP, Matanzima's party. So we decided to join it and sensitise the other women that this is not it, not what has been fought for and people were aware that there were campaigns that Mandela should be released. So everywhere our group went in the Transkei, we wanted to hear people talking about Mandela. If they did not talk about Mandela we knew this was not the organisation we were thinking of.

Q: I am trying to work out if it was all informal in the stokvel, or did you have any way of meeting with a few people and saying this is what we should do?

A: It was informal, but we discussed that we should defy Matanzima. We used to say one day the ANC will be unbanned, but there were no people to guide us.

This last statement indicates the dilemma of 'freelance' ANC supporters. They wanted to act in a way that supported the ANC, but not being in touch with leadership or formal structures meant they sometimes had doubts as to whether or not they were in fact doing what the organisation would have required.

But somehow through talk with trusted associates news spread of how to connect with ANC where it was present and that there was at times an MK presence and assisting of MK in other parts of the former Transkei, including activity of a member of the family of Matanzima:

> We also knew that there was somebody from Cradock who was a policeman in Lady Frere who used to help the people who were going out on MK, his name was Zolile Tshonti. He helped them to cross.
>
> Zolile was related to the Matanzimas, they never suspected that he was doing this. They only heard about this at his funeral. This man used to stay at Ilinge Township near Cradock… (Interview, Noloyiso Gasa, 2002)

Banished people

In other areas, the influence of banished people was important in spreading the message of the ANC, establishing structures and initiating activities.[57] (See von den Steinen, unpub 1999, pp. 59-60). Around Matatiele former ANC leader Dr James Njongwe was banished and ANC networks were formed, linked to his sons, in particular Boy Njongwe, who ferried people out of the country, where required. (Interviews Mandubu, Setsubi, 2004).

Nompumelelo Setsubi started to draw close to ANC thinking while a Fort Hare student in the early 1970s, listening to Radio Freedom together with a group of trusted friends. When she became a teacher in Matatiele, Boy Njongwe recruited her to the ANC. The process of induction entailed carefully discussing her understanding of politics and upon recruitment he took her through a process of thorough political education. She then performed various underground tasks, mainly related to the production of ANC propaganda. While some of this literature was introduced from outside the country, it was often translated into Xhosa and Sotho (Matatiele being located near to Lesotho and containing a majority Sotho-speaking population). Njongwe encouraged Setsubi to analyse the issues of the day and write and produce pamphlets with a local content, speaking to questions immediately affecting people in the area.

[57] Apartheid legislation gave powers to the regime to banish opponents to remote areas. That is one of the reasons why some seasoned ANC figures could be found in areas far away from the main cities.

Setsubi did not report regularly to Njongwe but was assigned a person who worked in a pharmacy with whom she would liaise and if required, arrange through him, meetings with Njongwe.

Without communicating this to one another, both Setsubi and her husband 'Charles' [MK name] were working underground, though in different units, performing distinct activities in the area (Interview Setsubi, 2004).

Mongezi Radebe, an activist who grew up in the village of Heilbron in the Orange Free State, also recalls the influence of people who were banished:

> In our township we had a granny called Ma Mokhele, who used to tell us a lot about black history. Later I started understanding that she had been a member of the ANC and she had been sent to Heilbron under banishment. So she used to explain a lot of these things: what they were doing in the Women's League, what ANC was in the initial stages when it became militant, when the young ones like Mandela came into it. She was explaining its historical significance and why we should be proud of it, and why we should take on from where they've left. And that's how we started understanding a lot of things politically. …

Radebe's also developed politically through reading, including banned literature:

> I would say, if you go on a farm where people are completely illiterate, it is not impossible that you should come across an old ANC or Communist Party book or some political book that would be regarded as subversive by the system. There are people who may not be very literate, but who'll always be in possession of relevant books, progressive books, and when he trusts you he'll say, 'I want to show you something,' and he'll show you a very good book that I would never have thought that a person of that calibre would be in possession of such material. (In Frederikse, 1990, pp.157-159).

Veteran Robben Islander, Peter Nchabaleng, located in the then Northern Transvaal, organised ANC supporters in Sekhukhuneland. Nchabaleng maintained contact with Ramokgadi, who took Tokyo Sexwale to him. During his visit to the area, Sexwale provided political education as well as military training. (State v Sexwale, statements of Sexwale). Nchabaleng later stood trial with Sexwale, but was acquitted. (See also Delius, 1996, pp.176, 178-9). He was subsequently active in the UDF before being murdered in police detention.

Finally, confirmation of extensive ANC underground networks in the rural towns and villages of the former Transkei is provided in a confidential interview with a former Transkeian security policeman. He indicated the continued existence after Rivonia of underground networks, often surrounding former political prisoners or other banished individuals, but also established on other bases throughout the post-Rivonia period. (Interview with 'A', 2004).

> Q: Were there a lot of activities going on at the time [in this area, unnamed to protect identity]?
>
> A: Well there were activities because there were people coming out of jail and we were concerned about the activities of those people and there were people who were leaving the country and we were gathering all that information
>
> Q: Now these people who were coming out of jail –were they banished to this area?
>
> A: Some of them were banished, when they come out of jail they were handed to us and we would take them to their original area [i.e. where they lived before migrating to the cities].
>
> Q: Did these people become focal points, places where activities emanated from; did you get the impression that if people wanted to join ANC you needed to watch those people?

A: Yes. Mostly the people who were influential in organising were people, who had been in the cities, then they went to jail and when they came out of jail they were not allowed to go back to the cities. They were sent to the rural areas

Q: What do you think they were doing?

A: There were those who when they came back they still continued propagating, talking to people, recruiting people

Q: This is now around Rivonia or after Rivonia?

A: No this was after Rivonia. This was 64/5

Q: Is it your impression that throughout this period there was a presence of underground organisation?

A: Oh, yes, yes, we knew because in the late 60s to 70s we were picking up information of people underground who had been in exile who were infiltrating. They had gone out for military training

External/Internal connection

What has not been adequately dealt with here is the internal/external connection in underground organisation. As indicated, the concept of underground organisation used in this thesis treats aspects of the exile experience as part of underground organisation, in that the acts that someone may have performed inside the country, were often prepared outside, either in training or in the targeting of particular institutions for attack. In addition, there was a direct connection insofar as some operatives like Chris Hani repeatedly entered the country from outside, starting in 1974 and later on a substantial basis in Operational Vula. Vladimir Shubin writes:

Hani's return to South Africa was the first successful step in creating a permanent underground structure within the country….

> Many years later he said:' I arrived at Johannesburg and found that the conditions for survival were not ideal. It was a question of safe places. Friends and relatives were very scared to accommodate me. They just stopped short of kicking me out because I was a relative.' But even before that things had not been easy. After jumping over a fence of the Botswana-South Africa border he had to make his own way for two nights, using a compass and the stars to reach Zeerust, where he took a train to Johannesburg
>
> In South Africa at that time the prevailing mood was 'a feeling of hopelessness, of surrender….You had to look over your shoulder whenever you uttered anything political.' After spending four months in South Africa, he crossed to Lesotho, where he remained for almost eight years.
>
> Chris and his comrades started 'to turn Lesotho into a temporary base from which to carry out our activities. We would cross into the country and meet with comrades to build units. By this time we had structures in the Free State, Transkei, Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Border.' (Shubin, 1999, pp. 125-6)

In part of Hani's account there is confirmation of the element of despair, which I am contesting as being the *overall experience* of the period under review though it was undoubtedly part of the reality of the period. Simultaneously, it was precisely the work that Hani then engaged in that helped turn that around, where it was present.

Other lesser-known figures entered and left the country for various tasks throughout the 1970s and 1980s. (See interviews with Serache, 2002, Totsie Memela, 2003. That Hani and others continued crossing the border from Lesotho in the 1980s is confirmed by Setsubi, interview 2004).

People like Cleopas Ndlovu, after being forced to leave in the Rivonia period, would enter the country from Swaziland in order to recruit people for MK. Arrested in late 1975 in Pongola, he was taken to a 'death camp' in Ingwavuma (where some people were held and remain unaccounted for). They did not kill Ndlovu because they wanted to put him on trial together with members of the internal underground,

including Harry Gwala. [58] (Interview Cleopas Ndlovu, 2003). This confirms both the existence of a provincial underground network, but also its connection to the ANC in neighbouring states.

This connection was manifested in many other ways. Not only were students based at Universities in neighbouring states often used as couriers, but also sporting events held at these outside Universities were an opportunity to forge enduring links between underground structures and external operatives (Interviews Ralph Mgijima, Phumla Tshabalala, Barney Pityana, and Totsie Memela 2003).

When the ANC came to recognise the ANC outside as not merely an 'external mission' but as the organisational headquarters from 1967, externally initiated or externally linked underground structures were mounted. This was the case especially with the small propaganda units and also sometimes through recruitment of non-South Africans to perform underground tasks for the ANC, (for example, the case of Sean Hosey, who served a term of imprisonment in the 1970s.) Amongst other endeavours, an elaborate system for smuggling arms through an overland safari, entailing the establishment of a fully-fledged travel company, was later developed (See the video, *The Secret Safari*, 2000). During this period Botswana was the main point of exit from South Africa, though those departing from Natal might have left through Swaziland and those from the former Transkei, through Lesotho. Research gathered thus far does not indicate the extent to which Botswana served also as an entry point, though some guerrillas such as Solly Shoke (interview, 2004) definitely entered there. But the Lesotho and Swaziland-initiated activity (and no doubt that from other areas on which the present research has not yet yielded interview material), indicates a dynamic and ongoing contact between 'inside' and 'outside'. Botswana has received less attention here because while it was the main exit point during this period the interview material mainly focuses on other areas after entry. There are however cases, where units entered in order to reconnoiter with a view to sabotaging the Bophuthatswana sports stadium. (Interview, Nat Serache, 2002).

[58] Harry Gwala, a former teacher, was a leading ANC and SACP figure, who served two terms of imprisonment on Robben Island. Gwala became famous as an educator amongst prisoners.

It is important to record that many nationals of all the countries of the region as well as Party officials in some cases, provided continuing assistance. Some were integral to the logistics of the ANC underground organisation. (See e.g. Keitsing, 1999). In the case of the former Zambian ruling party United National Independence Party (UNIP) they were of crucial importance in the early period of departure of MK recruits who had to make their way through British-controlled territories all the way to Dar-es-Salaam. (Interview, Williams, 2005).

The BC/ANC relationship: Underground influence and competition

The entire period after banning of the ANC saw its hegemony within the anti-apartheid struggle under challenge from various organisations, which were not constrained by illegality.

The emergence of the Black Consciousness movement constituted an important challenge, as did Inkatha in the mid 1970s (although the latter's formation appears to have taken place with ANC approval (Callinicos, 2004, 394-5.) In the early years of the rise of BC, relations were very complicated. The ANC was banned and the Black Consciousness movement was unbanned until 1977, although it gradually experienced increased repression. But it initially enjoyed considerable space to propagate its views, unlike the ANC. This freedom was allowed partly because the apartheid regime at first perceived BC's emphasis on blackness as a vindication of its policy of 'separate development'. (Cf Masterpiece Gumede, interview in Frederikse, 1990, p.110 and Anthony W Marx, 1992, p. 250. See also Karis and Gerhart (1997, pp.97-98). At the same time some people in BC were being harassed in the same period.

Insofar as BC engaged with the ANC *at a public level* it could not be a dialogue, but occurred exclusively through statements made by BC figures. Some BC leaders dismissed the ANC and PAC and regarded themselves as the vanguard of the struggle or were ignorant of the history of the struggle or the continued existence of the ANC. Some of those, then involved in BC, describe this as a 'chauvinist' trend, not shared by the general membership. (Interview, Ralph Mgijima, 2003). Others like Barney Pityana depict this as a later phenomenon, resulting partly from the restrictions placed

on many of the original leadership, and their being deputised by less experienced individuals. (Pityana interview, 2003). Because of its banning, ANC could not respond. It could not enter into public debate even where it felt the emergence of BC posed a challenge to its hegemony or the hegemony within the liberation movement that it wanted to re-establish.

The ANC engagement with BC from underground therefore comprised both cooperation with a view to influencing it, but also elements of competition. BC or some of the BC leadership were perceived as competitors, whose views were considered short sighted and narrowly based on 'race'. But in the view of the ANC the BC emphasis largely on ideas was also mistaken, being at the expense of building solid organisation.

At the same time, the more farsighted ANC figures appreciated that BC had injected something new and positive into the South African political scene, opening spaces that had been closed, helping to reassert black dignity and pride and a spirit of resistance and unity between all sections of the black population. Whatever reservations may have been felt these did not detract from the positive factors. This was the position of Walter Sisulu, when visited by his son Lungi who

> shared the feeling in the ANC underground that there was a danger that the Black Consciousness Movement might try to position itself as a replacement of the ANC. This anxiety was further fueled by the attitude in Black Consciousness circles that the ANC was a conservative and apathetic organisation whose non-racial politics were inimical to the liberation of black people.

Walter Sisulu however explained:

> We in the ANC did not regard the emergence of the Black Consciousness movement as hostile. We regarded it as part and parcel of the struggle and we welcomed it as a progressive idea. (Elinor Sisulu, 235, quoting Houser and Shore Interviews. For a more qualified response, see Mandela, 2001, pp 21ff.).

Likewise, a similar engagement-oriented approach seems to have guided most of the Robben Islanders and ex-Robben Islanders like Joe Gqabi. (On Robben Island, see Buntman, 2003, and interview with Amos Masondo, 2003).

Outside of prison, and on the ground in South Africa, the relationship that people like Jacob Zuma, Joe Gqabi, Albertina Sisulu and others entered into with BC people from their underground location, was not one of disrespect, nor was it patronising, although they did feel that BC had serious limitations. Barney Pityana, for example, speaks especially warmly of the response they received from Winnie Mandela who, he said, never made any attempt to draw BC people into ANC structures. (Pityana, interview 2003).

The engagement of ANC underground figures with BC was obviously meant to win them over to the ANC. To what extent this also entailed appreciation of the importance of the BC input is not clear. But the generally respectful relationship might have been an important factor in the gradual weaning over of many BC people before and after 1976 (Serache interview, 2002).

A similar engagement was taking place from Swaziland through ANC leaders like Thabo Mbeki and Stan Mabizela. Mbeki was based in the 'forward areas', especially Swaziland, just before 1976 and Mabizela spend much of the 1970s as ANC Chief Representative in Swaziland. Often Mabizela was the first point of contact between black security police providing information to the ANC or other information which he had first to deal with in a manner that protected the police concerned, and often the information was so sensitive that he had to find secure means of forwarding the individuals concerned to Maputo, after 1976 (See e.g. interviews with Mgijima, 2003 and Mandubu, 2004, Willie Williams, 2005).

The interview material already presented indicates that one should not exaggerate the perception and extent to which BC actually sought to supplant ANC and to establish an independent liberation movement or move towards PAC. The extent to which that tendency was present depended very much on individuals concerned, their family

history as well as factors such as the maturity of the leadership at different times (and on both sides). BC was in fact a movement whose direction was contested amongst its adherents, quite apart from many BC figures simultaneously interacting with ANC, admiring ANC or being in ANC structures underground. (See Jacob Zuma interview with Frederikse, 1990, above, Mgijima and Pityana interviews, 2003). Masterpiece Gumede, who joined SASO at the University of Zululand (Ngoye) in 1972, recalls that 'in terms of rhetoric, I think we were close to the PAC, but the people we wanted to be with were people like Mandela and Luthuli and ANC people.' (Frederikse, 1990, p. 110).

Ralph Mgijima indicates widespread overlap between the ANC underground and BC in the student community, with the University of Natal (Black) campus enjoying a relatively liberal environment and being able to communicate with activists on many other black campuses. Although this was a black university, its atmosphere was different from that of the 'bush colleges' like Turfloop or UWC, where police did not hesitate to enter. Falling under the umbrella of the University of Natal, seemed to have provided a space that was not available elsewhere and it became a place of refuge when some students were on the run, such as Thenjiwe Mtintso and a hothouse where illegal ideas were relatively freely circulated. Consequently, it was easier in such a situation to blur differences between the legal BC and the illegal ANC. But this overlap appears, from interviews already cited, to have extended well beyond these institutions.

Multifaceted character, role and 'command centres' of underground work.

There were numerous ways in which people worked in the underground, sometimes officially, sometimes 'freelancing'. Initially, this was during the 1950s when individuals would break their banning orders in order to continue with ANC activities. (Chapter 2 above).

Sometimes underground activity was under ANC instructions and in the early 1960s as a direct result of the organisation's decision to go underground and implement the

M-Plan. (Chapter 2 above). At other stages ANC cadres and ex-political prisoners who set about reconstituting the structures after Rivonia initiated underground activity. A strong link did not yet exist with the 'ANC outside', still then known as the 'external mission', but these veterans took it upon themselves to start the slow and painful task of rebuilding. They were aided by the uneven but nevertheless continued existence of traditions of support for the organisation.

But throughout this period both officially sanctioned and ANC- encouraged underground action occurred as well as activities spontaneously organised or undertaken unofficially by supporters.

The functions of ANC underground units were various. Sometimes they were limited to slow and patient organisation building, certainly in the short run and for a period whose duration would have been difficult to predict. This was the case in the years immediately after Rivonia. Obviously these units envisaged that they would do more as time elapsed and as they strengthened their position. That appears to have proved a valid assumption.

Generally most units had something to do with ensuring transport of individuals or groups out of the country, to avoid arrest or to join MK. Sometimes units pursued purely political activities such as internal political education, spreading propaganda or similar work. Sometimes they played an extensive welfare role, ensuring that funds were channelled to families of detainees or prisoners or those in exile. (Elinor Sisulu, 2002, Phumla Tshabalala interview, 2003, Houston, 2004).

This was occasionally combined with a military role, limited sabotage activities or connection with incoming MK cadres, providing assistance of one or other sort, receiving training or recruiting other individuals for training inside the country, as in the case of Tokyo Sexwale. (Interview, Murphy Morobe, 2003, Delius, 1996, pp.178-9). Such training inside the country was to become a much more significant factor in the 1980s.

While I have distinguished the origins of units, many came over time to develop 'command centres' inside and outside the country, to have connections with units

inside as well as reporting both within the country and to structures outside. Gordhan seems to have developed a unit which reported primarily to Mac Maharaj and while he was in the country, to Zuma, Potenza seems to have constituted a unit, mainly deriving from Christian left activists, which connected primarily to and received elements of training in Zimbabwe from people like Ronnie Kasrils and Geraldine Fraser, Mgijima gradually developed contacts through couriers going to Swaziland and going on sporting events there. Tshabalala in her work from Swaziland serviced such units and others, mainly in the Northern Transvaal. (Interviews with Gordhan, Potenza, Mgijima, Tshabalala, 2003).

Apart from the ANC underground, MK at its inception had its own, independent underground structures and command. Later MK was integrated into ANC, although it is claimed that one of the impediments to its operations was that the organisation never succeeded in establishing an underground existence that could adequately service MK soldiers. (Cf Barrell, unpub, 1993).

The SACP played a substantial role in developing ANC underground organisation. Many of those most active in rebuilding the ANC as an underground force after Rivonia we have seen were Communists. The Party also took concrete initiatives to rebuild its own underground units from the late 1960s and while these were initially mainly propaganda units, they distributed both SACP and ANC literature.

Significance of the claim of 'quiescence'

The approach to the period after Rivonia, which depicted it as one of 'silence' was part of an unproblematised explanation of the 1976 rising as simply being directed by BC forces, with the ANC being absent. [59] This chapter has not sought to argue that the ANC initiated that rising but to show that it was 'there' and at times played some role in its unfolding and direction. It also played a substantial role when activists (including those not aligned to the ANC) were in danger and sought to escape into exile (See Interview with Phumla Tshabalala, 2003, regarding direct role of Albertina

[59] As indicated a similar review is required for the 1973 Natal strikes

Sisulu). It was present in its own right, but also as a presence within the BC movement.

The prevailing characterisation also left unexplained the re-emergence of Congress symbols and organisations in the late 1970s and 80s. Why did Congress organisations and not BC derive this benefit? This cannot be explained without understanding the presence of the ANC throughout the post-Rivonia period and the character of its organisational input, as one of the key factors leading to later 'Congress hegemony' (See Chapter 8 below). The reason why the ANC had a better chance of survival than BC, was because of its emphasis on building structures. (See above and Suttner, 2003).

The main defect of the notion of a 'lull' is that it cannot explain the *internal component, what happened inside the country.* This is despite the tendency of many works to give primacy to what happened inside and to see the impact of the external as in the main, essentially marginal to subsequent South African developments.

The first element that is missing from conventional analyses, which has only been alluded to in this paper is that the ANC was more than an organisation for many people. Even after banning, it remained a cultural presence in many houses, drawn on in conversations and a reference point. Sometimes it was used to warn young people of what might happen if they followed Mandela's route. (von den Steinen, unpub 1999, p. 51). Even this negative allusion was an indication of the 'presence' of ANC in peoples' consciousness. (Cf Mgijima, interview, 2003). But it was also a reservoir of support for the organisation. People continued to regard themselves 'as ANC' where they had been that before, though obviously many did waver. Thousands of people who had been members had not been jailed or exiled. The thousands who had never joined but supported the organisation may sometimes have been cowed by the might of the apartheid state. (Cf Pityana interview 2003). But that 'Congress consciousness' did not simply disappear, even if people may have been cautious and wary and carefully sounded others out before indicating their sympathies.

Repression did lead some people into collaboration or to join alternative organisations, though this was sometimes suffused with ambiguities, with apparent collaborators actually assisting underground operatives in many cases. **(**See interview with Paul Mashatile, 2003, though this relates to the 1980s). It may also have signaled, in many cases a change of convictions and loyalties. But repression does not guarantee a shift in convictions or removal of a potential to act on these (though the quotation from Hani, earlier indicates cases where such a shift may have occurred). The capacity to oppress and repress does not provide any 'home' in itself, nor guarantee that people shift their loyalty to the government or structures it set up.

The prevailing historiography of this period generally has written out the ANC presence. It failed to acknowledge the existence of underground organisation, despite its not being entirely invisible, there being trials almost every year, as the earlier quotation from Jacob Zuma indicates. (See also Houston, 2004).

The underground organisation was the vehicle for drawing these sympathies into organised form, onto a basis that made some contribution towards the development of the 1976 rising, and in fact was in dialogue with BC organisations from the earliest days of their inception. The underground was also the organised force that provided access to an enduring home with the capacity to channel those who wanted to leave BC into a movement that was organisationally sustainable basis. This relates both to the ANC underground and the capacity, which it displayed to absorb the large numbers of youth that crossed the borders. Because of large-scale disarray and division, expulsions and counter-expulsions, amongst other factors, the PAC proved relatively disabled.

It is a paradox that the undoubted body of support that PAC enjoyed at its inception and through continued responses to the Africanist message never managed to be turned into a wide scale and sustained organisational presence. Tshepo Moloi in a study of Tembisa shows, however, that the presence of PAC underground cells established by former Robben Island prisoners and sometimes the mere presence of such individuals had an impact on later development of Africanist thinking amongst the youth, prior to 1976 (Moloi, unpub, 2005. See Below Chapter 8. Likewise See Davis, 1987, regarding Zeph Mothopeng's establishing a PAC cell in Krugersdorp in

1974). How much wider such organisational structures went is not clear, though it is evident that their broad national impact was limited.

Returning to the historiography, the dominant characterisation of the period cannot explain what happened after 1976. The reinsertion of the underground, together with continuing ANC presence in other forms, including guidance to cadres from outside the country, over the 'dark period' helps explain why they later joined or supported ANC.

What emerges in this chapter is a disjuncture between two sets of knowledge. (See Suttner, 2006, for wider discussion of manifestations of similar disjunctures in other areas of knowledge). On the one hand, authors of books declare the absence of a phenomenon on the basis of what they know or reason to be the case. On the other hand, there is a body of knowledge residing in large measure in the consciousness or memories of people who may never write books. From their own experiences, activity and knowledge they have a version of history fundamentally different from that found in the textbooks. They generally do not have access to media in order to correct such 'absences' and imbalances. Also, it is only since the 1990s that people have been free –legally- to speak about these experiences, about what they know. Even then, habits of secrecy persist and even now when the danger is no more, many are still reluctant to tell their story. But it is a story that needs to be recovered as far as we are able

Chapter Five

Characterising underground organisation of the ANC-led alliance -I

This thesis and other recent research attempts partly to reclaim the place of underground organisation in a historiography that has tended to imply its absence. Thus far there has been no attempt to characterise underground organisation in South Africa as an experience, with specific political, sociological, psychological and other implications. It is obviously very different from other ways of practising politics and the South African situation introduces conditions that may also distinguish this form of struggle from underground organisation in other countries. This chapter is a tentative attempt to (un)cover some elements, which might help characterise what has distinguished underground work in South Africa. Because its focus is on the character of the phenomenon, it does not adhere strictly to the time frame of the previous chapters. It draws on whatever data may aid in providing insights into underground as a social phenomenon, from whatever period or experiences that of other countries, where these are of comparative use. The same departure from chronological narration is applicable to the next chapter, which constitutes an elaboration of this one, with specific application to gender relations.

The character of underground work

What follows is based on insights from my own experience as a one- time underground operative, as well as data from the interviews, conducted in this research (e.g. Tshabalala, 2003, Mngqikana, 2001, Memela, 2003), with a fairly wide range of underground participants active from the 1950s onwards and a survey of what literature exists. The international literature that has been uncovered thus far, while providing historical data, has not generally yielded the type of theorisation that will assist in this study. (e.g. Michel, 1972, Merson, 1986, Liepmann, 1936). It is true that we are speaking of a species of clandestinity in general. But the particular

characteristics of underground political organisation in a liberation struggle of the type that has been experienced in South Africa appear to raise fairly distinct issues and problems.

Interviews conducted and information drawn from personal experience as well as contact with other operatives, without by any means exhaustively probing the question, reveal that the underground organisational experience in South Africa may see cadres implement their tasks as intended or divert their energies and the resources at their disposal towards other purposes, sometimes for private gain. The experience may manifest the highest moral qualities in the face of danger and also, occasions for abuse. It is not possible to measure the relative strength of either 'tendency', although my personal experience with cadres during the struggle against apartheid leads me to believe that abuse was not nearly as frequent as sacrifice.

Whichever of these routes the underground worker decided on or had the opportunity to take, heroic and moral or abusive and corrupt, there are some other characteristics necessary for the job, that may have left an imprint on ways of practising politics. Underground work is a specific form of politics requiring certain tools necessary to safeguard secrecy as well as an element of personal commitment, able to sustain people through adverse conditions. The moral qualities, it will be argued form part of a wider genre of 'revolutionary morality', expressed also in the writings of authors in or about other struggles (See Hermet, 1971, Guevara, 1997). The concepts connote not only a specific moral commitment sometimes requiring extreme personal sacrifice, but also conceptions of the relationship of the personal to the political and to the collective. (See Chapter 7 below) The way in which this is understood may also be a feature of the 'masculine' character of the ANC and represent what may be described as 'heroic' or 'revolutionary masculinity'. (See Chapter 6 below).

What follows is a tentative and preliminary attempt to outline the practical, social and moral qualities and tendencies that characterise underground modes of organisation. Chapter 7 returns to the impact that this has had on the freedom of the individual. Having committed himself or herself to the discipline of the organisation and more particularly underground structures, that chapter considers what this meant for the individual's personal judgment?

Underground style of work

Underground activity, as an experience, which may still influence the character and history of the ANC and SACP, (who in partnership were the main practitioners of underground organisation), requires distinct *styles of work that are quite different from open, democratic activity.* Few of the qualities that distinguish conventional democratic politics can be found in underground organisation. It must, by definition, lack a public element, just as underground work is generally without other features considered essential to democratic debate and consultation. But as with most other moments of ANC/SACP history, there are not Chinese walls between phases and the experiences and identities associated with these. Many individuals have been involved in both legal and illegal activities at different times or simultaneously. Many have taken habits from one mode of organisation into the other. Some of these ways of working may still have a bearing on the way some activists or leaders operate today.

Conspiratorial methods

Successful underground operation requires intense secrecy. One generally cannot 'open one's heart' to one's lover or anyone else if one wants to ensure survival. In fact many of the values that one might conventionally expect in a range of relationships tend to be negated. Underground work often makes it impossible to 'service' these in a conventional manner, because of the dangerous conditions under which work is done. What is normally a source of comfort may become a danger or a potential basis for suspicion. Where one might in other circumstances seek solace, this could place one in danger. John Nkadimeng expresses the dilemma, in describing the advice he used to give MK cadres infiltrating the country:

> You see these boys used to come to me when they were coming back into the country and I would give them instructions, and … say to them: you know who is your enemy now? For you to succeed in your whatsaname [operation/assignment] it is your mother [who is the danger]. Never you go to your mother. If you do go to your mother you are finished. Because your mother will be so excited she is going to tell her cousin, her friend and then it will be known that you are here and

> the enemy is sitting there and waiting for this type of information. So you can't succeed. Your mother, your sister, your girlfriend, your good friend no one of them…. (Interview, 2003)[60]

In fact, the police were prepared for lapses, arising from any manifestations of 'normality'- in the sense of resumption of conventional relationships that had existed prior to joining MK. They closely watched the houses of relatives in case MK operatives visited. (See General H. Stadler, quoted in Karis and Carter, 1997, p. 24). Linus Dlamini who infiltrated into the country as a stowaway in a ship from Dar-es-Salaam was forced to seek refuge with his brother and although he moved from place to place his brother was the person who actually led the police to him and his arrest. (Interview L. Dlamini, 2005). Keith Mokoape remarks that Nkadimeng was offering sensible advice, but if one were in real trouble, one might still have had to run to one's mother. (Interview, 2003).

But there were some cases where the success of underground operations did depend on confiding what one was doing with loved ones or with other people outside of the immediate activity. In some situations their assistance or that of others not formally 'inducted' into the underground unit may have been required.

The advice of Nkadimeng cannot be regarded as of 'timeless' validity in every instance. While the insights are borne out by the remarks of Stadler, they relate to a particular period of ANC underground history. The need to stay away from those with whom one may have had the closest bonds was also a result of the ANC's social base having been disrupted after Rivonia. Ideally some form of reliance on such people as one's family and friends should have been natural resources in underground situations. But in the specific conditions of disruption that had occurred this could not be so. Jeremy Cronin writes:

> Different subjective realities and different periods of the underground and different deployments in the underground required/promoted different responses. Nkadimeng's advice is …given to one of a few thousand exiles,

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[60] Helen Bradford e-mail 7 June 2004 has pointed to the fact that all the potential sources of danger to the operative were depicted as being female.

> assumed, perhaps, to have been known by the security police to have gone into exile, and presumably earmarked to return after a year or more of absence. The active sending out of tens of thousands of young militants was, probably, a strategic mistake (but also a reflection of the relative weakness of the underground in the late 1970s, early 1980s). It disrupted the organic connection between militancy and community/family/mass base. And exposed clandestine returnees to many problems and temptations (to visit family, for instance). In the 1980s, by contrast, for many underground operatives, family and friendship networks were, characteristically (but of course not always) their best friends (the sea in which they swam)…. (Personal Communication by e-mail 20 March 2004).

Interestingly, Zubeida Jaffer, in the different situation of having remained in the country throughout was active in the Western and to a lesser extent Eastern Cape in the 1970s and 1980s both publicly and underground. Unlike the returning operatives she depended and was able to rely very much on family and broader community connections. The absolute secrecy and relative isolation of MK missions, especially earlier ones, would have rendered Jaffer's work impossible. (Interview, 2005 and Jaffer, 2003). This tendency to draw on family and friends was also essential to the early underground structures given the situation where adequate preparations could not be made. (Interview L. Dlamini, 2005).

But it still remains true that for the majority of operations and structures, the notion of having to keep what one was doing absolutely secret, was required in the conditions of underground. This tended in very many cases, to subvert conventional notions and expectations of openness and trust in relationships.

While a mass, national democratic movement claims to aim at establishing a regime of popular power, the methods of underground are self-consciously conspiratorial. Revolutionaries tend to distinguish conspiracies from action involving the masses, yet it is conspiratorial methods that rule in underground organisation. This is partly because underground work tends to comprise the activities of small groups of people. The early ANC underground organisation was relatively large but also shortlived.

The post Rivonia reconstruction of ANC and SACP underground organisation was on the basis of small-scale units. People worked on the principle of 'need to know', that is, one person may have interacted with X with regard to one activity, but X ought not to have known that that person also related to Y but in connection with other activities.

The degree of professionalism of units varied. Professionalism refers here to the level, character and effectiveness of training. It also related to the closeness of the links that a unit was able to maintain with its command structures or 'handlers'. Having recourse to the advice of experienced cadres may have served as effectively as training courses.

Some cadres received years of training of a variety of kinds in many countries; others may have had a three-week crash course inside or outside the country. Still others were not trained at all and many acted 'free lance'. This affected the type of activities a specific unit or individual was capable of conducting and how it was planned and executed, and with what level of risk. If a guerrilla unit operated on a very professional basis, after an attack, it would have had an escape route and in case of problems, a fallback escape route. But there would be both commonly agreed fallback positions/escape routes, and individual ones, not known to other members of the group. Even in units where there was the highest degree of trust and comradeship, chances could not be taken through unnecessary sharing of information. (Interview Solly Shoke, 2003).

In general, there was not superfluous communication or sharing of information. The joy of achievement was not usually celebrated, beyond those who were involved directly in a specific activity, where they were able to be together after an operation, without causing danger. Alternatively, being together may in the particular circumstances have been the most secure situation. This may have been the case where, for example, movement to other places was dangerous or where alternative places of accommodation could not easily be found for the various unit members.

Security considerations, surveillance, counter-surveillance and the dangers of infiltration required a degree of single-mindedness and even ruthlessness. This led

some units to execute suspected or known informers, though that has not been encountered in the present research.[61] The qualities and requirements, outlined in this section, may-if one accepts the necessities of revolutionary struggle- have been required in the given circumstances, but obviously (!) militated against open debate and 'democracy from below.' Some contemporary analysts have claimed that this 'mindset' continues to influence current practices.

Technical proficiency, technicism and depoliticisation?

This same single-mindedness meant that specific activities had to be carried out with precision, be correctly timed and that careful reconnaissance and other logistical preparations had to be undertaken. Technical proficiency –of varying kinds and levels-was essential to ensure success. But requiring technical proficiency and such careful observation of the 'rules', may in time have led to a degree of depoliticisation[62]. High technical proficiency could lead to 'blind spots' politically, just as intensely theoretical people or those who spent a great deal of time on their own political development, might often have been insufficiently skilled in technical matters and in having to perform them, might have created dangers.

In the case of technicism, lack of political engagement could lead to demoralisation or lack of focus on the long-term, because of the preoccupation with getting things done. If one were producing and issuing pamphlets on a large scale, for example, one had to concentrate on various practical tasks –duplicating, the purchase of stationery (which

[61] There are well-documented cases of execution, as when a MK unit killed Bartholomew Hlapane, who had been a state witness in numerous political trials. Leonard Nkosi, a deserter from the Wankie campaign, who became an *askari* (i.e. worked for the South African police) was also subsequently executed (Van Driel, unpub 2003 and Personal communication, 28 June 2004). Interestingly, the police tended not to trust the askaris fully because they had often been recruited after threats of death. Personal communication from Professor L Piper, on basis of his research 8 September 2005).

[62]The depoliticisation could also be manifested if arrested and appearing in court where some people, who had been highly proficient in committing acts of sabotage or issuing inflammatory pamphlets, were sometimes prepared to follow legal advice and make submissions, which amounted to renunciation of their political beliefs. The professional interventions of lawyers changed over time, with many of the lawyers of the 1980s themselves being activists. But the lawyers wanted to do their best for their clients *as individuals.* This sometimes created a conflict between the possibility of securing release and the needs of the organisation, which may have required refusing to make a particular category of statement. I am aware in writing this, that it reveals my own acceptance of the notion of supremacy of the collective/organisational needs over that of the individual in the conditions then prevailing. For discussion of this paradigm in other contexts, see below and Suttner, 2004a, 425-7, as part of a critique of Turok, 2003

was often complicated) distribution and so on. One had to ensure that adequate precautions were taken to avoid leaving fingerprints, though this was less an issue with the early underground organisation. (Interview with Eric Mtshali, 2003). It is important to appreciate today that right up until the late 1970s there were few if any accessible and secure photocopying machines and that duplication was a time consuming and messy activity usually involving a hand-operated duplicating machine. (See Suttner, 2001, e.g. pp. 16-17).

And if these pamphlets were distributed through a 'bucket bomb', set off with a timing device attached to a tape-recorded message there were additional technical requirements, more complicated than simply posting.

Even if one were a simple propagandist operating through the post box, one could not simply dump all envelopes in one box because that would make interception easy. One had to have a mental picture of the location of very many post boxes throughout the area of one's operation. Envelopes had to be of a variable type and size and the way addresses were written or typed could not be uniform. Such precautions made interception more difficult.

If one were not composing the pamphlets oneself, and was purely responsible for distributing a publication of the liberation movement, the political element was something separate from the specific underground distribution activity. The political quality of the action was initiated by others. The underground activity was political in effect, but not insofar as the operative's individual practical activity was concerned.

Where a unit did not conduct discussions or political education amongst themselves, or where one person operated alone and distributed officially produced publications, there was a danger of 'alienation' from the political character of the activity and its result. The operative was not really politically involved and only responsible for technical tasks. Because the person knew that the apartheid police were hunting for him or her, some courage was undoubtedly required, given the expectation of torture and possibly death after arrest. But such a person was not engaged in preparing the message that was distributed nor did he or she know the result in most cases. The

press generally provided no coverage and unless the operative lived in the communities where they were received it was hard to gauge the reaction.

The process of recruitment and deployment generally did not provide or allow the opportunity for monitoring operatives on a personal level. People may have changed over time and in response to what they experienced. They may have experienced psychological difficulties. A psychological process of disillusionment or demoralisation may have rooted itself somewhere within some peoples' consciousness and those who deployed particular operatives may have been unaware of this. A psychological problem may have been lurking or emerged unobserved, only to have decisive effect in moments of stress or danger or inactivity or after arrest. This question of stress was especially important in intelligence relationships, where state institutions were infiltrated and providing information sometimes led to inordinate strain on the person supplying the information.

Some of the elements of potential depoliticisation were present, others absent in sabotage or combat operations. A wide range of technical activities, for example, transporting or collecting arms or explosives, may have preceded the actual detonation of explosives or military attacks.

In sabotage one may more easily see the reaction to what has been done. Eric Mtshali describes the pleasure of hearing people in a taxi discussing one of the activities of his unit. (Interview, 2003). Clearly if one is near a place where one sets off a bomb one can hear or more easily establish reactions. The first phase of success is simply to know that it has 'gone off'. But often one has- time permitting- to get far away from the place of the incident in order to ensure safety and avoid capture. As with pamphlet distribution one is speaking of a degree of technical proficiency –planning and executing whatever one's tasks may be.

The extent to which this led to depoliticised technicism may have depended on how cadres worked, whether alone or in a unit and what opportunities existed for meeting and holding political discussion. It is clear that serious processes of induction were often implemented (Interviews with Robbie Potenza, Ralph Mgijima, Mtshali, Cleopas Ndlovu, 2003, France Mohlala, 2004). This is especially true if we treat the

underground phenomenon as starting from the moment of the preparation of operations, which may have been in camps and other political schools, outside the country, where intensive and extensive processes of political training and discussion occurred. (Interviews Nat Serache, 2002, Pallo Jordan 2003, Faith Radebe, 2004, Totsie Memela, 2003). But considerable time may have elapsed between this period of preparation and the execution of underground tasks.

It may have been difficult to sustain political discussion as a living and continuous part of the unit's activity when in the country. Given that every meeting constituted some element of danger, there may have been a tendency for unit members to be isolated from one another when contact was not needed for operational activities. Such isolation could obviously enhance the possibility of depoliticisation.

On the other hand the identification and discussion of targets had to be undertaken, unless these had been pre-selected 'outside'. And the choice of MK targets generally reflected political assessments. For example, the attack on a police station in Soekmekaar was based on the unit's understanding of community anger at police involvement in forced removals. (Interview Petros 'Shoes' Mashigo, 2003). Likewise, the attacks on the Moroka and Orlando police stations in Soweto, the first such attacks in South African history, were aimed at organs of state power that were identified in the minds of ordinary people with the most intense repression. (Interview, Solly Shoke, 2003)

Elitism/vanguardism and hierarchies?

An elitist element is characteristic of underground activity. This was implicit in the early Communist conceptions of a vanguard party. Lenin's development of this model was premised on the need for theory to be brought to the working class from outside, by intellectuals. (Lenin 1977[1902]). Without this external influence, the working class was said to be condemned to spontaneous, trade union as opposed to revolutionary consciousness. Even before Lenin, Plekhanov, regarded as the founder of Russian Marxism, had advanced such ideas in more extreme form, seeing the intelligentsia standing almost '*in loco parentis* over the infant workers' movement.'

(Harding, 1983, vol 1, p.50 and more generally pp 49-54, citing works published in Russian). Plekhanov saw the intelligentsia as initiators of the revolutionary movement:

> The strength of the working class-as of any other class-depends, among other things, on the clarity of its political consciousness, its cohesion and its degree of organisation. It is these elements of its strength that must be influenced by our socialist intelligentsia. *The latter must become the leader of the working class in the impending emancipation movement, explain to it its political and economic interests* and also the interdependence of those interests and must prepare them to play an independent role in the social life of Russia. (Harding, 1983, vol 1, p. 50, quoting from his translation from the Russian. Italics inserted).

Lenin writes in *What is To Be Done?*:

> We have said that *there could not have been* Social Democratic [i.e. later to be replaced by the terms 'revolutionary or 'Communist', depending on context-RS] consciousness among the workers. It would have to be brought to them from without. The history of all countries shows that the working class, exclusively by its own effort, is able to develop only trade union consciousness….The theory of socialism, however, grew out of the philosophic, historical, and economic theories elaborated by educated representatives of the propertied classes, by intellectuals. By their social status the founders of modern scientific socialism, Marx and Engels, themselves belonged to the bourgeois intelligentsia. In the very same way, in Russia, the theoretical doctrine of Social-Democracy arose altogether independently of the spontaneous growth of the working-class movement; it arose as a natural and inevitable outcome of the development of thought among the revolutionary socialist intelligentsia…(1902 [1977], p.114. Italics in the original).

Lenin was not rigidly attached to this assessment, as can be seen in his response to the 1905 Russian revolution where the working class undertook revolutionary action spontaneously and in mass formations. He then developed his analysis to try to

ensure that there could be a mutual learning process from the vanguard to the masses and vice versa. (Liebman, 1975, especially pp. 45ff). [63]

This idea of bringing ideas to the working class 'from outside' is found from an early stage in Communist Party of South Africa statements. In 1921 a South African delegation report to the Comintern, referring to Africans said, 'This primitive mass is waiting to be stirred….' (Davidson et al, vol 1, 2003, p. 76).

Whatever the intentions, pamphlets issued some fifty years later with such titles as *Vukani! /Awake!* again imply that the masses had to be disturbed in their slumber by those who were more advanced. These sentiments are found explicitly in the writings of Che′ Guevara:

> Then came the stage of guerrilla struggle. It developed in two distinct environments: the people, the still sleeping mass that had to be mobilised; and its vanguard, the guerrillas, the motor force of the mobilisation, the generator of revolutionary consciousness and militant enthusiasm. This vanguard was the catalysing agent that created the subjective conditions necessary for victory. (Guevara, (1997 [1965] p.198)

Elitism was not necessarily the subjective state of mind of those involved, but that is one reading that can be given to such activities or statements. However one needs to probe more deeply into the connotation of words like 'elitism'. It's meaning changed over time. (See Williams, 1983, pp. 112-115, Bottomore, 1993, Chapter 1). The meaning given here is not that associated with privilege, and an attempt to establish a structure or a relationship where a select few, to whom certain qualities are attributed, enjoy benefits or take decisions on behalf of others. Nor is it associated with theories of government or to depict the concentration of power in the hands of a select few, as in some elite theories, as an efficient mode of ensuring what is best for all. (See e.g. Bottomore, 1993, Chapter 1 and generally).

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[63] Also, Lenin vehemently opposed the idea of a long-term dependent relationship between 'thinkers' and 'workers.' In *What is to be done?* he distanced himself from writers like Kautsky arguing that in the revolutionary party 'all distinctions as between workers and intellectuals…must be obliterated.'

Clearly the rationale behind the underground work described here bore some similarities to certain 'elite theories' in that the vanguard element was supposed to have special qualities. But in other respects it was quite different, in that despite an element of hierarchy, it did not entail power over large numbers of people. Modes of functioning did however demand initiating activities on behalf of others, or trying to stimulate others to initiate operations themselves.

But, even if we concede that there was an elitist element in the South African underground, which vanguardism may be described as comprising, *was this in the given situation a precondition for stimulating the later mass activity, or an obstacle?* [64] Is such elitism or vanguardism at any given moment, necessarily antagonistic to mass emancipation or emancipatory politics in the long run? Or put differently, was Lenin not right in thinking that outside stimulation by an 'advanced group' was sometimes needed in order to incite the masses into action? Evidence on the post Rivonia underground structures suggests that the presence of 'elitist', 'self-appointed' underground ANC and SACP units did influence the direction of the 1976 rising and was one of the reasons why many of these youth were subsequently involved in popular activity under 'Congress hegemony'. (See interviews with Nat Serache, 2002, Pharephare [General] Mothupi, 2004, Houston, 2004).

Related to the notion of elitism being present in underground organisation, is the issue of hierarchical structures. Many of the activities of these groups related to military or potential military activities and that almost invariably implied a command structure. Underground operations in general, because of security and planning, required lines of command and hierarchies. Some of the legacies of such distinct levels of authority are notions of 'seniority' as a result of which people are accorded respect or deference and often described as 'senior comrades'. It is not always clear on what basis this notion of seniority is derived, though in many cases it relates to having had command over others. It is sometimes said that once one has been a commander those whom one commanded always treat one that way. (Interview Ike Maphoto, 2004, a veteran of the Wankie campaign of 1967, who spent over ten years in Rhodesian prisons).

[64] This point has been indirectly suggested to me by Michael Neocosmos.

As with many of these generalisations, they may be qualified by other considerations and by the effect of individual personality. Chris Hani, for example, sought to break down many of these tendencies. Writing immediately after Hani's assassination, Sipho Binda, a former MK camp commander refers to Hani's interactions in Angola as MK commissar:

> His style of conducting political work was not bookish…. His first battle was to bring about humanness in the army. Harsh bureaucracy, poor administration etc were his targets. To us, who belonged to the officers' corps, we regarded that as the height of naivety. How can one bring liberalism & equality in the army Emkhontweni Akulingwana (no equality in the army)!
>
> Bra Chris was not to be cowed down nor discouraged by inertia or sheer reluctance towards change. He was not mincing his words. He wanted to transform MK into a real peoples' army. To him officers must be beyond reproach, women respected and given equal opportunities and the rank and file well trained &motivated to engage the enemy at home. (Binda, unpub 1993, 2)

Difficulty in ensuring accountability in the use of resources

Conducting underground work required resources, varying according to the type of activities undertaken, where the unit was located or emanated from, to whom it reported or where command structures were located. Supplying a unit required finances. It often involved weaponry or sophisticated equipment, depending on the tasks.

Where a unit was initiated externally or its funding was supplied from outside the country, accountability was difficult to ensure. Contact could easily be severed for a considerable length of time. Reporting to someone outside the country entailed great risks and could not be undertaken unnecessarily. It was hard to be sure that the person one wanted to contact would be at the assigned place when one arrived, apart

from other dangers involved in seeking the meeting. The operative might not go personally, and might have to send a courier, even though that entailed additional dangers. The more individuals that were involved in any activity, the greater were the dangers. Knowledge that one wanted to restrict was spread wider.

In the former Northern Transvaal, from the 1970s, MK cadres moved in and out of the area, establishing and supplying units. They were sometimes captured, sometimes passed on to another part of the country, sometimes disappeared. Later others appeared and on a seemingly *ad hoc* basis established contact. (Interview France Mohlala, 2004).[65] This again made monitoring and accountability in the use of these supplies, difficult.

Communication in writing was very risky, especially in the hands of couriers who might be arrested. Codes were sometimes employed, but many of the coding systems were very laborious to use and may have been difficult for some operatives to implement in the situation in which they lived or worked. And many forms of coding depended on access to books and obviously, also, literacy.

The 'book code', was in common use. It may have derived from early Soviet training, and entailed a very laborious process. Two people located in different places would agree on a book to be used and would construct a message by indicating a page, then a line, then a number to signify the letter referred to. So if one wanted to construct the word 'guest', one would have to count the number of letters in the line on a page of the book where 'g' is located, and then proceed in the same way either on the same page and line or another to then write 'u' etc. This took a great deal of time and in some cases only became an emergency method used where the preferred method may have been intercepted and the operative or 'handler' wanted to check. The preferred method may have been one or other method of chemically treated paper, or use of 'invisible ink' or other more sophisticated methods of coding learnt by those who had received intelligence training in the Soviet Union (e.g. Interview Linus Dlamini, 2005).

[65] This chapter, it should be recalled is not so much a historical account of the extent of underground achievements but a sociology of underground organisation. Consequently this reference is not intended to represent a systematic evaluation of the level of ANC activity in the area concerned, but related insofar as it shows the character of the interaction where it did occur in the case where I have sources.

Financial accountability involved another set of problems. The process of secret disbursement and accounting, immediately meant that in signing for any money, one obviously used a code name. Over time even the exact identity of the person who had been given funding may have become blurred, especially in situations of shifting deployment of cadres outside the country or those who disbursed funds inside. As different people took responsibility for tasks outside or often through arrests inside, the links were now between people different from those who had initially made the disbursement or accepted the funds.

Furthermore, on entering the country, operatives sometimes sent reports of what they had done or claimed to have done which could not be verified. The nature of the conditions meant that the press generally did not cover activities of underground cadres, even if what was reported to the liberation movement was in fact performed. (See Allister Sparks 1990, p. 242). But if what was claimed was fictitious there was little the 'handlers' could do to monitor or establish the truth.

According to one person entrusted with supplying funds to underground operatives, there were situations where they doubted the veracity of the reports received (and consequently, funds provided might not have been used for the purposes allocated or for any ANC activities). There were also cases where funds were allocated for projects in United Democratic Front (UDF) structures, but where the ANC funders were unable to check what was actually done with what had been disbursed. There were also situations where a person reported at both Swaziland and Maputo, seeking or receiving funding for the same project, until discovered. (Interview, Phumla Tshabalala, 2003).

While this account has highlighted the dangers and opportunities for abuse, it needs further contextualisation. What may have tended to happen, in general, was that the usually meagre financial assets of the operative were kept together or 'merged' with that provided by the national liberation movement. To do otherwise would have added complications and posed problems, given the requirements for opening accounts. If one were to have opened an account it could obviously only have been a 'front'. One should not 'read backwards' from recent fraud cases with claims of

'struggle accounting' and ignore the real barriers standing in the way of the average underground worker managing accounts in the way that many salaried people may be doing in the 21st century. Operatives would usually work with hard cash since this may have been needed quickly. Many or probably most did not have bank accounts or cheque books. Even to this day substantial barriers prevent poorer people opening bank accounts. Some leadership figures only received cheque books or credit cards for the first time in their lives, on election to parliament in 1994.

But this 'merger' of 'assets' still meant that some record ought to have been kept of what belonged to whom. Yet that could not be clearly documented and precise, for the expenditure would have related primarily to acquiring goods for illegal activities. Every time something was bought that could incriminate the person, he or she had to devise some way of recording but in a manner disguising that the specific item had in fact been purchased.

Assuming that records of expenditure for illegal tasks had to be coded, the question then arose of whether one kept this all in one place or separately and what was feasible where the person concerned lived or worked? I have been asked whether there are no examples or cases to cite? (Personal Communication, Phil Bonner). It may be that there are court records that mention some of these difficulties, though it is unlikely since it would not bear greatly on the issues at stake in a court case. There is nothing written on the subject, as far as I am aware. What I record here is based on my own experience and the evidence related of Phumla Tshabalala as a person disbursing funds and finding that some abuse was occurring and further malpractice suspected. But that does not address the question of how one who was not intending any malpractice, should keep records of use of completely illegal funding.

Where one was sharing a room with others and had little private space it was hard to keep documentation that could not easily be explained or whose character did not seem to gel with the surroundings. Finding a safe garage or other environment for illegal activities is easier to imagine than to implement. My personal experience in the 1970s was that I could never find a place other than my own home for preparing illegal pamphlets. Obviously what one can do is partially dependent on the resources available. In a special mission, where substantial funds are left in a Dead Letter Box

or channelled through one or other method, one can visualise the possibility that a person or unit might then be free to do things that were not possible for most operatives. But even having the money does not mean one can easily find a location without arousing any suspicion. If, for example, one hired a venue purely for illegal purposes, one could arouse suspicion if it were not regularly occupied or used. A safe venue for production, for example, is not necessarily safe for physical occupation of an underground cadre. What is apparently straightforward is often complicated in a world where minor matters often aroused the interest or attention of others.

It was, for the reasons described, not always possible to keep adequate financial records and ensure their safekeeping, given the diverse conditions under which people had to live or the opportunities they may have had for keeping records or the skills they may or may not have possessed in such matters. One needs to recognise, also, that if one had any written record, the moment one were arrested these were the type of lists police demanded to have interpreted. On arrest, in 1975, I was immediately asked what was written on my hand and subsequently questioned about various lists where odds and ends had been written.

Obviously the opportunity was created for the liberation movement's assets to become part of the private 'wealth' of the individual. But the reality may in many or most cases have been quite different. Many individuals may have had to subsidise the ANC/SACP's activities through their own meagre or, in some cases, more ample private resources. This was common because the provision of funding was difficult and could not always be timeous. It may have been politically important to act on a particular date or in response to some outrage or opportunity. In these situations many people had to find the finances needed for their underground activities, sometimes receiving compensation and sometimes or usually not.

The logistical difficulties in transferring funds created dangers and enhanced the likelihood of operatives using or seeking their own funding in one way or another. If one was 'on the run' for organisational activities, ideally one should have been disguised and if driving a car one should have been able to change cars and accommodation. Yet many people sought by the police did not have access to these resources, sometimes possessing only one sweater, which was easily identifiable,

making capture relatively easier. If they obtained a change of car or additional clothing, this expenditure to ensure their own security had to come from their own resources or through borrowing.

Certainly most did not have the resources to change cars or hire a car –assuming they had had the opportunity to learn to drive. The inequality of access to such skills is dramatically illustrated through Chris Hani's first incursion into South Africa in 1974. The plan depended on his riding a bicycle at some point. Coming from a very poor part of Cofimvaba in the Eastern Cape, where there were few roads and bicycles, Hani had never learnt to ride a bicycle and had to be taught by Joe Slovo.

In theory, working underground, especially if completely underground, meant acquiring a specific identity, to cover one's activity below the surface. That could, in specific circumstances, mean living according to a particular life style, which involved costs. In theory, since one was doing this in the service of the liberation movement, one should have been compensated. In practice, this seldom happened. Every time an operative bought a wig or a false moustache or dyed his or her hair or clothes to change 'image' or had a car repainted in a different colour or hired a car in order to evade arrest or assume a different identity, expenses were involved, but compensation was seldom available.

Similar issues arose for the UDF. In some parts of the country the UDF operated illegally or semi-legally, through most of its existence. This was especially the case in the bantustans[66] or in areas with large concentrations of right wing whites, like the Northern Transvaal. In that area, repression was more or less continuous from the mid 1980s and many of the leadership referred to themselves as 'internal refugees', as they continued to organise throughout the province. (Interview, France Mohlala, 2004).

But travelling in a province that covered large distances required funds. Often receipts were not produced and Azhar Cachalia, the UDF treasurer at the time,

[66] Under the Prime Ministership of Dr Hendrik Verwoerd, the policy of 'separate development' designated certain areas as 'homelands' or Bantustans for specific ethnic groups. Some of these purported to be independent under apartheid laws after 1976.

experienced considerable difficulty because he had to report on the disbursement of funds.

Consequently in implementing the accountability that the UDF treasury required, the security of activists and their work was sometimes compromised. France Mohlala and a group of activists travelled throughout the region during the state of emergency and, as required, kept receipts of petrol and food expenditures. On arrest, the police seized these receipts and spent some days analysing them. Contrary to the modest account of their travels given by the prisoners, the police were able to produce a map of where they had been and at what times, based on these slips. (Interview, France Mohlala, 2004).

Clearly there were contradictory modes or frameworks for operation. On the side of the UDF there was the need to avoid unauthorised expenditure or expenditure that could not be proved to have been incurred. The constitutional requirement of accountability for funds was enforced. On the other hand, the possibility of such forms of accountability was not intended to (but sometimes did, as we have seen), compromise underground work, which required modes of operation which were quite different.

The object of this section has been to point to real problems of accountability, which provided opportunities for corruption. But it is important to put the abuse in perspective and appreciate the broader picture where conventional notions of accountability could not possibly have been implemented and the likelihood that most operatives themselves, not the ANC or SACP, funded what they were doing. It was not meant to be that way, but that may have been how it generally turned out.

Morality, bravery, danger and abuse

Most people who entered underground units knew they faced great dangers. They only needed a sprinkling of knowledge of resistance history to appreciate that from the earliest days after the ANC's banning, people were routinely tortured and that from the first introduction of detention without trial, people were tortured and killed.

The expectation or anticipation of the possibility of a similar fate, ensured that many or most underground workers possessed a high degree of moral commitment. Often people worked under very difficult conditions. Survival generally required considerable understanding of the reasons for the sacrifice, and a degree of political maturity.

Hierarchical organisation was needed in order to execute a common strategic perspective in a situation of large-scale repression. One could not merely act on one's own whim or spontaneous ideas. Some operatives did work alone or the hierarchies with which they were associated were located far from them. Yet where a unit was being prepared in exile or was established with leadership and operatives in the country, hierarchies were a significant element in their functioning. They had to report on what was and was not done and fell under someone's command.

Hierarchies and lines of authority, while they may have been operationally necessary, provided opportunities for abuse, and could sometimes be used in order to secure or attempt to secure sexual or other favours. This appears to have occurred in the preparatory phases of underground work in MK camps, when commanders sometimes sought favours from younger women, who were their military subordinates or in certain underground units. (See Chapter 6).

Association or claimed links with the underground could also be used as a prestige symbol in order to secure favours or conceal promiscuous behaviour. Sometimes when a person could not account to a lover why he or she was not around at this or that time involvement in some highly secret activity was claimed, entailing absence at all times of night or for some whole nights. The type of phrase that would be used could be: 'A cadre must be at the disposal of the movement night and day'.

In the 1980s, when the lines between legal and illegal struggles were less clearly defined than in earlier periods, it was not uncommon for people to hint that they were connected to 'those people,' that is, underground ANC/SACP or 'Lusaka', often referred to with a gesture of the hands] and that the reason for a person's absence or some or other behaviour, was claimed to be related to the tasks the person was

performing or claimed to be involved in. These hints were sometimes used as a claim to authority, sometimes to justify abusive practices.

Knowledge as power

An intrinsic feature of underground work was that some people knew more than others. It was part of the security of the mode of operation, that people ought not to know what they did not need to know. Underground operatives would often be tasked with providing intelligence on the character of and divisions within organisations. Those receiving these reports were thus armed with information that could be deployed for factional political purposes, to advance one or other cause or to further personal agendas. During the 1980s, there were divisions between anti-apartheid groupings inside the country and each side claimed support of 'the movement'.

There were many occasions during the 1980s when activists invoked 'the movement' or contacts with the leadership in support of whatever they did. Interventions by people outside or people inside with special access to information played a definite political role. It would be interesting to know to what extent divisions of the period found within organisations inside the country were related to factional divisions outside.

A further form of knowledge as power was obviously the role of some underground workers as intelligence operatives. The prevailing paradigm within the historiography of underground organisation places great stress on the supposedly overwhelming power of the apartheid state and its omnipresent network of informers. (See references in Chapter 4). While this picture may be overdrawn, infiltration and other activities of apartheid spies was a real factor, inside and outside of South Africa. The ANC consequently had to develop its own intelligence service. It is not clear what degree of success it achieved, but it does appear to have penetrated certain security police offices, as well as the Home Affairs Department, (thus providing false passports).[67]

[67] Documentation obtained through these channels has been provided to the Hefer commission. I had some knowledge of this through association with people operating in the Natal area in the 1980s.

But possession of knowledge or the responsibility to gather such intelligence information was an especially powerful weapon that could be used to advance the cause of liberation, defend the organisation from penetration, and also settle scores and fight factional battles.

Acquisition of intelligence is acquisition of data that is intended to be used to protect a country or in this case an organisation or to take offensive action. But that data can easily be deployed for factional purposes and an activity unrelated to liberation per se. Beyond that questions remain of a more general kind. Given the secrecy within which intelligence organisations operate and the ANC intelligence operated during the struggle it is not clear what determined when or whether information was used and in what way it could be employed? There are not clear guidelines for determining the conditions, which justify making such information, based on intelligence sources, known to others or in the current situation, to the public at large.

All sections of the liberation movement abound with claims that some people were spies. Some of these allegations may have been well founded; and based on intelligence that was valid. But it remains true that the gathering of intelligence was also one of those activities, which offered opportunities both to make a substantial contribution to defend the liberation movement, as well as for abuse.

In seeking to protect itself from infiltration the ANC sometimes arrested spies or alleged spies. It is now acknowledged not only that innocent people were sometimes arrested but also that abuses occurred in the treatment of prisoners. It is by no means certain that all or most of those who were innocent have been publicly cleared. Many families know that the liberation movement to which they owe loyalty arrested one of their family. They are torn between their love for their family member and the belief that the organisation would not have done what it had done had there not been a reason.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a tentative characterisation of the main features of underground work in the ANC- led liberation movement in South Africa. It has tried to show that simple labels cannot explain a very complex phenomenon. Underground activities led to different subjective reactions and actions on the part of operatives, some noble and heroic, others corrupt or abusive. The conditions under which activity was conducted meant that the work or inactivity of operatives could not always be observed or regulated by the organisation with a degree of consistency that could ensure definite and desired outcomes.

Some features of underground work had of necessity to deviate from democratic norms. That could not have been avoided in order to achieve the goals of an essentially secret and conspiratorial mode of operation.

When one attaches labels to a phenomenon –conspiratorial, masculinist (see Chapter 6 below), denial of the personal (Chapter 7 below), one is doing so in an essentially conditional manner. That is to say, one is acknowledging specific conditions within which this occurred, where these qualities were found and that this was often qualified and where unqualified, may have been necessary in the situation. That is not to say that the same qualities would work in other circumstances. The question to be faced is the extent to which some of these habits persist in current situations and whether or not they are obstacles to peoples' participating in democratic structures and at the personal level, to what extent they continue to impact on and are recognised as a form of post-traumatic stress and barrier to peoples' emotional fulfilment.

It may be that this chapter appears over-generalised and lacking in specific examples. But there is no literature to draw on. It is based on personal experience and what is known of that of others and what has been read about other struggles, though none of this literature attempts to provide the type of breakdown of characteristics that is offered here. The chapter is therefore inherently limited in its scope and that does not appear possible to remedy through recourse to any available sources that are known to me. The chapter is therefore presented as a start of an enquiry, which it is hoped, can be augmented by future writers. While some of my interviews were conducted

without asking some of the questions that may have elucidated the issues that are raised, having raised them inconclusively here, enables others to try to find more comprehensive answers.

Chapter Six

Characterising underground organisation of the ANC-led alliance II: Its gendered character

This chapter focuses on the gendered character of underground organisation. While questions of gender relations and notions of masculinity or masculinities and especially womanhood and feminism have been examined in other works, this chapter tries to specify the precise character of a distinct process and phenomenon. This bears resemblances to that found in other situations, but locating these in underground organisation brings distinct qualities into the foreground

While by no means exhaustive the chapter tries by its range of enquiry to locate masculinity and femininity formation in complex situations that have not been previously discussed in South African literature. It tries to uncover important elements of the place and conditions impacting on women and men in the underground and how this was reflected in gender roles and relations.

With regard to men it will be shown, that in certain respects these identities relate to a past that belongs to a warrior tradition. In part ANC masculinities also interface with belief systems that precede and coexist with the organisation's existence, for example the relationship between initiation and other *rites of passage* to manhood. Interpreting such phenomena requires recourse to thinking that is not provided by existing literature on the ANC, (Erlank, 2003 Unterhalter, 2000) nor by more general textbooks (e.g. Connell, 1995, Whitehead, 2002).

The notion of gender in relation to underground work raises the question of heroism. In the period under consideration, Unterhalter (2000) has deployed the concept of 'heroic masculinity' in relation to 'struggle literature'. On the face of it the work has

a limited scope, drawing conclusions from certain 'struggle autobiographies.' But the way conclusions are framed sometimes lead readers to believe that the understandings provided have application beyond the area of enquiry. While the notion of 'heroic masculinity' is dealt with more fully later, put briefly, it refers to men being the representatives of heroic projects, whose success is contingent on woman being at home, often waving the men goodbye as they depart to face danger. (Whitehead, 2002, below). This chapter challenges the application of such concepts and understandings, arguing that there were both male and female heroic projects, subject to extensive qualification and conditionality, in both cases.

In some of the evidence to be presented we find the existence of different models of manhood within the organisation. This means that stereotypical application of qualities attached to male and female may require extensive qualification.

In general, the chapter indicates a range of sites and modes of masculinity formation and constructions of feminine identities in the period of illegality of the ANC, again subject in their interpretation to extensive qualification and conditionality.

Attack on manhood and the need for African men to assert that they are men

Leading textbooks on masculinity primarily if not exclusively concern situations different from that of South Africa. (E.g. Connell, 1995, Whitehead, 2002.) When they speak of masculinity or masculinities they are not relating to a situation where manhood has been denied in the sense that it has been in the history of apartheid or colonialism generally. When they refer to 'hegemonic masculinities' or 'gender orders' they do not purport to cover the layers within these layers that also give meaning to attempts to reclaim manhood in the context of apartheid and colonialism. The western textbooks do not deal with a situation where part of the dehumanisation characterising these orders is the explicit denial that men are men. That emasculation was part of but not the whole of the African male experience. In a colonial and apartheid situation which included territorial areas outside the immediate attention of the authorities, there were spaces where African men were able to conduct themselves relatively independently, acting out their manhood quite differently and with less impact of colonial overlordship than in the moments or places of colonial

encounter/control. In other words, manhood was not one phenomenon. It meant something different away from the colonial gaze, from what it did when encountering the law or an employer. The actual experience of African men was therefore at more than one level and in more ways than that described in conventional western texts. (Cf Connell, 1995, Whitehead, 2002. See also Lindsay and. Miescher, 2003, pp. 6ff.).

By the 'gender order' is meant

> a patterned system of ideological and material practices, performed by individuals in a society, through which power relations between women and men are made, and remade, as meaningful. It is through the gender order of a society that forms or codes of masculinities and femininities are created and recreated, and relations between them are organised. (Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p. 61. But see Connell, 1995, pp. 86ff).

> At the top of the 'gender hierarchy' characteristic [of modern Western societies] is 'hegemonic masculinity', the culturally dominant ideal of masculinity centred around authority, physical toughness and strength, heterosexuality and paid work…(Pilcher and Whelehan, 2004, p83. See Connell, 2002,54,123,144,148,119-148).

These works on primarily western masculinities sometimes address claims of a denial of masculinity or crisis of masculinity on the part of men who feel that gender equality assaults their sense of manhood. (Connell, 1995, p. 84, Beynon, 2002, Chapter 4, Haywood and Mac an Ghaill, 2003, pp. 125ff, Whitehead, 2002, e.g. at pp. 3-4, 6, 47-51, 139-40.)[68]

Notions of a 'gender order' or hierarchy of gender power take on different meanings in colonial/apartheid states, which many of the writers recognise, though it is not their area of concern. They do not purport to address a situation where manhood is *actually*

[68] A different species of 'crisis' is found in contemporary South Africa with many men reacting against the gender equality clauses of the present constitution and current legislation protecting women from abuse, seeing these as assaults on their 'rights'.

assaulted, that is, where men are called boys, no matter what their age, or where many whites never bother to even know their actual names.

The denial of manhood in African colonial contexts is closely associated with African men being designated as having a childlike status. Carolyn A Brown writes:

> In the racialised discourse of colonialism, African subordination was represented as weakness, effeminacy, or 'childlike immaturity'….In colonialist racial ideology being a 'native' and being a 'man' were incompatible. (Brown, 2003, 157).

General J.B.M. Hertzog, former Prime Minister, expressed the childlike status of the African very plainly in 1926:

> Next to the European, the Native stands as an 8-year old child to a man of great experience-a child in religion, a child in moral conviction; without art and without science; the most primitive needs, and the most elementary knowledge to provide for those needs. If ever a race had a need of guidance and protection from another people with which it is placed in contact, then it is the Native in his contact with the white man. (In Morris, 2004, p. 152.)

This is not an unusual text for its time. In some ways it constitutes a mild example from the genre of racist writings. What it signifies for our purposes is that the infantilisation of Africans and men in particular links to or *seeks to justify political domination by designating Africans as a race of children*. There are variants of such discourse, for example the use of terms like tutelage, trusteeship, sacred trust and others. All such terms refer to native people not having attained adult status and therefore requiring some form of assistance, which however benevolently phrased amounted to a denial of political rights or even the prospect of these.

Given the linkage between denial of manhood and of African political freedom in colonial discourse, African assertions of manhood, therefore need to be understood

not only as a challenge to a childlike status but as symbolising wider rejection of the overlordship, represented by such statements as Hertzog's. The assertion of manhood is in this context a claim for freedom.

Colonialism and apartheid consciously set about subduing the military power and perceived sexual threat of the African male. The latter finds repeated expression in nineteenth century colonial commissions, where reference was made to African men leading lives of 'indolent sensuality'. (Natal 1852/3, pp 8, 27). Because they battened in ease on the labour of their wives they did not fulfil their 'proper destiny' and work for the white man. (See Simons, 1968, p.15).

In general this chapter uses notions of masculinity to refer to socially constructed conceptions of what is meant by being a man (See formulations in Lindsay and Miescher, 2003, 4,5). Colonial and apartheid oppression did not treat Africans as boys for all purposes in that they recognised that processes of transition to manhood were taking place within African societies and generally did not intervene in these. *It was only in their relations with African males, in the context of the colonial encounter, that men were treated as boys*. What this meant in the eyes of African men and their womenfolk and children was that men were men in one context but were unable or not allowed to perform the roles of men in relation to the colonial order. This included providing protection of women and children. While the notion of the 'male protector' is admittedly patriarchal, it will be seen, that its significance needs qualification in the colonial/apartheid context. (See for a slightly different version of this argument, Brown, 2003, p. 158. The complex mix of factors and ways in which the concept has been used in South Africa, can be seen in Eales, unpub, 1991, Chapter 1).

Non-intervention by colonisers in the traditional process of manhood formation itself requires explanation. We know that the culture of the Other was treated as exotic and that it was marginalised in relation to that of the coloniser. Even where some colonisers purported to value local culture it tended to be treated purely as an anthropological curiosity. Western music, art and other practices constituted culture of universal validity. African culture fell within the realm of anthropology. (I borrow here from Needham, 1969, p.13**).** This is in line with notions of indirect rule and

overall conceptions of control that asserting the inferiority of Africans in the territorial realm physically occupied by the colonisers, coexisted with maintaining the cohesion of the 'traditional,' for which some colonial powers purported to have great respect. The social order and the social discipline provided by that order was part of what made it possible to rule colonies with relatively small numbers of colonial officials. In that sense, perpetuation of a variety of native customs including initiation, helped maintain and perpetuate that order.

It was therefore practice that the colonisers did not intervene in the African *rites of passage* to manhood. But the outcome of initiation was not recognised as constituting manhood for purposes of coloniser/native relations. The validity of the transition within the society of the local people was not recognised in the colonial encounter. While manhood formation in the traditional setting maintained cohesion, denial of manhood at the broader political level was part of colonial overlordship

Manhood and patriarchies in colonial /apartheid contexts

Manhood had been conceived from early times as including a right and duty to protect. It is inherent in the notion of the housewife/mother caring over the home and the man protecting his 'castle'. He is generally designated as a warrior partly because he has to protect his home from attack. He is also seen as the person who works in order that the woman is able to perform her household duties (See also below).

But the notion of protection and the concept of patriarchy to which it is attached should not be given one, universal meaning, irrespective of context. In the apartheid context the notion of 'protection,' seen as one of the qualities of manhood was in one sense what one might normally attribute to 'patriarchy'. But because of the conditions under which it was acted out, its meaning went beyond that. Apartheid and colonialism invaded relations between husband and wife and father and child. That was itself a situation which left men feeling that they were not able to act 'as men' to protect and was therefore humiliating. There are cases, for example, where police arrested a daughter and a father was powerless to intervene –fearing the worst for his child but also losing his power to protect. I have been told of such cases where the daughter seeing that her father's intervention would lead to his being beaten, urged

him to let the police take her away. In other words, there was an overall recognition of the father's powerlessness to intervene in a situation where his daughter was clearly endangered. In the early years after Union when application of pass laws to women was being planned, Eales describes a complex discourse related to 'protection', used both by patriarchs as well as the white authorities, both purporting to protect women from abuse. (See Eales, unpub, 1991, ch 1, and esp at pp 45-46. An analogous fear of women moving into the cities and outside of parental control, was seen by both white authorities and African patriarchs as synonymous with various vices, especially prostitution, see Jochelson, 2001, ch 6, especially at pp.111-116 and pp. 125-128. See also Vaughan, 1991, eg. at 143).

In one sense these authorities trespassed on traditional and also modern notions of man as the protector. But in the context of colonial and apartheid domination 'protection' takes on a wider connotation, indicating implicitly that the notion and attributes of patriarchy cannot be given a single meaning, irrespective of context.

The argument presented in this chapter is that one cannot read off gender relations or a negative relationship of men to women from the assertion of manhood in itself. At the same time, this chapter does not argue that the assertion of manhood being seen as a claim for liberation means that gender questions are resolved. What characterises the 'gender order' referred to by Connell needs to be analysed by relying on data beyond such words.[69] The object of this part of the chapter is purely to argue that the assertion of manhood has no self-evident and timeless meaning, nor the meaning attributed to it in writings, which purport from such usage to read notions of gender inequality and even broader political strategies. (E.g. Erlank, 2003. See below).

The assertion of a need to restore manhood was a legitimate claim, a legitimate part of a struggle for liberation. That no mention is made of women in some statements has no inherent meaning for the relations between men and women and the conception of these relations. That issue must be analysed separately and argued and even where the concept of the nation was defined in terms of manhood, it coexisted with

[69] The concept of the gender order was first developed by J.Matthews, (1984). I refer to Connell here because of the chapter's focus on masculinities and femininities, on which he is a leading theorist.

extensive political and public activity of women. This was the case with the early ANC, whose membership was restricted to males. Nevertheless women immediately entered the public terrain (cf Wells, 1993) and in practice even played a role in the ANC itself, long before the constitution formally admitted them as full members. (Cf Ginwala, 1990)

Given this need to locate masculinities and discourse about masculinities within a specific context where acting out of conventional patriarchal roles is conditioned by factors that are quite different to that found in non-colonial and non-apartheid situations, Natasha Erlank is insufficiently cautious in describing African nationalist discourse and its broader impact. She quotes words that are masculinist but does not locate these within the actual denial of manhood to which this chapter has referred. Furthermore, she attributes considerable and in my view, exaggerated strategic significance to this masculinist language:

> In 1935, Alfred Bitini Xuma…wrote a paper expressing confidence in the ability of Africans to participate responsibly in governmental politics because of their having come to the 'status of manhood.'[70] In 1946, Anton Lembede, leader of the ANC Youth League, wrote a charged newspaper article describing how a 'young virile nation' was in the process of being rebirthed, drawing strength from a nationalism which fed on the idea of Africa as a 'blackman's country.'[71] Xuma and Lembede were not alone among African nationalist leaders in resorting to rhetoric saturated in references to masculinity, although their vision of what it meant to be a man may have differed. Language redolent with metaphors calling for the reassertion of a denied manhood had prominent rhetorical place in nationalist discourse in the first part of the century. Seldom acknowledged, the existence of this discourse is *fundamental to understanding the political strategies of the ANC and other nationalist groups from the 1920s through the 1950s*. Such a discourse explains some of the gendered currents that motivated nationalist activity during this period as well as some of the reasons why African male leaders

[70] Quoting Sheridan Johns (1972), 317
[71] citing 'Bantu and Politics,' c. 1935, AD 843, Xuma Papers, box O, Department of Historical Papers, University of the Witwatersrand.

were disinclined to involve African women in political activity….(Erlank, 2003, 653. Emphasis inserted).

Erlank traces a documentary history whose discourse continually refers to emasculation and the need to restore manhood and a virile nation (Erlank, 2003). Unless it is also related to *the reality of denial of manhood* and the *de facto* participation of women in ANC politics at certain times it is historical in the sense of chronology, but ahistorical in failing to locate these assertions fully. This masculine idiom is also, of course, the male-dominated language of the time, not only within African discourse.

The struggle to be a man meant the struggle for dignity and the reclaiming of rights and to be treated as an adult human being. This is something that needs to be read into any analysis of ANC masculinities and femininities.

ANC masculinities

What made ANC masculinities and what was their character? This chapter argues that such influences were diverse and impacted differently on different people, depending on their own specific identities (including background prior to joining the organisation**)** and roles within the organisation as well as those identitities existing prior to or parallel to their membership of the ANC.

This chapter argues that the liberation struggle has thrown up distinct models of manhood. But these notions were as always contingent on conceptions and practices of the feminine. Notions of masculinity were essentially conditional, contested, ambiguous or contradictory and have varied over time and at any particular moment and within any particular experience.

A fairly substantial literature exists on feminism or women's struggle for gender equality within or about the ANC-led liberation movement (Walker, 1991, Wells,

1993, Bernstein, 1985, Hassim, unpub 2002, Ginwala, 1990). But the flourishing of studies on masculinity on other continents has only recently extended to the South African literature and scholarship relating to the liberation movement. (Cock, 1991). As far as I am aware, only two articles have been published dealing directly with the question of masculinities in regard to the ANC. (Erlank, 2003, Unterhalter, 2000). Otherwise, only indirect reference has been made to the subject in one chapter of a more general and pioneering collection on South African masculinities. (Morrell, 2001).

Methodologically, the argument of this chapter rests on the assumption that any attempted characterisation of masculinities and feminities within the ANC must be grounded in both formal/constitutional pronouncements as well as on practices, the latter often qualifying or diverging from the formal.

Joining the national liberation movement and the denial of manhood

The recovery of manhood looms large in the discourse of liberation in South Africa. Not only is the South African national liberation struggle suffused with imagery relating to manhood, stretching back to the periods of early resistance to colonial conquest. But there is also evidence that the national liberation movement connected in some cases with actual processes of *transition to manhood*.

Notions of initiation to manhood, used loosely, are often found in the language used and practices in various terrains of the liberation struggle. *The language of denial of manhood coexists with that of regaining manhood through the struggle or struggle-related activities*. Mongezi Radebe recalls:

> I know, for instance, people in Heilbron whom I had never thought were politically aware, and I got friendly with one and he gave me *The Struggle is My Life* by Mandela, and he said it's a good book, *it'll make me a man.* A man selling coal… I had never thought that he had been to school, and I knew him not to be in a position to read anything or write his name, but he gave me

> that book. So it was like that in townships all over. (In Frederikse, 1990, p. 158. Emphasis inserted).

This is regaining manhood at the level of discourse, as opposed to actually carrying out a specific practice. The language of transition to manhood is thereby associated with joining the struggle, becoming part of the process that would end the infantilisation of men and their regaining their place as adults.

The act of joining ANC or MK was associated in some situations with processes of attaining manhood or undertaking *rites of passage*. What is entailed in initiation is controversial with much media attention to circumcision as if that were all that initiation (which embraces a wide range of rituals) entailed. Also, there is a school of thought, which receives much media attention on radio talk shows, treating the phenomenon as static. Yet initiation entails a variety of practices and communication of values beyond the mere act of circumcision. It is often assumed to relate purely to 'traditional' notions of initiation yet it is not a fixed practice and it is not necessarily given the same meanings or understandings in all situations. (Cf e.g. Mayer, 1971). This is an under-researched topic, which is not at the centre of this thesis, yet insofar as it is raised, I was not able, in interviews and private discussions, to uncover precisely what values were communicated in all the cases that I studied. It is raised because it is important to understand how initiation or its values differed from traditional notions in the context of national liberation. (See below where some indication of differences are presented).

The interconnection between national liberation and initiation is illustrated by events in the 1960s, a period ripe for the emergence of notions of 'heroic masculinity'. This was because the banning of the ANC (and the earlier illegality of the Communist Party) created conditions where considerable danger attached to resistance. Yet the interface between masculinities and the struggle was extremely varied. In some ways it linked in the imagery it drew on, to earlier pre-Union notions and values of manhood connoting martial bravery. In other senses it connected with age-old practices, originally requiring specific *rites of passage* in order to achieve manhood. .

Peter Delius has suggested that Pedi initiation processes stressing a warrior tradition, facilitated recruitment to MK. (1996, p.129). In situations where the warrior notion of manhood was hegemonic, it certainly could be of assistance in recruitment for armed struggle. The late Zingiva Nkondo, when asked why he joined MK indicated that they (the Shangaan) were 'always ready'. He explained that he meant by this, that he was a descendant of Soshangane, one of the groupings that broke away from Shaka's Zulu empire and established the Gaza Empire in what is now Mozambique. As a descendant of this warrior tradition, Nkondo saw himself as having a predisposition towards entering a military situation, where required. (Interview 2002).

Becoming a Man through joining MK: Dinokana

Initiation arises in processes related to MK, in a more specific way than Delius reports, in the former Western Transvaal (now the North-West Province). Around the time of the Rivonia trial the community of Dinokana, as mentioned in Chapter 4, was emerging from a period of intense resistance involving both chiefs and women. Some of the chiefs in the community had sided with the women and the ANC. This patriarch/women alliance may again manifest the ambiguities already referred to, namely an assertion of a power over women, as theirs, but simultaneously a desire to avoid humiliation and powerlessness in relation to a state that could harm their wives and daughters. Rev Charles Hooper in his account of the resistance in Zeerust reports on just one of the cases, whose numbers one cannot know that there must have been, of young women being arrested for pass offences and then raped. (Hooper, 1989 [1960], 10).

As reported in Chapter 4, these chiefs had set up underground structures, which they linked, to MK and its recruitment machineries. According to Radilori John Moumakwa, who was one of between fifty and eighty boys[72] who were sent out to Bechuanaland, they were told that it was time to 'bolwa' or 'bolala', that is, it was no longer the responsibility of their fathers to provide trousers. (Interview, 2003). Certain informants claim the boys had just returned from initiation, (Personal communication, Zakes Tolo, who was also brought up in the same area, but is of a much later

[72] The approximation of the numbers relate to some of the original eighty being sent back by the then Bechuanaland authorities.

generation, 20 May 2003). According to Moumakwa's version, they were still to be initiated, in this case, through joining MK. Dr P.M. Sebate of the University of South Africa, African languages department, provides his understanding of the meaning of the term 'bolala' in this specific context:

> What 'go bolala' means here is that the boys had to go out to be initiated in the teachings of MK so that they could be men amongst men; men who would not be afraid to withstand the cold winter, the beating of the enemy, and the wrath of the forest. Having graduated as MK soldiers, these 'boys' would be able to protect their families, villages and above all their nation.
>
> I do think 'the age of 14'[mentioned by Moumakwa in interview, 2003] tells you something, 'that boys who go out for initiation are between childhood and manhood.' Normally when 'bogwera bo bolola' (initiates go out) village boys from a number of sub-courts gather at the main court (kgotlakgolo) of the village where the chief resides. It is then that the chief of the village gives an instruction that 'bogwera bo bolole' (initiates should go out). These boys will be in the forest at an area selected or chosen by the village witchdoctor (traditional healer). They will be there for the three winter months, where they will be taught work songs, war songs and hunting songs; and, that a stick thrashing can only kill an ant.
>
> Now back to our 'bolola'. In [this context] we learn that the boys were sent out at the age of fourteen, which is in line with the age at which boys go out on initiation. Secondly, it is said that fathers were no longer able to provide for these boys, so they had to 'bolola'. Remember, after initiation these boys will have qualified as 'men'. Thirdly, when boys from Dinokana went out to join MK, they were between childhood and manhood and were tasked to go out and learn 'war songs', to protect their nation, that the 'whipping they received from the white man could only kill an ant.' (E-mail, 20 May 2003).[73]

[73] In Matumo, (1993), the following entries are found:

MK may have provided elements of what was required in their transition to manhood, in teaching war songs. This can be seen in the words of the following song played on Radio Freedom:

Abasakwazi Nokupumula (They cannot Rest)

lead: Bayekeleni, sobabamba ngobunyama

chorus: Nangokuhlwa
lead: Abasalali, umkonto, mkonto wesizwe
chorus: Abasakwazi nokupumula
Umkonto uzobashaya, uzobaqeda
lead: Mabesati bayagalena
Sizofika sifuna, umkonto we sizwe
chorus: Ushona ngapha, ushona ngale,
Bayawazi

Translation:

Let them be. We will get them when it's dark./When night comes/They cannot sleep, due to the spear, the spear of the nation/They cannot rest/Our army will hit them, we will finish them/ When they try to do one thing or the other/The people's army will come/ Here now, then there-they learn of our elusive forces.) (From CD Radio Freedom, 1996)

Moumakwa refers to bolwa in this context being 'the opposite' of what it would normally be:

'*boloditse …bolotsa*, has let out, as livestock from the kraal or initiates of an initiation rite and *bolodiswe…boloditse*, have been let out, as livestock from the kraal, or initiates of an initiation rite.' (at p. 22).

In. J. Tom Brown. (1980), one finds:

Bolola… bolotse, go out of kraal of cattle, etc; set out on a journey; go on the war-path' (at p. 30)

Initiation, that's a bolwa. Now that one was opposite, now you go to join MK.

Q: Had you not been initiated?

A: No.

Q: Oh, so this was instead of initiation?

A: It's a form of initiation.

Q: It's a way of becoming a man?

A: It was a way of becoming a man.

Q: Oh, it wasn't after initiation, because your age group, age-set was going to get initiated through MK?

A: Through the MK. (Interview, 2003)[74]

Clearly the *rites of passage* in these cases relate to preparation for warfare. In the case of Dinokana, conventional *rites of passage* had been disrupted in a situation of societal stress. Similar processes have been recorded in the case of Palestinians, where experiences of youth clashing with the Israelis and being imprisoned are treated as displacing normal processes of attaining manhood. The result of youth having these encounters is that generational hierarchies were disrupted within Palestinian families and youth returning from prison were treated as men enjoying greater seniority than their own parents. (Cf Peteet, 2002).

[74] Professor William Beinart has suggested to me that In one sense, the rites of passage being transposed, being centred on one locale to a wider one is analogous to the Zulu under Shaka and Mpondo abolition of circumcision which is usually explained as breaking of local loyalty to command young men to regiments. (Personal communication, Professor W. Beinart, 11 September 2004).

In another situation, the element of secrecy attached to initiation ceremonies in the Matatiele area of former Transkei was the basis for recruitment of people to join an underground unit. The experience that had been shared as part of the same initiation group, enabled those selected to assess the suitability of others and decide which of the group should be recruited. But the secrecy, which linked them as an initiation group, was seen as a core basis for establishing themselves as an underground unit. (Interview Mzwandile Mandubu, 2004. Initiation was also a factor on Robben Island, where some 361 prisoners were circumcised. See Suttner, 2005a. According to Amos Lengisi, discussion 2005, the values communicated emphasised a specific liberatory content).

Initiation in exile

It is not clear to what extent initiation practices were implemented in exile. I have been told that many people, some as old as 40, were initiated on their return to South Africa after 1990. But in Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College, established by the ANC in Tanzania, initiation was an issue. It is reported that it was not easy for a Sotho man to have a relationship with a Xhosa woman. This was not because of ethnic animosity but because the Sotho students' might not have passed through initiation, and could be seen as amakhwenkwe, 'boys' –as males who have not yet undergone initiation are referred to in Xhosa society.' (Morrow, Maaba and Pulumani, 2004, p.107).

For those who wished to be initiated South African *ingcibis* [circumcision doctors] were available. But Dr Siphokazi Sokupa, a medical practitioner at SOMAFCO, is reported as saying that the boys were not taken to live in the bush for some time as the tradition required. It was feared that in tropical surroundings so different from the veld of the Eastern Cape, students would develop diseases like malaria. (ibid).

Such initiation, occurring under *de facto* ANC auspices, often leaves unstated what precise notions of manhood were entailed. What meanings of manhood were commended to the initiates? That boys were circumcised signifies little, for that is an operation that can occur outside of initiation. What did not seem to be probed is

whether in the conditions in which these youth found themselves, in SOMAFCO, an institution associated with the national liberation movement and a specific liberatory educational curriculum, the notions of masculinity took on connotations, which stressed martial or other values. It is by no means clear that notions of initiation within South Africa follow any one pattern. (See Mayer, 1971). What traits are commended to boys as desirable for a man in the instruction and lectures they are given before and after the circumcision may vary considerably. It is also important to note the role of women in these processes, that men do not become men without the substantial (and generally unacknowledged) role of women, something that has always been present there, but may have taken on an increased significance in the current period, due to the Aids epidemic. (Personal communication from Nomboniso Gasa, on the basis of research in Ntshingeni village, Eastern Cape, June 2004. Discussion with Dr W Serote, Maputo, January 2004).

In recent months I have leant that initiation both on Robben Island and in exile beyond whatever happened at SOMAFCO, where it occurred, tended to embody a liberatory content, a distinct conception of manhood drawing on the values of the struggle. This was the case in the initiation of Chris Hani and Sandile Sejake. (Interview, Amos Lengisi, 2005)

Manhood and the early martial tradition as inspiration to later generations

Earlier warriors

When Nelson Mandela made his two speeches from the dock in court cases in 1962 and at the Rivonia trial in 1964, he referred to the impact that tales about earlier warriors made on him. In it he depicted the tranquil existence that prevailed much of the time prior to colonial warfare. (See below where this tranquil environment appears to be related in the 19th century to men having the capacity to protect their homes and families):

> Many years ago, when I was a boy brought up in my village in the Transkei, I listened to the elders of the tribe telling stories about the good old days, before the arrival of the white man. Then our people lived peacefully, under the democratic rule of their kings and their amapakati,[75] and moved freely and confidently up and down the country without let or hindrance. Then the country was ours, in our name and right. We occupied the land, the forests, the rivers; we extracted the mineral wealth beneath the soil and all the riches of this beautiful country without let or hindrance. Then the country was ours, in our own name and right. We occupied the land, the forests, the rivers; we extracted the mineral wealth beneath the soil and all the riches of this beautiful country. We set up and operated our own government, we controlled our own armies and we organised our own trade and commerce. The elders would tell tales of the wars fought by our ancestors in defence of the fatherland, as well as the acts of valour performed by generals and soldiers during those epic days. The names of Dingane and Bambata, among the Zulus, of Hintsa, Makana, Ndlambe of the Amaxhosa, of Sekhukhuni and others in the north, were mentioned as the pride and glory of the entire African nation.
>
> I hoped and vowed then that, among the treasures that life might offer me, would be the opportunity to serve my people and make my own humble contribution to their freedom struggles. (Mandela, 1990, pp.149-15. See his almost identical statement in the Rivonia trial, at p. 161. See also Delius, 1996, pp.128-9 regarding similar upbringing of boys in Sekhukhuneland. In interview Walter Sisulu describes similar veneration of these heroic figures in his childhood. See: 2001, pp. 18, 214. And dealing with the way he taught history classes on Robben Island, at p. 164. Similar reverence for Makana emerged in Suttner interview with Sisulu, 1992).

This reverence for 19th century warriors was or was to become an important part of liberation discourse over the years that followed. All broadcasts of the ANC's illegal

[75] 'insiders', those of highest rank next to the king. Footnote in the work from which this is drawn. The word also refers more conventionally to councillors.

radio station, *Radio Freedom* would begin with references to earlier warriors of various peoples of South Africa. Illegal pamphlets would allude to this heritage. Even to this day, it is conventional in ANC celebrations, such as the presentation of the January 8 statement on the organisation's anniversary, to salute these past heroes.

This discourse established a notion of the male warrior as hero in ANC self-identity or as a model of manhood to be emulated. Such notions of masculinity remained part of Mandela's thinking in 1990, when he is quoted as referring to his military training in Algeria as having 'made me a man.' (Quoted, Cock, 1991, p. 169).

In conducting the armed struggle, cadres were encouraged to see themselves as 'picking up the spear', that had been dropped when Bambata[76] and others who had been killed after the last armed rebellion before Union, in 1906, continuing a tradition of martial heroism and resistance.

The heroes, it will be noticed are all male. Certainly women warriors existed like MaNthatisi, who as the mother of the heir to the Tlokwa led her people in war, though not against the colonists. [77] In the case of the Moorosi, as will be seen, women were prepared to fight the colonists. The exact role of women in these situations needs further examination.

One of the key figures in the heroic iconography, listed by Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu, was Makana[78], who led an attack on the garrison in Grahamstown in 1819, and was sent to Robben Island where he died trying to escape. (Roux, 1964, pp. 8-17, Mostert, 1992, pp. 426ff, 472ff, 480-1, Pringle, 1966, pp. 216ff). There are many interesting features about Makana's life, but it also raises issues of manhood. At that time a conflict existed between Ndlambe the regent of the Rarabe clan and his nephew, the heir Ngqika (called Gaika by the colonists) who was collaborating with the colonisers (and as often happened in these relationships was 'rewarded' in the end, with his own land also being seized). What is interesting in our concern with notions

[76] Also spelt Bambadha
[77] Jennifer Weir has assembled a large number of other women warriors in an unpublished project outline.
[78] Sometimes referred to as Makhanda or Makanda or Nxele, the latter meaning the left-handed one.

of masculinity and its traditional association with qualities of bravery is that in defining the areas of difference between Ndlambe and Ngqika there is repeated reference to the followers of Ndlambe *not regarding Ngqika as a man*.

When Makana surrendered to the British in order to end the warfare and plunder of Xhosa lands, a delegation of councillors approached the British and, according to the British record, used language suffused with masculinist imagery to justify their rights:

> …Our fathers were MEN; they loved their cattle; their wives and children lived upon milk; they fought for their property. They began to hate the colonists, who coveted their all, and aimed at their destruction. (Emphasis in original)
>
> Now, their kraals and our fathers' kraals were separate. The boors made commandoes on our fathers. Our fathers drove them out of the Zuurveld; and we dwelt there, because we had conquered it. There we were circumcised…
> ...
> We wish for peace; we wish to rest in our huts; we wish to get milk for our children; our wives wish to till the land. But your troops cover the plains, and swarm in the thickets, where they cannot distinguish the man from the woman, and shoot all.
>
> You want us to submit to Gaika [Ngqika]. That man's face is fair to you, but his heart is false. Leave him to himself. Make peace with us. Let him fight for himself-and *we* shall not call on you for help….But if you will still make war, you may indeed kill the last man of us-but *Gaika shall not rule over the followers of those who think him a woman.* (Pringle, 1966, pp. 285-7, referred to by Pringle as a 'manly remonstrance', at p. 287. Spelling as in original. Emphasis in final sentence inserted).

This discourse illustrates an early theme of manhood being associated with willingness to resist, willingness to defend one's land and one's people, children and womenfolk especially who were not supposed to be targets in warfare. The depiction of Ngqika as a woman was a sign for cowardice and treachery. Morality and honour

–in the norms of the society of the time-was associated with being a man. Similar association is found during the Moorosi rebellion against the British in 1879, when the British hold Chief Moorosi's son, Lehana, captive and Moorosi hesitates over rescuing him. Atmore reports:

> Moorosi was under great psychological pressure to authorise the rescuing of the prisoners before it was too late. Lehana's mother is said to have upbraided him: 'I don't produce children for the white man. You take this skirt and give me your trousers [a very short Basuto garment].'….(Atmore, 1970, p. 23. Atmore's spelling of Basotho).

Even in this process of women challenging gender roles, they accepted the notion –by reference to wearing pants- that warfare was an attribute of manhood.

Clearly, then, when Radio Freedom invoked the memory of Makana and others it was appealing to a martial and primarily masculinist tradition. But within that martial tradition, as it evolved, there were variations, with the full extent of women's role still to be uncovered and acknowledged. This chapter will argue that later periods disclose many variations in manifestations of masculinity and femininity, some diverging from notions of 'heroic masculinity', including what may be called 'heroic femininity' and others conforming to these.

(S)Heroic projects

Notions of 'heroic masculinity' have been drawn from masculinity theories and applied to the South African situation. (Cf Unterhalter, 2000. See also more generally, Whitehead, 2002, below.) While there is definitely something useful and suggestive in this approach, one needs to be extremely wary of casting notions of heroism within a monolithic model. Various individuals are regarded as heroes in the struggle and it may be that some or many have performed acts of bravery that warrant the label. But insofar as this is a characterisation applied mainly to men the evidence to be presented shows that these heroic figures had quite varied ways of playing out their masculinity and heroism. They sometimes conducted themselves in a manner

that requires modification of stereotypical notions of what constitutes a hero, in particular the tendency to distance it from expression of emotions. Consequently the degree of variation within the category of people designated as heroes means that one cannot simply use the term as having a single meaning

This is not necessarily to contest the way in which some literature does depict male heroism, as in Unterhalter's work, to be dealt with below. But that literature does not represent the only model of manhood and heroism found within the ANC-led national liberation movement. Also, as indicated, the 'heroic project' was never confined to men.

Underground work and 'Revolutionary masculinity'.

Underground work may nevertheless have been mainly the work of men, who left behind women to look after children and other household responsibilities. In this respect it conforms to or is depicted as conforming to a pattern of 'heroic masculinity', where the man is assumed to 'make history' and the woman's domain is the private sphere. (See Whitehead, 2002, pp. 114, 117ff and Chapter 5 generally). Thus Ben Turok writes that after he had placed a bomb at the Rissik Street post office:

> Mary [his wife] asked me what the matter was and I was not able to tell her, but she knew that I was on edge. When she read the newspaper the next day, everything became clear. She was rather resentful at not having known about my MK role and we discussed this. *Certainly, she had to pay as high a price as I did. She had previously been left with the children while I was in hiding and she had to face the police when I was away. But our security demanded this kind of balance and she was bound to accept the arrangement. (2003,p. 130. Emphasis inserted)*

And again:

> Deeply steeped in these [revolutionary] texts, I now saw myself as a typical communist revolutionary. I held senior posts in the ANC[79], SACP and MK. My personal life was now overtaken by my being swamped with work; I was constantly in meetings. Mary had also become fully integrated into the work of the COD as chair of the Johannesburg branch *while trying hard not to neglect the boys*….(2003, p. 139. Italics inserted).

In other words, Ben Turok's job was to concentrate on revolutionary work. Mary could be involved, but without neglecting the children. The assumptions, which need to be problematised, appear to conform to the masculinist view that man has been assumed to 'make history'. (O'Brien, 1983).

This consigning of women to the private domain is part of a heroic male mythology. (Whitehead, 2002, pp. 117ff). Stephen Whitehead writes:

> Despite its inherent flaws, the image and mythology of man leaving home to engage in a heroic project maintains a resounding presence in most societies. We see the mythology at work in the notion of'man as hunter'; the adult male subjecting himself to the rigours and dangers of the wild, far removed from the comfort of (female) home…. Yet despite their absence from the main scene, which such notions suggest, women play a key role in the imagery of 'man in his world'…Woman is the Other that necessarily exists in order to allow man to assume his central role. Indeed, at a practical level, women are usually the ones who make the necessary sacrifices of time and energy in order to supply the means and space for men to exercise their heroic project. (2002, p. 119.)
>
> …In the 'real world', the dilemmas of the heroic male project, together with their irresistible character, are caught in the timeless images of men trudging resolutely off to war, waved off by their womenfolk. (2002, p. 120.).

One of the ways in which one can immediately identify a departure from this model in the South African situation is in the mode of departure. There generally was no

[79] For the record, whites could not be members of the ANC until the 1969 Morogoro conference allowed membership to those based outside the country.

'goodbye' to loved ones. Cadres simply left secretly. Also, the model does not 'fit' in that there were women who were themselves soldiers or underground workers – themselves part of a heroic project. (See below).

Elaine Unterhalter, in a study focusing mainly on South African 'struggle autobiographies' identifies a common construction of masculinity in texts across race, class and generation

> The work of heroic masculinity …is work where men cross boundaries of race, class, ethnicity and age, trusting different men (and some women) with their lives, generally despite the effects of socialisation, and the strictures of the state which warn against such a course….
>
> Heroism and adventure is work lived exclusively in the public realm, which must be supported unquestioningly by the private sphere (mothers, wives, girlfriends, children). …In men's autobiographical writing the support provided by a feminised portrayal of 'home' is always complemented by male camaraderie, deep bonds of friendship formed in adversity. Side by side with heroic autonomy, is deep loyalty generally to other men. If there is a choice between the private (feminine) world and the public sphere of heroism and adventure, the choice is always made by the author for the public world, backed up by reference to history. The sacrifice of 'the soft world' of feminised relationships is justified in terms of the 'hard achievements' of heroism and male camaraderie. (2000, pp. 166-167).

It may be that this accurately conveys the content or one of the implications of these works. But when one looks beyond these writings one encounters a complexity that means that this notion of male heroism/female home making cannot reflexively be applied to the South African struggle. There were women, like Ray Alexander, who joined the Communist underground, while her husband Jack Simons refused, to some extent reversing conventional domestic responsibilities. (Cf Alexander Simons, 2004). This replicated a pattern in their marriage, where Jack, a leading theorist,

would drive Ray to her trade union negotiations and wait in the car having to content himself with his books, flask and sandwiches. (Alexander Simons, 2004).

Unterhalter's characterisation is also immediately open to qualification by different conceptions of manhood found in the ANC, some of which are referred to below. Apart from Simons there were many others who do not conform to the role on which Unterhalter's argument is built. There were women as well as men in MK and the broader underground, as will be shown below. In some cases these women had men under their command. (See below and interview, Faith Radebe, 2004.) There were many such women, including Thenjiwe Mtintso, Jackie Molefe [Sedibe], Thandi Modise, and Dipuo Mvelase.

Diverse models of manhood

There has been no study of the notion of models of manhood within the ANC. Yet it is a question that deserves interrogation since it may be one of the bases on which gender equality will have to be grounded in the future. Many people may have represented, through their conduct, models that were commended to others, much as the Cubans say 'be like Che′ [Guevara]'. It may be that many of these conform to macho militaristic images. Military activities themselves may encourage traditional notions of manhood.

But one of these individuals, who was one of the most famous revolutionary models, did not conform to 'traditional' or contemporary 'hegemonic' notions of manhood. This was Vuyisile Mini. He was the composer of revolutionary songs, including the famous one *Nants' indod' emnyama*…/Watch out Verwoerd/Vorster here comes the black man.'

Mini was a South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) leader, early MK soldier and Communist. He died on the gallows, convicted on false evidence. Cadres used to be told stories about Mini being offered his freedom on death row, in exchange for supplying information about his comrades, and refusing. In the tradition of freedom fighters 'holding their heads high', Mini is said to have walked his last

steps to the gallows singing some of the many freedom songs he had composed. (Luckhardt and Wall, 1980, pp. 177-8, who refer to Mini as a 'musician and poet of exceptional quality'. See also 'Vuyisile Mini'.n.d. and Vuyisile Mini. Worker, Poet and Martyr for Freedom'n.d.).

These are the qualities often associated with being a revolutionary and in particular with 'revolutionary masculinity', found especially in someone like Che′ Guevara or Chris Hani (MK and Communist Party leader, assassinated in 1993). The oral and written tradition amongst the members of a liberation movement tends to create a model of what is revolutionary conduct and which people are exemplars of such conduct. Clearly Mini has been projected as representing such a model.

But there was also a side to Mini that is not so easily assimilated into this convention (just as there are elements of Chris Hani's *persona*, which it will be shown, raise similar ambiguities in accommodating such a label).

Sobizana Mngqikana, as a member of the Border Regional Command Secretariat was instructed, after the formation of MK in 1961, to write to comrades in Port Elizabeth demanding a report back on the ANC conference that had been held in Lobatse in 1962. In some ways this mode of operating was a hangover from the earlier period of constitutionalism, requiring normal forms of accountability, without sensitivity to the changed conditions demanded by illegality. Sobizana Mngqikana reports:

> In response to our demand a delegation comprising Vuyisile Mini and [Caleb] Mayekiso[80] came to East London. The meeting lasted from 8 p.m. to 5 a.m. the following day. The four-room house in which we held the meeting was discreetly guarded and secured by MK cadres. Before we could delve into the main part of the meeting, Mini, in tears, expressed dismay at the uncomradely letter we had written. 'Did we know the implications of the resort to armed struggle', he asked? 'Did we appreciate that blood is going to flow and that lives are going to be lost'? At some stage he couldn't continue as tears rolled down his cheeks. Mayekiso, I remember, mildly reproached him: 'Vuyisile,

[80] He was also to die after torture in police detention.

> Vuyisile stop this, stop this!' After a while he cooled down and proceeded to give a report of the Lobatse conference and the expectations that the leadership had of us…. (Interview, 2001).

Here a revolutionary hero conducted himself in a manner that did not conform to conventional notions of manhood, where men are not supposed to shed tears, that being the role of wives and widows. It contradicts the idea found in much masculinist discourse that the rational is the prerogative of males and the emotional that of females. (See Whitehead, 2002, Chapter 5, esp at p. 179, Connell, 1995, pp. 39, 164-5, 187). In other words, MK soldiers, and members of the ANC are provided here with a model of manhood that may disrupt conventional military expectations of what manhood entails.

The model presented by Chris Hani is especially important because in some ways he has attained heroic status in some ways equivalent to that of Che′ Guevara in the Cuban struggle. This is not to suggest that all who admire him emulate all elements of his personal conduct nor that Hani was a saint. But there is a complexity in Hani's life and a definite break from textbook notions of the male hero, that need to be factored into any account of masculinities within the ANC. This will be illustrated in the sections that follow.

Conventional macho conduct does not seem to have been uniform, although the evidence remains limited. Faith Radebe's gives an account of male soldiers' longing to have children visit the camp in Angola. She reports how they continually asked that Angolan women be allowed to visit the camp with their children so that they could have children around them.

In the same camp men objected to women who were pregnant being sent to Tanzania to have their babies, because facilities were only available there. They wanted the women to give birth in the camp and they wanted the facilities to be provided there. They longed for elements of 'normality' in their lives, represented in this case by the presence of babies. (Interview 2004).

Women in MK: The 'heroic female project' and surrounding controversy

The role of women in national liberation movements appears to be controversial in very many struggles, as is their place after liberation. It is common for feminist writers to assume as proven that nationalist movements, while benefiting from the involvement of women in varying ways during a liberation struggle, betray their interests in the aftermath of liberation. (E.g. Ranchod-Nilsson, 2000, 168). This viewpoint tends to be depicted as an iron law of history from which there has been no deviation. While the character of women's participation has always been controversial, the reasons have varied over time. But the main concerns have related to:

a. Whether they have been involved or the extent to which women participated in the liberation struggle

b. The level of their activity if any and the prestige or otherwise attached to the activities in which they participated, as opposed to those involving men. What was the character of the political/military work that they did, whether or not one attaches importance to this, whether or not it was 'heroic' and how wide the range of activities are that come within this characterisation?

c. The extent to which modes of women's involvement has tended to reproduce patriarchal relations found in the country at large (Cf Wells, 1993, but contrast with Radebe interview, 2004).

d. The relationship between women's involvement and feminism, whether the way in which women have entered political struggles has been compatible with feminist activity or represented a variety of forms that cannot be so classified. (Cf e.g.unpub Wells, 1991). This relates to wider theoretical questions- whether there is one feminism or whether one should be speaking of feminisms and also patriarchy or patriarchies

Although the focus of this chapter is on underground activities, it does relate to these controversial questions, but in the specific way in which they are manifested within the period of underground.

Ambiguities and problems in women's involvement in the underground?

Existing historiography has from an early stage tended to dismiss or downplay the involvement of women in political struggle. They have tended to enter as 'mothers', or to support the role of men, or to perform conventional female roles.

Much of this commentary operates with narrow conceptions of what a feminist role can be, as if there can be only one meaning attached to the word. At the same time there tends to be an assumption that contexts do not alter or modify the meaning of an outwardly similar relationship. This applies particularly to notions of patriarchy and motherhood. These are treated as static and in the case of women, do not take adequate account of the reasons why women's first point of entry into the political arena is often as mothers. What may be the dominant view in South African feminist scholarship tends to fail to recognise that male protection of this maternal status is not merely a 'proprietary' right over a wife, but also an attempt to provide protection against real and ever-present dangers specific to apartheid repression, especially manifested when in police custody.

The critics also do not place sufficient weight on the importance of women entering the public domain *per se.* (See Wells, 1991, 1993). This it is claimed in traditional masculinist texts is the area where men are supposed to realise themselves as men just as women are supposed to find fulfilment in the private sphere. (See Whitehead, 2002).

In the context of underground struggle, considered within the wide spectrum of the definition already provided, it is impossible to enumerate the women who

participated. The problem with providing statistics for the underground as a whole, or even for armed struggle as a whole is that, as indicated, there are both formal and informal contributions, the latter often being as important for success of an operation as the former. This relates to the definition of 'combat' discussed below as well as the characterisation of a variety of logistical supports, whose significance tends to be unacknowledged.

According to Jacklyn Cock (1991,162) a dramatic increase in the numbers of women soldiers occurred after 1976. By 1989 they made up approximately 20 per cent of MK cadres. Whether these figures are accurate or not depends on one's basis for counting. Personally, I believe they can only embrace those formally inducted, whereas MK activities in fact involved far more people, who do not appear on any official list. It is argued below that the activity of women is more likely to be 'invisible' or unacknowledged than that of men when such calculations are made.

There is no doubt that women were present in significant numbers in the overall military effort involving MK, albeit generally as a minority. They may have been formally recruited members of underground units or MK, but they also included those participating at a less formal level, performing a variety of tasks more or less close to the actual military action. But that presence was suffused with ambiguities. The ambiguity of the roles of women related to the often-varied responses of the men they worked with or under whose command they fell (though many women were also commanders, as indicated).

In a male-dominated 'world' men overwhelmingly set the conditions within which women's participation in the ANC underground was determined, the extent to which it was limited or enhanced, encouraged or discouraged. One cannot make bald and unqualified assertions since the situation was often complicated and contradictory and the responses of both men and women were by no means uniform. Also, the period of women's involvement in the underground was one where the gender consciousness of the ANC as an organisation was gradually developing. The early entry and modes of relating to women in MK could not be grounded firmly in constitutional texts and policies of the organisation. The place of women was gradually enhanced and can

now be defended in the light of the ANC having embraced gender equality and promoting it in a democratic South African constitution.

Women embarking on 'heroic projects', working underground and going to war with the apartheid regime, nevertheless substantially disrupt the notion of a 'heroic male project'. 'We lived in the same camps. The women did exactly the same training as the men. Exactly the same. Drilling, handling weapons, topography…everything.' (Gwendoline Sello, in Bernstein, 1994, p. 149. See also Cock, 1991, esp Chapter 5, von den Steinen, unpub 1999, pp. 179,190-191, Jacqueline Molefe in Cock, 1991, p. 164).

Experiences, impressions and reflections on this period, however, convey more than one message and interpretation. Some women felt their male comrades did not take them seriously. Katleho Moloi reported that the men did not take the women seriously or undermined them or considered them a threat. (In Bernstein, 1994, p. 183.)

Referring to 'male camaraderie', although not using those words, Moloi notes, 'And you could see some of the things that you're not involved in. It's only men, who stand there whispering. And then they're gone; and you start asking yourself, 'Why am I being left out?' (ibid. See also von den Steinen, unpub 1999, pp. 191-2. See also Modise in Curnow, 2000, 39). Given the continued persistence of gender stereotypes, women had to struggle for full recognition as soldiers and were known as *umzana*, which is a derogatory pet name meaning 'delicate thing'. This affected the type of work women were given. (Mtintso, 1992, 18).

Often an initial assumption was made that women did not come to join MK or go into exile in their own right, but to follow a lover. Thus Shirley Gunn was asked 'whom are you following?' (Interview, 2005).

But others report on more positive experiences (See Thandi Modise, in Cock, 1991, p. 151 for a different statement of experience.)[81] Jacqueline Molefe, now General

[81] Modise's account in Curnow (2000) is less positive.

Sedibe, claims that women earned, through their actions, the respect of men in the army and were treated as equals. (See Cock, 1991, p. 163.) Faith Radebe also did not experience men as undermining her or other female members of MK and in fact considered them supportive and pleased to have women as leaders in particular situations. Interview, 2004).

It appears that some of the leaders and commanders, especially Chris Hani were intolerant of any practices undermining of women. (See Interview with Dipuo Mvelase, 1993. See also quotation from Binda, unpub, 2003, in Chapter 5).

Settling down as women soldiers: Stressful situations related to their numbers and intimate relations

There were also problems in women forming intimate relations with men. (von den Steinen, unpub 1999, pp. 187ff). Many women formed relationships with senior figures. It is sometimes suggested that this related to the capacity of these men to provide more of the good things of life in a harsh environment. It is also said to be because the young women knowing only South Africa were meeting men who were conversant with many parts of the world and more mature than trainees of a similar age group to the young women. (von den Steinen, unpub 1999, pp. 196-7).

The relatively small numbers of women were far outnumbered by the men. Tension was inevitable because it was the other trainees with whom the women worked in their training and not the commanders with whom they had formed relationships. This often made it more difficult for male/female relations to be amicable. Some commissars, while admitting the right of these women to form such relationships advised them to be discreet and treat the relationships as private. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999). It was considered desirable in order to respect the feelings of those not in relationships to conduct romantic affairs in 'semi-underground' fashion. (Interview, Faith Radebe, 2004).

Chris Hani took steps to prevent senior officials taking advantage of the vulnerability of new MK women. Dipuo Mvelase reports:

> There was a situation where in our army there were very few women and they come into the army, officers will jump for them, all of them and use, or misuse their powers and the authority that they have to get women. That led to some nasty situations. Comrade Chris established this Rule 25-it was a new rule - that no officer will have a relationship with a new recruit because it is an unfair relationship. A recruit needs to be given a chance to know our army so that they can make a decision about these things and understand …things because when they come in people use their authority and the difficulties of training as a soldier, to start relationships with these women and the rule was a problem with officers. But not that they could defy Comrade Chris. Though, I mean, people complained about it. But it was observed.

Mvelase claimed that Chris Hani never 'left the camp without dealing with the gender issue'. There was no time that 'Comrade Chris left the camps without sensitising all of us about the issue and taking it up seriously, not only with the soldiers but with officers also, with the administration.' (Interview, 1993)

But even if a relationship were established under these difficult conditions, the demands of conducting struggle often placed it under great strain through deployment of lovers/spouses in quite separate places, sometimes leading to their breaking up**.**

Faith Radebe fully accepts the need in a revolution for operational considerations to take priority in the final analysis. But this placed intolerable strain on her marriage. Husband and wife were not able to spend time together or sufficient time together at important moments of personal crisis or illness. She makes clear that in her case this did not feed into already existing weaknesses in her marriage, but rather the demands of the national liberation movement made it impossible to conduct the relationship in a manner that could make it sustainable. But that is not intended, by Radebe, to put blame on or repudiate the revolution or the liberation movement. It is a reality that

Radebe sees as regrettable but one of the necessary or inevitable fallouts from a revolution. (Interview, 2004).[82] (For other examples, see Bernstein, 1994).

Abuses

Sexual harassment or abuse or rape undoubtedly occurred and these were sometimes hard to report or have recourse to adequate mechanisms for protection. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 198-200, Modise in Curnow, 2000, at p. 38[83]). The exact extent of this phenomenon does not appear to be quantifiable on the information currently available. While some women report harassment, others never encountered it. (E.g. Radebe interview, 2004).

Again, this is one of those subjects, which, as in all situations tends to be under-reported, where it occurs. Also, many who may have experienced such abuse would be more likely to relate it to a woman than to a male researcher. And loyalty to the ANC may have made some people reluctant to voice certain experiences. What is presented here does not pretend to be more than an indication of a phenomenon which is not unexpected, but on which adequate evidence is not yet available.

Nevertheless, without any evidence one can posit a hypothetical situation conducive to abuse. If a woman were raped in an underground unit, would she be free to access normal legal remedies? If she were to do so, presumably the entire unit, innocent and guilty alike would be exposed to the police. This hypothetical situation may have been actual experiences in some cases. I do not know and have not heard of any such case. It does however raise conflicting moral questions: the need to safeguard the security of the unit as a whole and the right of a woman to protection from abuse. But this is in a situation where the means of protection may mean exposing a

[82] Obviously when one is outside of such a struggle and does not make the choices Radebe made one can adopt various moral positions towards the break up of a marriage. But Radebe had made these choices and she recognises this very unfortunate price that resulted from her decisions.

[83] Modise's earlier interview with Jacklyn Cock (1991) does not mention harassment and is a glowing account of men's respect for women soldiers. I am not inclined to treat this contradiction as a serious problem. The later version is more likely to represent Modise's experience. Having just emerged from prison and instilled in tight military discipline, when she did the first interview, Modise may well have suppressed negative experiences. Given the elapse of a decade before the Curnow interview, she may have felt greater freedom to speak of what she previously concealed. This is not to say that every experience of Modise was replicated for others or that her interpretation of her experience must be accepted in every respect.

revolutionary unit as a whole. Can one find a way of avoiding pitting one principle or right against the other?

Women, pregnancy and children

If sexual relations resulted in pregnancy it tended to lead to the woman's political activities being prejudiced much more severely than those of the man, since she was generally sent to Tanzania. (von den Steinen, 1999, 202ff). Because of the difficult conditions there, this may have been interpreted not only as a way of managing pregnancy, but punitive.

But women insisted on being able to continue as fighters or taking part fully in other activities and appear to have won these rights, insofar as childcare facilities were provided in Tanzania, able to house the children in the event of the mother being posted elsewhere. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 205ff).

Not all women left their children behind. Some were able to take them with on the assignments on which they embarked, including sometimes when they worked underground inside the country. In some cases, having a child provided a better cover for such operations in that a mother with a child appeared less likely to generate suspicion of being a trained MK soldier. (von den Steinen, unpub, 206. Interview with Gunn, 2005, who took her baby with her when conducting reconnaissance.)

Deployment of women

Some statements in reports to ANC conferences and authors suggest that women were not adequately deployed and that the organisation was reluctant to place them in dangerous situations, especially in combat. (von den Steinen, unpub 1999[84], Cock, 1991, see below, Lyons and Israel, 1999). The evidence by no means completely

[84] Citing Report of Commission on Military Training, Improvement of Skills and Deployment, preparatory papers for Kabwe conference, 1985, von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 182. See also 'December Sixteen and Our People's War', (1985) in the *Voice of Women*, cited by von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, 181.

supports this view and may, instead, be based on a flawed conception of what is meant by 'combat' or dangerous work. Von den Steinen refers to serving in the immediate front line states 'at best as couriers or in communication inside the country', as apparently less dangerous work. Likewise, Lyons and Israel, discussing mainly Zimbabwe write in an article, expressing views in line with the concerns raised by Cock (1991):

> In contrast to the glorification of women's role as combatants, some women have portrayed their role in a different manner. In several interviews with Tanya Lyons, women discussed how they mainly carried weapons and ammunition across the borders- 'an inglorious but necessary task'. For example, Maria stated that: 'One of the important roles that was played by female ex-combatants was in the transportation of ammunition between Mozambique and Zimbabwe.' (Lyons and Israel, 1999, p. 7)

But this *was* dangerous and indeed essential work and generally part of the important preparation prior to crucial operations. It may have been that in some situations those better suited to certain work in the sense of being less likely to attract attention to what they were doing, would be male and in others female. But it is important that we do not fetishise a narrow conception of combat as meaning direct physical fighting.

It needs to be understood as entailing a number of components, including planning, reconnaissance and a variety of other forms of preparation and logistical support. Indeed, *sometimes where women performed a conventional role as mothers providing for 'sons' in feeding them, they were not merely perpetuating traditional female roles, but an essential element of the success of a military operation*. What Irene Staunton writes of the Zimbabwean liberation war has wider application:

> These women, the mothers, were both victims and actors. Throughout the war, over and over again, they fed and protected the freedom fighters and they risked their lives to do so. This they know and it is a fact of which they are proud. 'The men were around, but they only used to say, 'Hurry up [with the food] before the soldiers come and beat you up!' They regarded the *vakomana* [the

> boys, i.e. the freedom fighters] as their children, everybody's children, with needs, which they as women, as mothers, had a responsibility to meet. (Staunton, 1990, pp.xi-xii. Because I did not consciously seek out this evidence at the time of the interviews it forms only a partial aspect of what I have recorded).

Not precisely analogous situations are recorded where women provide shelter and food in South African situations in the early MK activities of Billy Nair (interview, 2003), and the Communist underground work of Ahmed Kathrada (interview, 2003). As mentioned in Chapter 3, the hospitality of the Indian community was a big feature in the reconstitution of the Communist Party underground. Nat Serache was provided with food and shelter by maternal figures when entering former Bophuthatswana for reconnaissance with a view to blowing up the 'national stadium'. Although not elaborated, it is similar in character to the Staunton quotation. (Interview, Serache, 2002). Amos Lengisi cites many cases where his mission was made possible in the late 60s through women providing food and shelter. (Interview, 2005).

In other words, the same phenomenon- a woman putting food on the table, as a mother, has more than one meaning. This again illustrates the need in explaining gendered relationships to move away from a 'one size fits all' notion and to accept that there are feminisms and patriarchies, that is, that these concepts may have quite different connotations in various situations. We cannot simply ascribe to all of these contexts the same meaning, that women are cast in a specific role where they serve the needs of their menfolk. Where a woman gives a meal to a soldier or provides shelter for the night before a battle, it means that the conventional maternal role is simultaneously a key element of the war effort.

From the earliest days of reconstituting the ANC underground and assisting MK soldiers returning to Natal, women like Dorothy Nyembe's assistance in the late 1960s was as essential to their activities as the weapons they carried. She provided shelter; she hid Linus Dlamini and provided food for him in the course of his performing his mission as one of the early MK soldiers infiltrated by sea, from Dar-es-Salaam to Durban. (Houston, 2004, pp.641ff, Interview, L Dlamini, 2005).

Totsie Memela, was a MK cadre, a lot of whose work was in reconnaissance, the type of activity described as less 'glorious'. Yet what she did appears to have been just as dangerous as the actual infiltration of the *Vula* group for which she prepared, having to ensure that every point at which they entered, and that every place where they would stay was safe. In so doing she had to experience the danger or otherwise of the various places of entry and shelter before the group entered. (Interview, 2003.)

In Totsie Memela's developing role one sees how a MK woman gradually grew in skills, responsibilities and confidence. Her work entailed entering the country and included smuggling in arms, in false bottoms and within the doors of cars, and placing these in DLBs[85] where they could be picked up by fighters. Memela describes how her expertise developed:

> And as time went on I had gone …for training in Angola, and when I came back then I was able to go and actually prepare DLBs, actually put guns and be able now to write maps for people to be able to come and pick that up. Pick those things up and know more about DLBs and how do you make sure, where do you put the information for people to know where the dropping has been. How do you make sure that you've put the signs so that they can be able to see where you've actually dropped the guns? And some of the times I would get specific people that I'd been told to go and give the material to. I would have to make sure that I have cleared my route, I understand what's going on to make sure that I don't get arrested, and later on starting actually infiltrating people, comrades, from outside. (Interview, 2003)

According to Memela, 'We'd go to the North and we'd drop material'. This often entailed Memela herself finding a suitable spot for Dead Letter Boxes during the day and digging in the evenings on farms, and ensuring that the signage [the way of identifying its location] was sufficiently simple for soldiers to be able to find the materiel. There had to be precise timing for picking up the weaponry and no need for compasses or complicated methods to find the Dead Letter Box. Memela grew in MK:

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[85] See definition in Chapter 1 but in addition one can speak of a place where you hide arms or other dangerous items. It is placed in a location that can be identified by other individuals who know that the DLB is being created. It is emptied without there being any contact between the person (s) who created the DLB and those who access it. So a DLB is a place of storage, which avoids any form of contact between the cadres using the weaponry and the cadre(s) who placed them there. That is the type of security required, knowing as little as possible of other individuals, if missions are to succeed

> I kept on graduating in terms of the responsibilities…but the bulk of the time my role was infiltration, which started from a simple letter and later on I was now infiltrating or taking people outside the country, groups of people. At the time, for example, when in Natal, there was quite a bit of violence, I used to take out students and I would come inside. And I was coming into the country illegally [initially she used to do ANC work while entering legally]. I would come into the country…make the connections and …take out these groups…because I had quite a huge network in Swaziland. And then I would take them to …safe houses and …send them through to Mozambique for all sorts of different things, for example Bheki Cele [MK cadre, now KZN MEC). (Interview, 2003).

Sometimes Memela had to take out leadership figures, like Ebrahim Ismail Ebrahim, when the situation became hot for him; sometimes she had to bring in people like Mac Maharaj or Siphiwe Nyanda. In every case, routes had to be checked, knowing patterns of road blocks and having information should these change. Legends had to be developed to explain the presence of individuals in parts of the route, should they be discovered. Means of communication were required to know whether or not they had arrived safely.

Much of the combat experience of most MK soldiers occurred in Angola, fighting UNITA[86] or protecting camps against SADF bombings. In many of the Angolan campaigns women were in the forefront of armed combat. (Bernstein, 1994). In one such case, Wally Serote relates a situation where a group was ambushed and a woman soldier turned an anti-aircraft gun into an artillery weapon against UNITA covering the retreat of her comrades, and sacrificing her own life (conversation with Serote, January 2004, Maputo).

This is not to suggest that the tendency to deploy women in traditional female roles, as typists and clerks was not prevalent. But there were important exceptions to this pattern and there were a fairly substantial number of women engaged in dangerous work and combat, and not all sections of the predominantly male leadership accepted restrictions on deployment to 'more dangerous work' (See below).

[86] A movement supported by the apartheid regime and competing with the ruling Angolan liberation movement.

Chris Hani played an important role in challenging tendencies to confine the role of women to stereotypical non-military activities:

> In our army we had a situation, when we came in, women were deployed mainly in… communications, in the medi-corps or in the offices. Comrade Chris challenged that. We get the same training but we are deployed differently. It is unacceptable for the people's army. Women should be deployed anywhere they are trained for and he used to be the key person in trying to get women to come into the country [as guerrillas] because his view was we are all trained for combat duties but women tend to get involved in combat- related duties, not in combat itself though they get the same training as men. (Interview, Dipuo Mvelase, 1993).

However, Mtintso, albeit in a brief allusion to attitudes, which appeared to infantilise women soldiers, indicates the uneven character of this gender consciousness at the time (1992,18. See also quotations above). It should be recalled that feminism was still a contentious doctrine within the ANC and notions of gender equality were only gradually emerging.

Jacklyn Cock correctly questions the notion of combat that is often used in order to assess the involvement of women:

> [W]omen have not generally been used in combat roles, as that is conventionally defined to mean direct, hand-to –hand fighting in confrontation with the enemy. As a guerrilla army, MK has not engaged in much of this kind of conventional combat, but the exclusion of women from combat may be significant given that the experience and tradition of actual combat with the enemy is an important ingredient in MK's prestige.
>
> No women combatants are mentioned by name in the NEC's statement delivered by Tambo on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of MK. …. The exclusion of women from traditional combat means that no woman participated directly in the famous MK actions that are now the subject of myth in the townships-actions such as the 1967 Wankie campaign….Women

were also generally excluded from combat roles in Angola, where MK soldiers gained battlefield experience and fought against Unita[87]. Nor were women directly involved in any of the really spectacular MK missions such as the attack on Sasol in June 1980, or the Goch Street shootout led by Solomon Mahlangu. The word 'directly' is important here, because women were extensively deployed as couriers and in surveillance and reconnaissance, so they contributed indirectly to these actions. Furthermore, if 'combat' is redefined to mean exposure to danger, then acts of arson and sabotage performed by women MK cadres are part of 'combat'. (At 165. See also at 166).

Cock concludes by challenging the definition of combat used in a more general sense:

> This is true in a conventional war because of changes in military technology, and it is also true of a revolutionary war that does not involve direct confrontation and where the boundaries between 'front' and 'rear' cannot be sharply demarcated. There is no doubt that women have played an important and courageous part in MK activities. Undoubtedly the nature of the struggle and the breakdown of normal male-female roles encouraged *many women to discover new capacities within themselves.* They formed a complex web of support that sustained combatants in many ways; they provided much of the infrastructure of resistance-they acted as couriers, they provided intelligence and refuge…. (Cock, 1991, p. 167. Emphasis inserted).

We have already seen that Totsie Memela grew in experience as a soldier, taking on more and more dangerous tasks. Faith Radebe also felt a sense of empowerment in the positive reaction to her being a commander. Echoing Cock, she felt that the situation enabled her to discover qualities, which she did not know she possessed:

[87] Some of Cock's evidence qualifies this. My evidence is that whether intended or not, women were involved in fighting UNITA, as indicated in Serote's experience cited above. See also Bernstein, 1994.

> I think they [the men] loved it…You know how women are? Women are good managers in terms that they are, … team workers. I think *because of those skills, which I didn't even know that I've got….* (Emphasis inserted).

Cock also refers to partly mythological images of female fighters, as well as actual cases of MK women guerrillas crossing the border for combat. 'In June 1988 there were two separate crossings of MK guerrillas, including three women from Swaziland. A woman was among those shot, allegedly by the notorious hit –squad commander Captain Eugene de Kock.' (Cock, 1991, 167), which tends to indicate that the extent and nature of deployment needs further research. (ibid). It should be mentioned that mythology is often just as important in regard to MK as actual performance or in this case, the actual presence of a particular category of soldier. The inspiration of a popular army like MK, its impact on popular imagination may have been far greater than the actual scale of the attacks that it executed. That there was a belief that women were deployed in a particular place may well have inspired others to take action themselves.

Masculinisation of women as the price of working in MK and underground generally?

Jackie Cock observes that some women felt that the wearing of military fatigues led to their losing their femininity. She refers to the SADF maintaining a hierarchical ideology of gender roles and cultivating a subordinate and decorative notion of femininity. On the other hand, she cites one informant as finding irksome 'the egalitarian ideology of MK [which] sometimes involved a denial of femininity' (Cock, 1991, 168).

Sometimes when women did what was required to succeed in the army, they claimed they evoked resentment from some of the men. This was by no means a universal experience. In fact, as Cock and my own research has shown, the experiences of women were not one and the same. Different women wanted to assert themselves or found they had to assert themselves differently in order to succeed in MK. Different

women had different ways of claiming or alternatively refusing to assert their femininity, as they understood**.**

It seems that many women enjoyed week-ends when they could wear conventional clothes and affirm their being women in a way that was akin to the way they may have wanted to do in 'normal life', and not be purely soldiers. Wally Serote describes an image he has in a camp, where Thenjiwe Mtintso emerged from her tent wearing a mini-skirt, with a pistol in her belt. Her beauty was admired, a beauty that was part of the normal life for which they longed. (Conversation with Wally Serote, 2004)

This raises a number of interesting questions. Did women generally, often or sometimes have to pay a price in joining MK, in terms of contesting their right to be women- as they saw it- as well as soldiers? Or did they have to suppress elements of their conceptions of their own femininity in order to be acceptable? In other words, was there a 'masculinisation' of women, the adoption of modes of behaviour that conformed to a militarised conception of masculinity in order to win acceptance?

There is nothing unusual about such a phenomenon, that women might under certain circumstances become 'masculinised'. Connell writes:

> Unless we subside into defining masculinity as equivalent to men, we must acknowledge that sometimes masculine conduct or masculine identity goes together with a female body. It is actually very common for a (biological) man to have elements of 'feminine' identity, desire and patterns of conduct….. (2000,pp. 16-17).

A contribution to an *Encyclopedia of Feminist Theories*, likewise states

> [M]asculinity does not only have to do with men. From the woman who is simply assertive, strong and self-confident to the woman who explicitly identifies as butch, to defy the boundaries imposed by femininity is to be deemed 'masculine'….Excursions into 'masculinity' by women would not be socially frowned upon were they not recognised to be claims on social power. (Code, 2000, p. 324).

The quotations speak to at least two issues. The first is that even if feminism and notions of gender equality were consolidating within the ANC, increasingly over the years of illegality, there obviously would remain gaps between the consciousnesses of various people. To this day norms of gender equality are unevenly diffused within the ANC and the society at large. That much is well known. Consequently, many men when seeing women succeed in the military would have perceived this as a claim on 'social power' within a terrain that they regarded as a male preserve. This would consequently provoke some form of antagonism.

Another manifestation of antagonism to women entering this terrain is that when women played roles that were not conventionally designated as female –by illegal action in the struggle, they were depicted in the case of white cadres as misfits. This was how Barbara Hogan and Marion Sparg were portrayed by media and judicial authorities. On their arrest both were depicted in newspapers as not succeeding in conventional ways, with nasty references to their being overweight.

In other words, because the idea of a white woman identifying herself fully with the cause of the oppressed black people of South Africa was in itself abhorrent, identification as an underground worker and especially as a trained soldier, in the case of Sparg, was particularly repugnant to the white male view of what should constitute femininity. Consequently, the only way of reconciling what was irreconcilable in their understanding was to deny their femininity.

Masculinisation of female soldiers or Multifaceted identities?

Returning to the earlier question of whether the price of joining MK or working underground meant the 'masculinisation' of women, one is asking a question that can

be answered on one level through a survey of how various women perceived their experience. Unfortunately that degree of access is impossible to attain. One cannot base one's answer on that type of evidence.

However, one can address the question in another way and that is to assert the reality that all people have multiple identities. Even if one is a soldier one does not cease to be whatever else may constitute one's identity, even if elements of that may be repressed or under-represented in specific situations. A good example of this quality, comes from another struggle in a photograph in a book by Margaret Randall. It depicts a 16-year-old Sandinista woman soldier. In military uniform, there is a rifle on her shoulder, she wears a huge cross round her neck and in her shirt pocket there is a pen and a nail file. The caption reads: '"Somewhere in Nicaragua" this sixteen year old woman defends her country…with a gun, a cross, a nail file and a pen.' (Randall, 1985, pages not numbered**).**

While this quotation deals with Nicaragua it captures what some of the earlier allusions have intimated in regard to South Africa. Woman entered the military world with multiple identities. Some of these are in abeyance at various times and are only acted on at particular moments. This young soldier can attack the 'contras'. She may write poetry. She may read the scriptures and at moments of leisure will care for her nails.

It is true then that in a revolution, elements of one's personality tend to be repressed. For operational reasons one's desire to be with one's lover may be interrupted. One may be sent far away to do the business of the revolution. Revolutionaries accepted the need to suppress their personal needs, despite this price. That does not mean that the desire for one's normal life or the life that one hoped to enjoy in a democratic society was therefore obliterated. It had to wait, but it may still have been what most revolutionaries still hoped to enjoy.

No easy route to characterising gender relations within the ANC-led alliance

This chapter has tried to convey through a limited period of ANC history the essential conditionality of any assessment of masculinities and femininities within the organisation. The ANC carries a number of legacies within its organisational consciousness, practices and individual identities. Some of these are male warrior traditions. Some are traditions that link the ANC to cultural systems preceding and coexisting with members joining the organisation. Some stress specific conditions of manhood that may presuppose limits on the role of women. Yet other elements of that legacy are conducive to realising gender equality. Notions of manhood within the ANC are diverse. It may be that the example of Hani is atypical of MK or MK leadership. It nevertheless represented a role model for many and complicates the picture and indicates the urgent need to go beyond formal texts or other writings and uncover the variety of actual relationships that existed. The unevenness of the spread of ideas of gender equality has been noted. Before more can be said, further research needs to be done into both masculinity and femininity formation in order to bring this legacy to the surface and unpack the extent to which it impacts on the present.

Chapter Seven

Characterising Underground organisation of the ANC-led alliance III: Revolutionary morality and the suppression of the personal.

Much of what has been written in the two previous chapters have a bearing on the significance of participation in a revolution for the individual person. The relationship between a revolutionary organisation and the individual or 'the question of the personal' impacts on individual judgement, and conduct. It curtails the freedom of the revolutionary to do certain things that other people can do. It also has implications related to the family, love and how a person fulfils or represses emotions. Much of this is related in feminist literature to characterisations of masculinity as having attributes of reason and femininity relating to the emotional. Again the experiences and literature discussed below reveals considerable complexity beyond these neat characterisations. While the bulk of the chapter is devoted to notions of love and the personal generally, it begins with the impact of belonging to a revolutionary organisation on one's right to use one's individual judgment.

The Collective and Individual Judgment

Revolutionary thinking in the ANC was much influenced by Marxist texts of Soviet origin. One of the elements in their teaching was that one is supposed to realise oneself as ain individual in the collective (see the *Soviet Dictionary of Philosophy,* Saifulin and Dixon, 1984, pp. 73-74). From this notion a variety of noble predispositions is born, and that is not a myth in that there have been people such as Che Guevara, Amilcar Cabral, Chris Hani, Bram Fischer, Ruth First[88] and many others, willing to sacrifice their lives for the popular cause and realise themselves in the service of something much bigger than themselves. This theme is dealt with here in relation to individual judgement. The question of the personal is returned to in the rest of the chapter, in relation to the

[88] Ernesto Che′ Guevara is the well-known, Argentinean-born Cuban revolutionary who died fighting in Bolivia. Amilcar Cabral was leader of the resistance movement in Guinea-Bissau, assassinated in 1969, Chris Hani, MK and SACP leader was assassinated in 1993, Bram Fischer, a famous Afrikaner lawyer and later a Communist leader, died while serving life imprisonment for resistance to apartheid in 1975, Ruth First, an ANC and Communist intellectual, was assassinated, by apartheid agents in Mozambique in 1982.

displacement of individual needs in the context of 'love for the people' and related perspectives.

In a revolutionary situation, while an individual may, in theory, argue his or her view, once a decision is made, it is binding. Often in the history of the Russian Revolution those who had opposed a decision were made to implement it (See Carr, 1950). That is part of the notion of 'democratic centralism' and it has been said that there tends to be more centralism than democracy. The theory is that the more open a situation, in the sense of freedom of political activity in the society at large, the more internal democracy within the party prevails. The more repression in the society, in particular where an organisation is illegal, the more the centralised element comes to the fore. It is paradoxical that while the SACP abandoned democratic centralism as an organisational principle in the 1990s, it reappeared in ANC documentation in 2000 and is now asserted as a central element of that organisation's mode of functioning. That this is the case indicates that there is some utility in explaining this collective/individual relationship both by elements of its operation in the period of illegality and in the present.

Obviously, the notion of responsibility to the collective, while necessary in many ways for the survival of a revolutionary and especially an underground organisation, carries with it the possibility of abuse, and also problems of renewal or resistance to fresh thinking and innovation. The pressures and stresses and security considerations of a protracted struggle may make one especially resistant to much-needed changes of approach. One can only wonder how much more difficult it would have been for the SACP to adapt and attempt to renew its strategic thinking had the collapse of the Soviet Union and allied states occurred when it was still operating illegally and having to safeguard it s existence on a day-to- day basis. In that situation innovation and periodic re-thinking was less prevalent than the transmission of a body of accepted ideas.

Ben Turok's autobiography raises issues from his own experience that bear on these questions. He devotes some pages to his effort to raise criticisms with the leadership of both the ANC and the SACP. In the case of the ANC, it is interesting to note the long and careful response of Joe Matthews (then a leading ANC and SACP figure,

later to defect from both) to Turok's criticism of modes of organisation prior to the ANC's Morogoro conference in 1969 (Turok, 2003, pp. 217-218, 287).

In the period of the 1973 Durban strikes however, a different problem arose (2003, p. 234). Turok was in contact with Harold 'Jock' Strachan, a former political prisoner, who sought funding to assist those involved in the historic strikes. Turok tried to obtain Party support and appears to have received unsatisfactory responses, to the effect that structures inside would handle the situation. Turok had doubts about the security and efficacy of Party underground work and decided to pursue or adopt methods of operating outside of Party structures. He managed to access funds and channelled them to Strachan. When the Party discovered this, he refused to divulge to whom he had given the money, believing it would endanger their security. The Party, in turn, considered it unacceptable that an individual Party member should channel funds to people inside the country without accountability to the organisation. He was expelled.

According to Brian Bunting, about whom Turok has a lot of negative things to say, Ben Turok was expelled for 'good reasons' (interview, 2003). And within the paradigm that Bunting was operating, one can understand the unacceptability of someone operating as an individual –running a private funding operation for activities inside the country.

On the other hand, what if, as Turok indicates, he did not get an adequate response from the Party and did not have confidence in its security? What should he have done? Operating in the Durban area at the time, my impression is that while security seemed to be good in the way I was engaged in relation to the Party underground in London, there was unlikely to have been a range of structures in existence that could have provided for the situation with which Turok was confronted. MK groups entered the country from time to time, but those were sporadic and do not seem to have established enduring structures that were in existence at the time of Turok's dispute with the Party. Whether Turok was right or wrong (and I have sympathy for his position in this regard), by taking the action he did nevertheless put himself outside the Party collective, and he should not have been surprised at the action taken.

This discussion is not intended to pass judgment, but to show that when one problematises responsibility to the collective, it raises contradictory forces-one can make a case in both directions. In the initial stages of research, as indicated in Chapter One, the aim was to consider the impact of various ANC experiences on the present. And this can be illustrated in the case of the public apology of Jeremy Cronin, SACP Deputy-General Secretary, to the ANC leadership in 2002. This is a context of legality, but where the same principles of collective/individual relations were applied. Cronin had conducted a long two-part interview with Irish academic Helena Sheehan, which appeared on the Internet. In the course of the second interview he referred to the possible 'Zanufication' of the ANC, i.e. a reference to ZANU (PF), the ruling party in Zimbabwe, meaning that the ANC might take a decadent, bureaucratic and undemocratic course. This evoked outrage among some members of the ANC leadership and some semi-racist responses, which described Cronin as a 'white messiah'. The substance of what he raised was not debated, but was regarded as a vilification of the organisation. The notion of such a characterisation –of possible Zanufication- being raised outside the organisational collective, was treated as impermissible.

When the matter came to the National Executive Committee of the ANC, a suggestion was made that the Communists meet in a separate caucus, and this group advised Cronin that he should apologise. The paradigm within which Cronin operated was that he was subordinate to both the ANC and SACP collectives and he apologised. Many newspapers and others have referred to this as a 'craven' apology and 'cowardice'. In some situations, it is true that bravery may be measured by whether or not an individual stands against a collective, speaks 'truth to power'. But in this case it would be more accurate to see Cronin as acting within a particular paradigm, one where the individual should subordinate himself or herself to the collective. It is interesting to question whether the primacy of this paradigm in the present period is conducive to the development of democratic debate that may enrich our understanding. In reality, all organisations demand a degree of subordination of the will of their members- all parliamentary caucuses do that. It is a matter of degree and all of these factors need to be brought into any judgment one makes. The answer one gives may vary according to where one finds oneself.

Whatever moral judgment any outsider may wish to make it should be qualified by awareness that there are conditions and circumstances under which collective relationships render the individual's judgement subordinate to that of the collective. In that context of illegality and danger, often a highly militarised situation, it is valuable and a necessary condition for an organisation's existence. Whether conditions prevailing in 2005 make it so, is open to question. All paradigms relate to a context and insofar as that context changes, it is necessary for new paradigms to emerge.

Revolutionary morality and the suppression of the personal

Involvement in a revolution, which is what motivated the ANC/SACP underground organisation, especially in the period of insurrection, raises under-researched questions concerning the impact of these activities on conceptions of the personal. It led to a negation of intimacy, with overriding demands for sacrifice and loyalty to something greater than oneself. It may be that many of these values also fed into conceptions of masculinity, already referred to, which may be dominant (though contested) in the ANC's self-conception, and in particular, in those activities of the organisation that are considered most heroic. (Unterhalter, 2000).

A substantial body of revolutionary literature exists, some of which used to be much sought after, which exalts a conception of personal sacrifice for the revolution being the highest and most honourable duty of a revolutionary cadre. Liu ShaoQi, notes from whose work 'How to be a Good Communist' were found in Nelson Mandela's handwriting at Rivonia is one of these (Mandela, 1994). He writes very bluntly:

> A PARTY MEMBER'S PERSONAL INTERESTS MUST BE UNCONDITIONALLY SUBORDINATED TO THE INTERESTS OF THE PARTY.
>
> …
>
> At all times and on all questions, a Party member should give first consideration to the interests of the Party as a whole, and put them in the forefront and place personal matters and interests second…. [E]very Party member must completely

> identify his personal interests with those of the Party both in his thinking and in his actions. He must be able to yield to the interests of the Party without any hesitation or reluctance and sacrifice his personal interests whenever the two are at variance….(Liu Shao Qi, 1984 [1939] at pp. 136-7. Capitals in original. See also Turok, 2003).

Here, the idea of a revolutionary is an individual who expects nothing personally, who is prepared to sacrifice all personal needs in order to ensure success of the struggle. (Cf Hermet, 1971, pp 148ff, writing on the Spanish Communist Party underground experience). Consequently, no sacrifice is too great and there is no situation where personal needs can supplant those of the organisation. The heroic legacy of Party cadres is constantly communicated to members. (Hermet, 1971, p. 149). The French Communist Party, during the period of resistance to Nazism was known as the 'Party of the executed' because it suffered so many deaths in the resistance. (Palme Dutt, 1964, p.271). The exemplary revolutionary life of Ernesto 'Che' Guevara, the famous Argentinean-born, Cuban revolutionary, inspired generations of revolutionaries throughout the world. Yet his ideas also contain a specific notion of the personal and the political that we are in a position to interrogate more closely now. (Cf Guevara, 1997).

Given the sacred quality of Guevara in the eyes of most revolutionaries and being themselves in the thick of difficult struggles, few would then have engaged in such an examination of his views. Furthermore, whatever the dangers or negative legacies in their perspectives, to which I will draw attention, Guevara's position and that of Liu, just quoted, may have been one of the conditions necessary for success in revolutionary ventures. Single-mindedness may have been required for successful conduct of the tasks of a revolutionary and also helped blot out some of the pain entailed. (Cf Suttner, 2001, e.g. Chapter 1).

Harmonisation between personal and political needs was not impossible. In some cases this was achieved, despite the great stresses. It may be that Albertina and Walter Sisulu achieved this in their marriage (Sisulu, 2002, Suttner, 2003a). Walter and Albertina Sisulu's responsibilities to the 'ANC as family' do not seem to have impaired their conventional role and exercise of responsibilities to children and

grandchildren. In fact, Walter Sisulu was constantly consulted on Robben Island about the naming of children or his advice was sought on other family issues. In the case of Albertina Sisulu, her role as mother cannot be narrowly confined to that of a caregiver or whatever other conventional notions attach to motherhood. As a mother, she also saw herself as a politiciser of her own children and a wide range of others who came to be embraced in the notion of 'sons and daughters'. (See Anthony W. Marx, 1992, p. 100, Strasburg, DVD, 2004, statement of Lindiwe Sisulu).

But it may nevertheless be true that the denial of the personal was *generally* one of the conditions for the successful prosecution of revolutionary activities, in many situations. The reason for probing is that there are consequences and scars that have been left through these sacrifices and they need to be recognised, acknowledged and if possible remedied. (See examples in many of the interviews in Bernstein, 1994). Yeats in his profound but ambivalent poem commemorating the martyrs of the Irish Easter 1916 rising, writes:

'Too long a sacrifice
Can make a stone of the heart.' (Yeats, 1973, p. 204)

This numbing of emotions may be part of the legacy of ANC/SACP underground organisation; for it may well be that these conceptions of revolutionary morality were more thoroughly absorbed in the underground situation than any other site of struggle.[89] There are sacrifices beyond those that are known that remain with many people, unacknowledged as part of their contribution.

Underground work and its secrecy forced choices, imposing enduring pain and guilt for many cadres. Many had to leave their homes and families and loved ones, usually without informing them of their departure. (E.g Duka, 1974, pp. 58ff, Thomas Nkobi in Bernstein, 1994, pp.16-17, Ruth Mompati in Bernstein, 1994, pp. 18-20, 21-22). At the time, the expectation was that they would soon return, instead of being absent for decades. Many left children as babies only to see them again three decades later.

[89] This numbing of the emotions was also very necessary in prison, where prisoners sometimes felt that allowing themselves to hope for release and a satisfying personal life would weaken their resolve. (Cf Suttner, 2001).

(Interview Ike Maphotho, 2004[90]). Anton Qaba explained how, in operating underground, a call on someone to leave for MK worked (in the phase between his first and second periods of imprisonment). When he told young people that the time had come to leave, there was no opportunity to say farewells. There was no such thing as 'I have left this or that at home.' To allow people to return to their homes could compromise the security of everyone involved in the operation. (Interview with Anton Qaba, 2004).

Hilda Bernstein captures the pain

> Exile exacts its price not only from those who leave, but also from those who are left: parents and siblings; and wives and children left by husbands who fled across the border, often without a word of farewell and leaving behind no money for material needs. The women went to work and brought up families alone and in loneliness, shouldering the total burden of responsibility and care, often through silent years without any communication from the one who had left….
>
> Many who left concealed their intention to depart from those closest to them-parents, wives (mostly; few women left husbands), brothers and sisters-both for self-protection and to protect those left behind from reprisals and allegations of complicity. Then their lives were haunted by the unresolved departure-not having said goodbye. For years there could be no communication by letter or by phone with any member of the family…. Without the rites of farewell the one who had departed was already within the realm of the dead.
>
> Abrupt and secret departure added a sense of guilt to the exiles' pain of unresolved separation from the closest members of the family. Some mothers left babies, believing they would be reunited within a short time-only to meet them again when they were strangely grown…The years of loss and suffering of the mothers are only one part of the picture; the other is the alienation, the resentment

[90] Maphoto was one of a number of South Africans who spent more than ten years in Rhodesian jails after being captured in the Wankie or Sipolilo campaigns – a part of resistance history that still needs to be adequately documented.

> and feelings of rejection suffered by the children who were left behind. (Bernstein, 1994, p. xiv)

Ruth Mompati was sent out for political training in 1962. She was not able to return because it was believed she would face arrest. This forced her separation from her children. 'But I still wanted to go back, because I'd left a baby of two and a half years, and a child of six years. And I just couldn't think of not going home.... (In Bernstein, 1994, p. 20). When they did reconnect in 1972, they did not know one another. 'I was not their mother…I was a stranger…I think I suffered more, because they had substitutes. I hadn't had any substitute babies. I now had grown-up children, who became my children as years went on....' (Bernstein, 1994, pp. 21-22. See also interview with Thuso Mashaba, in Bernstein, 1994, pp. 67, 70, 71).

Eric Mtshali left to join MK in 1962 without being able to inform or say goodbye to his wife or children. Eight years later, without having had any contact, his wife died.

> Q: So you have no idea of what your wife thought about your just disappearing?
>
> A: Absolutely
>
> Q: Did it pain you a lot?
>
> A: Yes it did, but I took it like a man….(Interview, Eric Mtshali, 2003. See also Callinicos, 2004, for similar examples of pain of separation).

This type of severance of relationships was not peculiar to underground organisation in that imprisonment often ruptured relationships irreparably. (Cf Kathrada, 2004 and interview, 2003). Antonio Gramsci, the Italian Communist who died in Mussolini's prison, never saw his wife or children after his arrest. (Fiori, 1970).

Success in underground work meant that operatives had to harden themselves and repress basic needs to communicate with others. The work meant concealing

important parts of their lives and fears and anxieties. Often this created misunderstandings in not meeting social expectations from people or simply failing to explain adequately why one or other thing was done or not done. (Cf Jeremy Cronin quotation, in Frederikse, 1990, pp. 126-7). Underground life sets serious limits on social and emotional life.

Love for the people versus inter-personal love

Paradoxically, both Liu and Guevara do not deny the importance of love. But in the revolutionary context, they do not conceive of or acknowledge love as an inter-personal phenomenon. Personal love is supplanted by 'love for the people'.[91] Guevara writes:

> At the risk of seeming ridiculous, let me say that the true revolutionary is guided by great feelings of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality….*Our vanguard revolutionaries must make an ideal of this love of the people*, of the most sacred causes, and make it one and indivisible….
>
> The leaders of the revolution have children just beginning to talk, who are not learning to say 'daddy.' *They have wives who must be part of the general sacrifice of their lives in order to take the revolution to its destiny.* The circle of their friends is limited strictly to the circle of comrades in the revolution. There is no life outside of it.
>
> ….We must strive every day so that this love of living humanity is transformed into actual deeds, into acts that serve as examples, as a moving force.

[91] Though the testimony of Guevara's daughter, Aleida, in an article on his *Motor Cycle Diaries*, indicates an atmosphere of love in the family environment. See 'Riding My Father's Motorcycle' at http://www.cubasolidarity.com/aboutcuba/cubaspeaks/cheguevara/041009aleida.htm where she describes him as 'the most complete man I've ever met'.

> …There is also the danger of the weakness we can fall into. If a man thinks that dedicating his entire life to the revolution means that in return he should not be distracted by such worries as that one's child lacks some necessity, then with this reasoning one's mind is open to infection by the germs of future corruption.
>
> In our case *we have maintained that our children should have or should go without those things that the children of the common man have or go without, and that our families should understand this and struggle for it to be that way*….(Guevara, 1997 [1965], pp. 211-212. Emphasis inserted)

Liu relates the question of love to 'communist morality', the need to 'show loyalty to and love for all comrades, all revolutionaries and working people…' (Liu Shao Qi, 1984, p. 137).

Ray Alexander Simons describes how she was unwilling to return to Latvia from where she had emigrated as a teenager, in order to join her fiancé. '[A]lthough I was not in love with any other man*, I was indeed 'in love' with the people here,* the country and the struggle against race discrimination…(2004, p. 81. Italics inserted).

The first verse of the song 'Girl of the Sandinist Front' by Carlos Mejia Godoy also clearly captures this displacement of one type of love by another:

> Lovely girl of the FSLN
> with your boots and pants of drill
> machine gun in hand
> your long flowing hair
> that grew in the month of April.
>
> You left your lover
> to begin another relation
> for your true love
> is not he but another
> it's the love of an entire nation. (Randall, 1981, 129).

ANC/SACP as 'family

Participating in the struggle and the embrace of this wider love also entailed a distinct notion of 'family'. Writing of the Spanish Communist Underground, Guy Hermet refers to the Party as 'a sort of extended family in which memories and hopes are shared and to which [the member] is tied both emotionally and materially. In a letter to his wife from prison Julian Grimian uses just the word –family- when he refers to the Party, saying that it was sending him too many parcels, considering the financial difficulties it was in.' The USSR also formed an over-arching family figure. (Hermet, 1971, p. 149.)

In South Africa, Communists sometimes used the word 'family' as a metaphor or code word to refer to the Party. (Frankel, 1999, 58. Interview, L. Dlamini, 2005, on the words used in being recruited). But this was also true of the ANC. One woman cadre, in explaining to her children that she had to leave them behind in Tanzania in order to execute an ANC assignment, told them, 'although I may be your mother, your real mother and father are the ANC. The ANC will look after you, feed you and clothe you.' (In Majodina, 1995, p. 29. See also Callinicos, 2004, pp.416-7, 429). This conception can be found earlier, in recollections of the role of volunteers in the Congress of the People campaign, which led to the adoption of the Freedom Charter. Mrs Sibanda, an old volunteer from Cradock, reported, 'Whenever we went to people's houses, and they were in trouble, or had problems, we would become mothers of that family, and men volunteers should be fathers.' (Suttner and Cronin, 1986, p. 12).

The notion of ANC being *in loco parentis* arose in the context of cadres wanting to marry. Von den Steinen refers to 'the common slogan that the ANC was each comrade's mother and father' (unpub, 1999, p. 207). Permission had to be sought from the ANC leadership before a couple could marry. Security considerations made contact with family back home difficult if not impossible, and placed strain on young couples who felt that taking such a step without the knowledge of their family was problematic. (von den Steinen, unpub, 1999, pp. 207-8). Baleka Mbete argues that the need for the organisation to approve was not a manifestation of authoritarianism

but a responsible attitude, ensuring that adequate investigations were conducted to ensure that other parties were not prejudiced, for example, undisclosed spouses left behind in South Africa. There was also an overall need to care for young people who left in their teens and had no role models, other than the mothers and fathers in the ANC. (Interview Baleka Mbete, 2003, Pallo Jordan, 2003).

The question one may ask today is what were the consequences of wives or children not being consulted about the sacrifices that the (usually, but we have seen not always) husband/revolutionaries decided should be their lot.[92] We know this consultation usually did not take place and may well have endangered the activities of MK had it occurred. Obviously this left much 'unfinished business', which often remains unresolved. Families did not hear of their children's' decisions till much later. They sometimes expected them to return with material wealth, while instead they often returned without means of support and this exacerbated earlier resentment by their in fact often becoming dependents. (Personal knowledge from communication with various returnees).

These notions of love may also have resulted in specific conceptions of parental responsibility and relationships, as part of this vision of a broader love of the people that tended to supplant or downgrade the inter-personal, including responsibilities towards children. Freddy Reddy, a psychiatrist working in MK camps in Angola, from the 1970s, reported a consultation concerning a young man who left the country to join MK, but mainly to meet his father. He had hardly known his father who had been in prison during his childhood and then joined MK outside. Reddy describes their meeting and the differing reactions of father and son:

> The first time he saw his father was on the parade ground during inspection. He was very excited, but his father gave not the slightest sign of recognition, nor did

[92] Apart from the earlier quotation regarding sacrifices that the revolution demanded from families of the leaders, one of the most famous revolutionary statements, Che Guevara's farewell letter to Fidel Castro, in resigning from the Cuban government includes the remark: 'Wherever I am, I will feel the responsibility of being a Cuban revolutionary, and I shall behave as such. *I am not ashamed that I leave nothing material to my children and my wife: I am happy it is that way. I ask nothing for them, as the state will provide them with enough to live on and have an education*.' (Guevara, 1997 [1965], p. 354. Italics inserted). It should be noted that in this case, as is evident from utterances of the Guevara family, that no resentment is borne for the decisions Che′ Guevara took which impacted on their lives.

> he contact him later after the inspection. The boy was emotionally devastated. He felt that his father did not love him. It was not very long before he developed confusional psychosis. On asking his father why he ignored his son, he replied that *everyone in the camp was his children*: 'I could not give him special treatment'. (Reddy and Karterud, 1995, p. 226. Italics inserted).

How widespread was this attitude? To what extent was the embrace of this wider notion of parenting an adoption of wider responsibilities towards children in general, or to what extent was it primarily a mode for displacing or repressing the need for responsibility towards one's own children?

Many young people wanted to see their parents and the organisation tried to insert itself as a substitute. It could not fill that gap. In fact, many young people missed their parents very much. Phumla Tshabalala speaks of missing her mother every night. But it was not only the young girls or women who manifested this longing to fill a void. She said there was no one who did not miss his or her mother. In fact, Gertrude Shope, head of the ANC Women's Section, was asked to visit camps for two days instead of one because so many young men wanted to be with a motherly figure. (Interview Tshabalala, 2003, confirmed by Faith Radebe, 2004, Reddy and Karterud, 1995, p. 227).

As a revolutionary, Chris Hani appears to have departed from the 'revolutionary masculinist' norm, displacing the personal. Women in MK testify to Chris Hani making cadres feel that their personal fears and emotional make up was as much the concern of the army and the revolution, as strategy and tactics. Dipuo Mvelase, a female MK commander describes the way in which Hani raised issues that for many people were outside the bounds of revolutionary discourse:

> He was …a comrade to whom you felt you can say anything and not feel bad about it, whether it is personal or whether it is about the struggle…. Someone you could confide in, probably say certain things that I couldn't even say to my mum. …. Despite the fact that everybody needed his attention because he was the commander in that area [in Angola], we had about three hundred new

> recruits and he spent every single evening talking to us. And you felt wanted, you felt at home. You felt important you know.
>
> Asking you about your family, how you feel, what is your experience, do you miss home? Questions that you thought you wouldn't be asked because we are in a revolution…., you as a person, you get lost…. But Comrade Chris made sure that you don't get lost ….[H]e humanised the struggle…. He made every one of us feel we count. This is something that one never experienced before, because there are those big expectations that revolutionaries have to do this-have to sacrifice that. That revolutionaries are ordinary people, one never felt that until I met Comrade Chris ….(Interview, 1993. Nomphumelo Setsubi reports similar impressions. Interview, 2004).

Hani also integrated this concern in the way cadres were briefed prior to being sent on missions into the country:

> Comrade Chris's brief …had more to do with you and your readiness than with the details of your mission. He would ask,'are you really ready' and some people find they are not really ready to come into the county. But they are scared because they will be called cowards, less revolutionary.
>
> [He made] you feel that if you are not ready it doesn't mean you are less revolutionary. … You can still make a contribution and to win the war it doesn't mean you have to be in the country. ... And Comrade Chris used to be more concerned about *you* succeeding, you fighting so that you can fight tomorrow. Not you fighting and making a sacrifice and be put in the heroes' book. The *life* of each and every soldier used to be very important to him. He used to ask: Do you think there are things that are personal that you need to sort out? His view was that if you go home with the baggage of certain personal problems that are not resolved, that are not addressed, you might not be very, very confident in fulfilling your mission- that you might *die* and that used to concern him *very, very much.*
>
> We all joined the army because we were angry-, but once you are there…some people discover that they really don't want to go back home and fight, you know, and because of an army situation there isn't enough space to accommodate that...

> Comrade Chris managed to accommodate it because he used to deal with us individually and discuss with us and find out what troubles us, what makes us happy, you know, and that …was very important, more important than the mission itself because these people-we have to implement these missions, and not some objects because they happen to have skills…(Interview, Dipuo Mvelase, 1993).

Revolution –adapting to an 'abnormal' situation

This chapter has related to the reality that being in a revolution entails a rupture in peoples' lives, their breaking from the normal pattern of relationships that sustain them or would sustain them if their lives had not taken the course requiring secrecy, warfare and other consequences. That there was a rupture did not mean there was no longer a need for the relationships that were now absent or the needs that could not be fulfilled in that situation.

The chapter also shows that one's normal individual powers of judgment may have to be suspended when one takes the choice to subordinate oneself to a broader collective. One cannot simply act on what you believe is correct. Having chosen to be part of an organisational arrangement in conditions of great danger, one sacrifices elements of one's individual judgment. That same subordination is of course carried over into situations of legality as where membership of any political organisation means one cannot publicly raise fundamental disagreements.

In the sphere of political judgments there was little doubt that the individual submission to the collective was accepted as necessary for security and other reasons. But the personal being suppressed in a more broad sense, required substitutes and this gave rise to such notions as the ANC or Communist Party as parents or family. Also, the desire to fulfil oneself through inter-personal love was supplanted by 'love for the people'. This love was manifested in the case of people like Guevara in making sacrifices costing his life. The nobility of this cause did not however mean that the need for individual fulfilment disappeared.

We have also seen that there was an area of flexibility or ways of exploiting spaces to try to meet both political imperatives as well as personal needs. The personal needs would never be adequately fulfilled in revolutionary situations but the Sisulu relationship with their children certainly went beyond that of many other revolutionary parents in seeking to maintain conventional responsibilities as well as revolutionary ones. Equally, Chris Hani was simultaneously one of the most revered revolutionary heroes and also a person who considered the personal important. His conception of the revolution encompassed this concern for the personal and it even had practical consequences in that he believed that failure to interrogate personal aspects could have endangered cadres and missions.

The overall picture does appear to indicate the general suppression of 'the personal' in favour of 'the collective', but this is qualified in varying degrees by the interpretation that some people placed on the revolution and its relationship to cadres.

Chapter Eight

Re-establishment of ANC hegemony

This final chapter is by way of an epilogue. It deals with the outcomes of resistance efforts that have been described in previous chapters. Responsibility for the outcomes was partly the result of underground organisation that has been described. But the chapter locates this in the context of broader forces of resistance, whose combined effort was responsible for the victories achieved. (What qualifications there may be on these results is not discussed, being beyond the scope of this work).

The establishment of ANC hegemony within the liberation struggle and in the new democratic South Africa was not preordained (Dubow, 2000, pp. xiii-xiv). There were times in the history of the organisation when it was virtually dormant and in the period under review the ANC weathered storms so severe that some felt it could not survive. (See Chapter 2).

Its survival depended in the first place on the way in which the ANC had, over decades inserted itself into the cultural consciousness of people, forming part of their sense of being even if at times of great repression there was no public basis or outlet for this identity. This continuing cultural consciousness of belonging to the ANC or 'being ANC' is captured in an interview conducted with Joseph Faniso Mati. He remarks on organising in Port Elizabeth in the 1950s:

> When I asked a person to join the organisation-even if the person had no money for a membership card of the ANC-that one would say: 'Oh my child, who is not a member of the ANC? We are all members of the ANC!' (In Coetzee et al, 2002, at p.35.)

Even though fear may have reduced some to silence, this consciousness nevertheless remained present and was transmitted from generation to generation in a variety of ways, depending on the degree and scope of repression.

In the late 1970s and especially in the period of the 1980s the public political landscape of South Africa began to appear substantially different. Until then, the presence of the ANC and the spread of ANC ideas had tended to be covert, in exile or prison. The phase opening after 1976 saw growing open or 'coded' expression of adherence to the ANC and its principles, primarily through organisations other than the ANC, because open alignment to that organisation still carried heavy penalties. Even the coded expression of support for the ideas of the organisation, given the wide definitions in repressive legislation, carried the potential of prosecution. But an atmosphere was gradually created where, despite continued repression, there simultaneously occurred an opening of space for public opposition to apartheid. Ideas and programmes intimately associated with the ANC, in particular those contained in the Freedom Charter, were advanced. An alternative or simultaneous way of manifesting this partisanship was the recognition of Nelson Mandela as a leader to whom allegiance was pledged.

This change in conditions was partly or primarily a result of initiatives of the anti-apartheid resistance forces, which forced concessions from the regime. But it also derived from attempts by the government to relieve some of the stress under which it tried to function, by appearing to 'normalise' the political situation. The pressures to which the regime responded were not only forces of liberation but also external ones, especially powerful Western states, and domestic and international capital, which sought a stable investment climate.

It is a paradox that under the leadership of PW Botha, starting in the late 1970s, who is now generally remembered as a cantankerous old reactionary, certain openings were created. These spaces were intended to absorb black frustration and direct these towards manageable political (and labour) activities, albeit not necessarily direct support of the government of the day. By allowing these openings to opposition forces it was hoped to engender an appearance of political 'normality', while

nevertheless sustaining minority rule. Unfortunately for Botha, the resistance forces used these spaces for different and more far-reaching objectives and frustrated what the apartheid government intended. It also led to the development of modes of opposition more threatening to the continuation of apartheid rule than ever before.

With regard to the ANC underground forces, opening these spaces and using them for radical purposes, was partially spontaneous- a response to mass activity. In many cases, however a conscious, deliberate attempt was made by underground operatives to increase the scope of public operations in the late 1970s and 1980s, spreading the area where mass mobilisation could be initiated and undertaken. Zubeida Jaffer, being 'plugged in' to local community and worker networks was able to use these in order to raise funds or draw on other resources that could sustain MK units or other illegal activities. Shirley Gunn, while working as a social worker during the upsurge of the 1980s tried through underground production of pamphlets to point to wider meanings and implications of the activities being conducted in the legal struggles. (Interviews, Zubeida Jaffer, Shirley Gunn, 2005. See also Jaffer, 2003).

Responsibility for the gradual establishment of ANC hegemony was the product of combined efforts of a variety of forces, one of these being the long-term efforts and continued presence of the organised underground. In order to understand this process, it is important to spell out what is meant by hegemony in this context.

Hegemony did not inhere merely in numerical superiority, and the displacement of other political formations as the most popular element amongst the anti-apartheid forces. The assertion of ANC hegemony encompassed more than one factor, including *ways of organising, advancing specific symbols and ideological approaches,* though these were simultaneously contested, even within the organisation. In each of these respects the ANC and its allies differed in varying degrees from other opponents of apartheid.

Content of ANC hegemony

1. ANC hegemony manifested as modes of operation

What distinguished the ANC to a large degree but not absolutely from many other organisations was the amount of time it devoted to organising structures, modes of organising, and the scope of its activities, extending further and wider than those of other organisations, that is, even without counting ANC-aligned organisations. The breadth and scope of the intended organised activity was both geographically and sectorally wider than the forces of any other political formations.

The development of the ANC as a well organised political body occurred relatively late in its history. It was not until the 1940s that the ANC devoted itself to much besides annual conferences. It was not in reality organising its members on a regular basis or for campaigns or on any sustained basis. (Cf Walshe, 1970, ch 10, and Suttner, 2003). In particular, it did not consider challenging the regime nor did it develop the strategies and tactics, or the mechanisms or structures for undertaking such a venture, had it intended this.

According to Rusty Bernstein, when people consider Communist influence on the ANC they generally focus on ideological input, whereas in his view, the Communist contribution was primarily at the level of organisation. Reflecting on the 1940s and early 1950s, Bernstein suggests:

> The work content of a Party member's day was very considerable and they were used to working as an organised group, but the ANC was not, the ANC was a very loose organisation. You could join the ANC and pay five shillings and not ever attend a branch meeting…our people brought into the ANC and for that matter into the trade unions a very particular style of work, which wasn't, indigenous to these organisations and I think that was our biggest contribution. Frankly, a lot of commentators write about the great theoretical contribution we made to these organisations. I think, in some ways, it's the other way round. They made a great theoretical contribution to us, but we made a really important

> organisational contribution to them and gave them what they lacked, which was a sort of organised disciplined core. The few spread out through the branches and through the various organisations, and this is what enabled them, I think to grow as a great mass organisation. (Interview with Peter Delius, Delius, 1996, 101).

Nevertheless, it is true that within the ANC itself (possibly without any CPSA influence, though some individual Communists may have contributed to such decisions), the period of the 1940s witnessed the impact of work by Rev (later Canon) James Calata and Dr A.B. Xuma to build a functioning administration and attempt to establish an organisational link between the leadership and other levels of the organisation. In a striking glimpse into the difficulties entailed in undertaking such an enterprise at that time, it is reported that a decision for Calata to make a union-wide tour took him three years to complete. (Walshe, 1970, 257).

The first element of achieving ANC hegemony –some three decades later- was the diffusion of what activists refer to as 'our way of working' -how the ANC organised people (Cf Gordhan, 2003, Masondo interview, 2003). This is still a common phrase, 'how we do it' or lamenting the passing of a period when 'we used to do things' in a particular way, a phrase which has a very clear meaning to those who were part of such activities. Some mythology surrounds this, in that not everyone who considered himself or herself part of the ANC was actually a member or were organised in this way or with a full understanding of the patient, long-term sustainable structures envisaged.

Not only did this emphasis on organisational structures develop at a relatively late phase in the ANC's history, but consolidation of organisational structures was again interrupted by both the Treason trial, which impeded the activities of top leadership from 1956 till 1961 and the period of deep repression starting in the 1960s. The changed emphasis on sustainable organisation was supposed to be a long-term, patient process whereby enduring structures would be built. This was intended to be a general approach applicable in some measure to all organisational situations, irrespective of the conditions. Obviously this did not happen in every structure that

was established and it would be modified depending on the existence of conditions of legality or illegality.

In the context of illegal activity, this often meant slow work, careful selection and induction of recruits, when some time elapsed between initial organisation and the point when something was done or visible results were seen. This approach meant developing an organisational consciousness where 'quick fixes' were not sought and cadres understood that they were in for the long haul. This, as we have seen, led to the impatience that many BC activists felt with the ANC (See Chapter 4 above), though BC disinterest in such organising was not universal. (Cf Zubeida Jaffer interview, 2005).

During the 1970s, often with the involvement of veterans, some of whom were former political prisoners, popular organisations were built in a variety of sectors- in the communities, at the work place, amongst women, youth and many others. As much attention was supposed to be placed on spreading a message as on organising a base for sustaining it. This was not always achieved, as is recognised by the later UDF slogan 'from mobilisation to organisation'. This was meant to illustrate that mobilising for a campaign or to attend a mass rally was not the same as sustaining that support base. Enduring organisation was required to build cadres who would organise for the long term. How long the long term would be was not then known, and these had to be cadres who could savour victories as well as defeats, drawing lessons from either. Uneven as it may have been the ANC-aligned structures did emphasise the importance of organisation. That it had an uneven character was one of the reasons for criticism by some trade unionists.

2. ANC symbols as manifestation of growing hegemony

A powerful form in which ANC hegemony was increasingly manifested was through symbolic identification with the organisation. This was accomplished in a number of ways. In the first place and at some risk activists might 'show the colours', that is, hold a flag with ANC colours or erect a banner or wear the colours on their clothes. Or they might wear ANC caps or other direct ways of aligning themselves to the

organisation's symbols. Clearly engaging in such activities still entailed considerable risk, evident in the conviction of individuals in numerous cases for furthering the aims of a banned organisation by displaying the colours of the ANC on a mug or similar 'offences'. The hoisting of ANC flags at funerals became widespread. As an indication of the complexity of the politics that evolved, the first funeral at which the ANC flag was raised, may have been that of Labour Party member, Hennie Ferrus. Ferrus was a former Robben Islander, who on release worked in the 'collaborationist' Labour Party. Somehow or other he must have been linked into ANC structures, signified by his being buried as an ANC cadre.

Another form of identification with the ANC were the multiple ways in which Nelson Mandela was projected as the legitimate leader of the people of South Africa. This was often in the context of campaigns for his release and that of all political prisoners. Many people may have pressed for his release on purely humanitarian grounds. But a substantial number saw such campaigns to be a claim for Mandela as leader also to imply the necessity of ANC leadership of the country.

In the same period, the Freedom Charter and its slogans were popularised, initially at a purely symbolic level, while later its ideological implications came increasingly to the fore in debate. This is discussed separately in this chapter as an ideological phenomenon. It was, even without ideological specificity, a powerful symbolic way of identifying with the ANC. Clauses of the Charter would become household words, through being heard or seen or chanted. Without having studied it many people would know passages, especially 'The People Shall govern!', 'The People Shall Share In The Country's Wealth!' and others, depending on the area of activity to which they had application. Such phrases were painted on walls or held up on banners at demonstrations.

Underlying much of this symbolism and in fact embraced in such slogans as 'ANC is the nation' was an attempt to identify the ANC symbolically with the future of the country and the ANC as the authentic representative of the people of South Africa. This equation of a liberation movement with the nation was part of the contestation that has arisen against minority rule, not only in South Africa but in all anti-colonial struggles. It had a positive unifying element but also carried dangers that can and

have later emerged in other countries and to some extent in South Africa. These include a distrust of pluralism considered broadly, and a failure adequately to recognise the range of identities that constitute the human components of the nation. (See Suttner, 2004b).

3. MK as a symbol of ANC's developing hegemony

MK was seen both as an army and a symbol of a people resisting, fighting and piercing the apparently invincible defences of the apartheid state. It contributed to ANC hegemony at a powerful symbolic level, quite independent of its actual military capacity and the threat that it may or may not have posed to the security of the apartheid state. That soldiers of a people who had been denied military training by the apartheid regime took up arms and attacked the apartheid police had important symbolic power beyond any assessment of its actual military strength.

An attack on a single police station, whatever its status in regard to the overall balance of military forces, filled people with great emotion. The idea that this could happen at all had not been conceived of in any earlier period. The ability of soldiers from MK to shoot and kill apartheid soldiers was something new and was seen as growing out of a popular power, which filled people with pride and awe.

MK, as ANC declared was 'born of the people'. It was an army, whatever its military power may have been, that arose from a source entirely outside of the settled apartheid constitutional political arena. It emerged after a stumbling beginning into formations that were able to attack major apartheid targets, such as SASOL. MK was seen as representing the 'sons and daughters of our soil', as Freedom Radio would express it and songs indicate the expectations that people cherished, expectations that MK could not in fact realise. Nevertheless, the glimpses of MK's strength, gave power to people's emotions and empowered resistance on other fronts.

What was the political content of the ANC hegemony established?

1. Political contestation.

The development of popular resistance after 1976 was not a smooth process whereby growing resistance led to the simple adoption of the principles, strategies and tactics of the ANC. The development of ANC hegemony was contested throughout this period and the 1980s, though the ascendancy of ANC ideas amongst resistance forces was the outcome. This is not to say that the traditions, which came to enjoy less support, left no impact on the ANC. There is a tendency to see BC, for example, as an immature political manifestation, leading inevitably through political maturation to joining the ANC (the obvious and ultimate destination). This may be the way in which many former BC adherents understand or have described their conversion/ political evolution.

But it is important that we do not assess the significance of BC purely by its current electoral strength in the year 2005. The BC people who joined the ANC left a mark on the organisation, changing aspects of its thinking and strengthening certain currents within the ANC. In other words, where one speaks of the development of a situation where the ANC enjoyed hegemony it was a mediated hegemony, mediated amongst other factors by the impact of some recruits from other traditions on the organisation and it's thinking.

Likewise in a centre such as the Western Cape the discourse of the Unity Movement, very much a minority movement, nevertheless influenced Congress organisations and the ANC itself, after its unbanning. Even today one can detect a Unity Movement inflection in much of the Western Cape ANC discourse in some fora.

One of the most important bases of contestation in the period and especially the early 1980s was that between 'workerists' and 'populists/nationalists', reflecting divisions

between those, especially powerful in the unions who emphasised the class character of the struggle and sometimes denied its national character. On the other side the 'nationalists/populists' emphasised national oppression and in the views of some 'workerists' neglected class exploitation. The character of these contending positions varied internally within each tendency, from totally one-sided emphases or alternatively an emphasis on the combination of factors, though each still tending to give primary emphasis to one or the other –national or class. Over and above whatever differences there may have been between the tendencies, the tight organisation of many of the unions, possibly especially so in those more 'workerist' ones, probably contributed over time towards improved organisation amongst left forces generally**.**

What then were the main political ideas underpinning ANC hegemony, which differentiated that position from those of the traditions, which became relatively marginalised on the political level? Immediately one must stress that these ideas may not always have been presented as a unified package to all potential adherents.

In particular sites of struggle, issues would arise which brought to the fore questions, which differentiated the Congress position from one or other contending force- in relation to a limited area of focus. In that particular context the popular forces may have chosen a 'Congress position'. This may have been with greater or lesser awareness of the 'package' as a whole. For example, in the context of educational struggle issues of nonracialism came to the fore and even in organisations named after Azania, the Africanist name for South Africa, one would see *contest over nonracialism* and in the case of AZASO (the Azanian Students Organisation), the gradual adoption of a Congress position.

An issue might, on the other hand, have arisen in the context of a community struggle, where the question may have been whether workers should only involve themselves in issues at the workplace or support what was being undertaken in the place where they lived or by their own children. Alternatively, on the community side, support may have been called for an activity outside of the immediate community, a workers' strike, in particular, though it was often likely that members of the community were

part of the workforce concerned. The degree to which this might have been understood as part of national struggle may have varied.

2. Freedom Charter and nonracialism as distinguishing element in content of ANC hegemony

The basic ideas which came to characterise the Congress position were broadly those of the Freedom Charter, encapsulated in the first paragraph declaring: 'South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white….' (Suttner and Cronin, 1986, 262). These words diverged sharply from the position of both the Africanist and BC organisations.

While interpretations of the Charter and application to concrete situations may sometimes have been controversial, its contents nevertheless related to a range of issues that related in one or other way to peoples' lives. It covered a broad position, which differentiated Congress supporters from those of other trends.

This is not to say that the Charter itself had a meaning that was uncontested even amongst its own supporters. What clauses were emphasised differed according to the diverse inclinations of its adherents. Those who were more or less concerned with an attack from the left, tended to try to deflect such criticisms by emphasising the more working-class or socialist oriented sections of the Charter. Alternatively, those who wanted to emphasise the national character of the struggle and were possibly less concerned with class exploitation might have placed emphasis on the type of nation envisaged by the Charter as a whole. There were many permutations, mediated in many ways by the concrete situations and type of opposition that people encountered, the type of opposition they faced.

If one considers nonracialism, a cardinal principle of the ANC and its allies, this commitment cannot be assumed to have been carefully interrogated, even now to this day in the 21st century. The adoption of a principle in a situation where Africans do not work with whites or even non-Africans is quite different from a context that is constituted nonracially and multi-racially in practice. By this I mean that when one works as an inter-racial or multi-racial organisation, problems often arise that are

unimaginable to someone who has adopted the principle of nonracialism but has never had to practise it in their daily political experience.

While the most powerful unions were not initially within the 'Congress fold', from the days of FOSATU onwards they did emphasise nonracialism, but as Sakhela Buhlungu has indicated, that nonracialism concealed a concentration of certain skills amongst white officials that allowed them disproportionate influence. That caused resentment and was later overcome when the unions developed their own black, especially new African organic intellectuals who were able to displace the monopoly of such functions by white intellectuals. (Buhlungu, unpub, 2002).

Whites and to some extent people from other minority groups also had connections that Africans tended not to have. They knew who to go to where a lawyer was required or a tax issue arose. Their own experience, in a world that was relatively new to the African unionists and the broader activists created situations where white knowledge was a necessary resource. This was necessary but it was also a cause of resentment.

Similar tensions were present in popular organisations within the country, where resources and this set of connections were disproportionately available to whites and other minority groups, where they were more likely to have cars, and tended to have access to funds that could be used to embark on specific ventures. This sometimes led to relationships of patronage, where control of funds enabled some people to influence the political orientation of people to whom they provided resources for specific activities. (See reference to factions in autobiographical sketch in Chapter 1)

Likewise the deleterious impact of Bantu education tended to make it harder for Africans to become proficient writers and to contribute to the theoretical orientation of the Congress movement in this period. Consequently, theoretical inputs into strategic directions tended to reflect a disproportionate influence of minority groups, especially whites and Indians.

3. Overall *strategic orientation* of Congress position as part of ANC hegemony

The overall strategic orientation of the Congress position was to emphasise national liberation. This meant assembling a combination of forces from a range of sectors and communities who in varying ways felt the impact of apartheid oppression. This was a cross-class and cross-community alliance, involving also a small number of progressive whites.

At various points, the emphasis on national liberation, national democratic struggle or the national question was in contest with forces attacking the Congress position from the left and this led, especially in this period and during the 1980s, to much discussion of socialism and the relationship between national liberation and socialism. An emphasis on national liberation remained but insofar as there was contestation with certain socialist forces and a large degree of support for socialism within the social base of the Congress forces, the exact relationship between the two struggles was constantly formulated, reformulated and debated.

The 1970s tended to see the operationalisation of this national liberation perspective primarily in the form of community support for workers action or vice versa, in some situations and not in others, or the articulation of positions where specific sectoral organisations orientated themselves towards an overall national democratic perspective. The coming together of the various trends into what could be seen as a broad national alliance was a slow process whose manifestations would become clearer over time.

Paradoxically a common support for socialism indicated common ground between the various anti-apartheid forces. The internal sub-division resulted in the trade unions presenting an often-alternative socialist, non-racial tradition, which also was contesting BC positions. Socialism was therefore a point of convergence, though not

initially acknowledged. Another paradox is that the word 'socialism' is seldom heard in polite circles today, except to laugh at the foibles of some of our 'youthful fantasies'. At the same time, ANC and government in defending conservative economic policies deploy the discourse of Marxism and Leninism.

4. Congress hegemony as a democratic alternative

Congress was depicted as part of a democratic movement. In contrast to apartheid imposing its policies, the Congress position was depicted as arising from below and involving processes leading to a situation where the people would govern, as demanded by the Freedom Charter. The exact content of this democracy would also undergo various permutations over time. The degree to which it could be implemented or was intended to be implemented during the course of struggle varied, depending on the degree of repression as well as the way in which particular structures were constituted. As indicated, there were tendencies towards patronage and that may have impeded the level of democracy inside some organisations. Also the meanings attached to democracy in the popular power period during the 1980s constituted a substantial reinterpretation of previous notions of democracy and the application of the Freedom Charter provisions in novel ways (Suttner, 2004c).

The Congress movement like any political tradition continually confronted a tension between the democracy it was advocating for the society as a whole and the creation of internal democracy within the organisations aligned to or the ANC itself. Obviously the overall situation in which the ANC was illegal and the advocacy of its policies was illegal created a framework unconducive to openness and the type of debate that could be engaged in where there was no fear of repression. A popular upsurge may have been in progress but that did not mean that every person could feel free to confide their beliefs to every other comrade or supposed comrade, especially if betrayal could lead to arrest.

Continued state repression, especially during the states of emergency between 1985 and 1990 also influenced the degree of internal democracy that was practised. Even

where desired by members, conventional democratic practices could not be sustained without risking arrest.

This was a situation, which lent itself towards small caucuses making initial decisions, which were then sold to wider bodies (in varying ways depending on the conditions). Alternatively and especially where some leadership figures were under forms of restriction, implementation was engineered in one or other way, which sometimes led to complaints of undemocratic practices. But some degree of subterfuge and opacity was required in order to survive and where one could not be entirely open with one's own comrades –as a necessity in the conditions prevailing, it was hard to practice internal democracy.

Insofar as the existence of an underground ANC presence was often a crucial reference point during this period, it by definition operated by 'remote influence' or 'remote control'. Of necessity these influences had to come from 'faceless individuals'. This was apparently also true of certain unions, where informants have told the author, delays in discussions often arose for inexplicable reasons, but appear to have been due to consultations with veterans from SACTU and other ANC-allied organisations.

4. Mass organisation and struggle as key manifestation of Congress strategic hegemony

A key feature of Congress politics was that it was intended to be mass-driven politics. That was the character of the period that was emerging, that the people were driving the process. They articulated their own demands through their own structures, which they had built on various fronts. For many years this outcome had been envisaged by the ANC, though its exact manifestation could not be clearly imagined. (ANC, 1979, Barrell, 1992). The ANC had for some time wanted to operate in the public terrain and not only through the presence of individuals who may have had more or less progressive perspectives, but through the masses making their strength felt in a number of fronts. This may also account partly for the ANC having spent some time

wooing Mangosuthu Buthelezi before finally deciding that his agenda was not the same as theirs. Buthelezi may have had a mass base at certain phases of Inkatha's existence and the ANC may have hoped to ensure that it developed along the lines of democratic politics. But that was not to be.

In contrast, the mass politics emerging in the late 70s and after were infused with the ideas of the Freedom Charter and its mass character was also linked to the conception of a struggle that was national, that is, one whose scope was meant to be covering the entire country and all its peoples.

Who established ANC hegemony?

1. Underground operatives

The focus of this thesis has been on the building of underground organisation and it is one of its contentions that the underground was a key factor that kept the ANC alive, widened its base of support and prepared a group of cadres for opening up legal space and influenced that space, both from positions of illegality as well as through participation in the public domain.

But the achievements of the ANC after embarking on revolutionary activity cannot be attributed to any one factor alone. Nor indeed can the establishment of ANC hegemony be seen as emanating purely from formal ANC organisational activities or directives alone. That hegemony arose from activities of a variety of forces, formally and informally connected to the ANC or allied organisations and their overall goals.

The ANC underground like the older comrades on Robben Island and in exile were the bearers of a historical tradition that was communicated to younger people. In that sense the underground formed part of a continuing, enduring cultural presence, which survived the darkest periods. In communicating this history and the lessons of this history they helped equip a new generation for the struggles of the late 1970s and 1980s, they provided tools that enabled what had previously been forced underground to increasingly emerge above ground, despite legal sanctions barring this.

The generation that emerged in the late 70s and 80s had a sense of the history of the struggle. Often it may have been insufficiently nuanced but through the presence of underground organisation and as indicated through similar processes of education and induction taking place on Robben Island and in the camps, a concept of what it meant to be part of 'Congress' became diffused amongst this new generation and politicised their activities in a manner that transformed these into political action with a clear Congress orientation.

The ANC underground operated primarily within the African community and it may be true to say that the existence of the ANC was in many respects *an enduring cultural presence*, even during the darkest periods. This is perfectly compatible with the contention of many writers that the 60s saw an atmosphere of fear, that many supporters of the ANC may have kept that a secret except amongst trusted friends. Nevertheless an ANC presence persisted in varying ways in both urban and rural areas, in songs, and in other manifestations. (Nomboniso Gasa, 2003).

On the one hand, it is true that the Rivonia and other arrests were a severe blow to the ANC as an organisation and created an element of demoralisation and fear. Children, we have seen, were warned of the dangers of following the road of Mandela. But it is important that we do not exaggerate this element of the response, for it was prudent in the 1960s, to keep a low profile and to avoid resistance until or unless one understood how to express it without inviting repression. There was no reason to encourage children to remember the ANC where one was inviting police attention by so doing. It is not thereby suggested that the apparent silence meant a carefully planned but stealthy support for the organisation.

At the same time there were elements of continuity as well as rupture. As indicated by Limb in Chapter 4, not every ANC person was arrested in the 60s. At the same time, the basis for ANC support cannot be measured through membership figures or public activity in the name of the organisation. Even in its earlier legal periods there were many people who considered themselves to be 'ANC' without ever joining. Chief Luthuli was not himself a member of the ANC at the point when he was elected Natal

President. (See Luthuli, 1962 and quotation from Joseph Mati at beginning of this chapter).

2. Robben Island

Robben Island as a prison (and to a lesser extent other prisons) was a key force in consolidating ANC support amongst people who would later re-enter South African society in various sectors –trade unions, political organisations, civics and other community structures. The Island was as one prisoner told the author, the only place where one was openly a member of the ANC. Obviously not openly and ostentatiously to the authorities, but both the prisoners and the authorities were well aware of who was ANC and the Island experience was a species of underground organisation in that while known as ANC, ANC activities had to be organised secretly and in the main this aimed at winning over those who were not members, inducting them into the organisation as members but also consolidating the understanding of those who were already members.

Prisoners were located in various parts of the prison, depending on their perceived seniority in the organisations (though some who were not in the top leadership were in the same section as Mandela, Sisulu and Mbeki). The leadership periodically wrote various papers, which were, discussed throughout the prison, through elaborate methods of smuggling. Each part of the prison had its own *Umrabulo* (i.e. political discussions) and formal courses of study of ANC history as well as Marxism. While Marxism was taught, the Communist Party did not formally operate as an organisation independently of the ANC on the island. (Cf Chapter 3 above, where a similar absence of an independent Communist presence can be seen more generally).

Political education was conducted at various places of work and in various sections of the prison. But where there was a dispute, the resolution of issues was sometimes done on a hierarchical basis. Where conflict over an interpretation raged for some time, it was usually referred to the top leadership for a decision, though they were not always in agreement. In particular, disputes continued between Govan Mbeki (allied with Harry Gwala, not located with the top leadership) and Raymond Mhlaba some of the time on the one side and Mandela and Sisulu on the other. It was partly a contest

of Mandela's leadership but an ideological component also surfaced. This referred to the extent to which the struggle for socialism should be incorporated within the vision of the ANC, which Mandela and Sisulu resisted. (Buntman, 2003 and personal communications with various former prisoners).

Over the years extensive political education courses were developed. These inducted some into the ideas and practices of the organisation and consolidated the understanding of others. (e.g. Buntman, 2003, Suttner, 2005). Individuals such as Terror Lekota 'crossed' from BC to ANC because of his continual exposure to the ideas of the ANC leadership. Others consolidated their discussion in the hothouse atmosphere where politics was continually debated.

Robben Island was a place where people became intellectuals in the sense in which Gramsci used the term, that is, through their practice (irrespective of their academic qualifications) entailing an intellectual role. (See Suttner, 2005). Significantly, some of the most important teachers on the island, men like Motsoaledi and Sisulu, were not conventionally trained intellectuals, but mainly self-taught.

3. Exile

The 1976 uprising led to the exit of many young activists out of the country, partly because they were on the run from police and could not in any case continue their education inside the country, partly in order to seek a way of returning, equipped to meet the apartheid repressive forces through military means. Many of these people had a vague idea of the difference between ANC and PAC or what level of organisation existed outside. Neither the ANC nor the PAC were equipped to deal with this influx, but the ANC gradually developed a greater capacity than the PAC to house those who joined it, and also to give them training in the political ideas of the organisation. It appears that most were offered a choice between education and military training. The ANC favoured the former, but many insisted on going to the military camps. (Suttner, 2003b, Interviews with Serache, 2002, Faith Radebe, 2004. See also Callinicos, 2004, 435ff).

From an early stage of their admission to ANC environments, some form of political education took place. Many of the youth were not at all sympathetic to ideas of nonracialism and in some cases objected to lectures by white comrades. (e.g. Faith Radebe, interview, 2004). Others were not interested in completing or extending their education and this may have been the majority view. They wanted to return gun in hand and take on the apartheid regime. It required a great deal of explanation to convince the youth that the ANC army was not a conventional one, but also a political army. As was repeatedly said, what mattered most was not that someone held a gun, but who was behind the gun and what their understanding was. (See also Callinicos, 2004, 435).

From early days of reception in the neighbouring southern African states, through military training and political education all over the world, the ideas of the ANC were instilled in these young men and women. Many of them, like the late Mzala became intellectuals and trainers in their own right, contributing to the political doctrine of the ANC or enriching it from the experiences of the BC period. (See e.g. Mzala, 1988, Suttner, 2005). This enrichment cannot be measured purely through the absorption of political ideas but also through the sense of psychological emancipation that these youth brought into the ANC.

Again, the character of this hegemonic outlook was contested within the exile community and passed through various changes and is not the same as what appears to be hegemonic today. At the time of the ANC's banning, Marxist ideas were present in the thinking of many leading figures who had joined the ANC, but this was an individual choice, rather than an organisational orientation. Over the years and decades that followed a marked ideological shift can be discerned so that the overall orientation was heavily influenced by Marxist positions. (ANC, 1979). This is also evident in the foreign policy of the organisation, which became closely aligned to that of the USSR, and its allies, (See ANC 1969).

This orientation was reflected from an early stage in the literature used for the induction of new recruits. While the ANC history, strategies and tactics were central elements in its teachings, Marxist education also became a key part of what was taught in the camps and in other classes. This is reflected in the published lectures of

Jack Simons and also confirmed by interviews conducted. (Sparg et al, 2001, Serache, 2002, Memela interview, 2003). This education was often empowering and instilled pride in some in their backgrounds, which often were characterised by great poverty. Totsie Memela mentioned that having come from a poor background, on being taught Marxist beliefs she for the first time felt proud to come from the working class. (Interview, 2003)

Over the years that followed this dominant orientation of the ANC in exile, acted together with the influences of the underground and from Robben Island in clarifying the interpretations of ANC policies, strategies and tactics, but also in popularising socialism in the late 70s and 1980s. This is not to say that there were not serious differences within this overall orientation. In some ways, these may have fed into the 'workerists/nationalist' contestation already referred to or other internal divisions. In some ways, divisions within external groupings, may have impeded coordination and common goals. Distinct factions may have been 'running' independent underground groups within the country whose interpretation reflected the differences between the distinct 'handlers'. There were units, such as that to which Jeremy Cronin and myself belonged, which related to Joe Slovo and Ronnie Kasrils, while those in Natal, linked to Pravin Gordhan, were primarily connected to Mac Maharaj. Then others seem to have related to Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and others. These exiled individuals, I later discovered, differed sharply over strategy and tactics and naturally this impacted on those to whom they related inside the country, sometimes as underground units and sometimes above ground.

At the same time, as briefly mentioned, there was a strange, though unacknowledged convergence between the so-called workerists, nationalists and the dominant ethos in exile at the time. The internal trade union movement presented an alternative socialist and nonracial tradition, which was also in contest with BC. Socialism was thus a point of convergence between many of the opposing forces, though organisational loyalties may at a certain point have made it difficult to acknowledge this common ground.

Nevertheless, whatever divergences may have existed in interpretation, these external forces built a cohesive ANC orientation, which became a reference point for people

inside the country, especially through Freedom Radio and the *African Communist, Sechaba* and *Mayibuye.* The latter two, ANC journals, were less easily available than the *African Communist* as far as I am aware though this may have varied from time to time.

The importance of the exile influence was that it transmitted ANC beliefs in an overall package, emphasising that 'the main content of the present stage of the South African revolution is the national liberation of the largest and most oppressed group- the African people.' (ANC, 1969). And within this broad mass of the African people who had to be mobilised, special emphasis was placed on the role of the working class.

Simultaneously emphasis was placed on the nonracial character of the struggle aiming to liberate all and inviting the participation of members of all groupings including progressive whites. The objective was to implement the vision of the Freedom Charter, which represented a manifestation of the goals of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR). This did not mean purely political liberation but also the transformation of the overall conditions of oppression and exploitation. This theme was of course open to more than one interpretation with some emphasising NDR's inherent transformatory character and others depicting it as being or having the potential of continuous transition from national liberation to socialism.

In a practical sense this section cannot be ended without noting the importance of the interventions from Lusaka, the strategic directions given, joining internal and external. In a sense, the ANC succeeded in that it propounded a vision that was more coherent and whose understanding corresponded more than that of other organisations, to what people believed was necessary and often showed to be possible. This was displayed particularly in the January 8 statements on the anniversary of the ANC, when it declared that a particular year would be devoted to one or other sector of struggle. Generally this led to extensive development and focus on that area, within the country. The ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) understood, sometimes better than the UDF in the later period, the language of the various constituencies, language that would persuade them to undertake certain tasks. When, for example, the UDF struggled to persuade students to return to school, they responded (albeit

temporarily) to the ANC's call to return, because the 'schools are your trenches'. Militaristic this may have been, but it struck a chord and this was an important feature of the success of the ANC strategic vision in mobilising and organising people from a variety of sectors placed geographically in a range of situations.

4. MK as a military force

The earlier reference to MK related to its being a symbolic force. As indicated, its military power was not what was attributed to it by many activists. But its presence, the existence of a military arm of the ANC, which attacked apartheid targets, was an important element in establishing ANC hegemony over the anti-apartheid forces in general. It was in this period immediately after 1976 when MK first fired shots on South African soil. That captured popular imagination and the existence of such an army was an important contributory factor in establishing ANC hegemony in this period. Interviewees testify in the early 60s to the psychological impact of seeing black people carrying arms and in some cases, seeing Mandela in military uniform (Interview Matthews Ngcobo, 2005, when undergoing training in Algeria).

Obviously the impact of the limited military activities of MK cannot be verified absolutely without undertaking some type of survey. It is not claimed that MK had the capacity to overthrow the apartheid regime, but there is little doubt that many people cherished that hope, that MK inspired them greatly and that its existence and the military achievements that it did secure was an important element in ANC hegemony being consolidated. It should be recalled that many people did not understand an attack on a police station in Sibasa in the overall balance of military power, and tended to overrate its significance. But these military forays were important in the perception of the ANC as the force that would bring freedom.

Conclusion

At the outset it was indicated that this chapter is by way of an epilogue. The earlier part of this work has aimed to 'render visible' a relatively unacknowledged part of resistance history and to extract its various meanings, meanings that go well beyond

pure organisational questions. As we have seen, these relate to distinct identities, questions of gender relations, relationships between the personal and the organisation and modes of organisation specific to conspiratorial small groups.

The way in which conventional scholarship treats knowledge is that the written word stands higher in the hierarchy of knowledge than what may be known by many who cannot write. Before the latter insights can form part of what is called knowledge it needs to be changed into the literate form. Much of this work has dealt with that body of knowledge or knowledges that are marginalised because they have not crossed that hurdle and been recorded. This is not to say that having crossed that hurdle necessarily means that what is recorded is necessarily a true reflection of what is understood in the communities from whom the recorded information has derived. There are often many accompanying gestures and in the case of art forms performance elements that get lost in transition to the written text.

This thesis has sought to make visible a range of activities that have not found a place or adequate place in existing historiography or political treatments of the period after the banning of the ANC and the crushing of the top leadership. It has started in an earlier phase because what was done in the early ANC attempts to prepare for underground during the M-Plan, continued to have a bearing on subsequent organisational efforts in the immediate-post-Rivonia period, right up until the 1980s. Likewise the successful reconstitution of the South African Communist Party as an underground organisation had a continuing impact beyond the organisation itself. The experience that the Communists built had considerable influence on the early underground activities of the ANC and the re-establishment of the ANC underground.

What is true of the ANC in this regard is also true of the PAC, despite the limits on their activity. As indicated in Chapter 4, there is evidence in Tembisa township that released political prisoners from the late 1960s were a presence and influenced the thinking of the youth prior to 1976. (Moloi, 2005, ch 2). Likewise, as already noted, PAC leader Zeph Mothopeng revived a PAC cell in Krugersdorp in 1974. (Davis, 1987, pp31-33).

The thesis breaks from the approach which treats exile and internal as inevitably separate political experiences. This is not to suggest that every exile experience was part of the underground and other internal political activities. But the thesis shows in many cases that the training and preparations from outside were integrally connected to what people who were not purely internally based were able to do. Even in the case of those who never left the country or had any contact with externally based individuals, Radio Freedom was often a major influence on their activities and the moulding of their ideas and the development of a process of ANC hegemony.

The thesis steps back from a historical account and tries to dissect underground organisation in South Africa as a particular type of social and political phenomenon, operating according to distinct rules that are in many respects unique. In certain respect this relates to how an underground unit has work in order to avoid detection and perform its operation –qualities that in some ways are completely different from modes of politics practised in normal times.

In addition, to trying to unpack these 'rules' and modes of operation, the gendered nature of underground organisation is brought to the surface in that men and women enter into activities that in the case of MK are essentially militarised and traditionally the preserve of men. The public terrain or the political terrain is in general whether secretive or public, counterposed to the home, where women are supposed to find fulfillment. The thesis has shown that the character of gender relations within the ANC underground cannot be simply categorised. On the one hand women entered male dominated organisations, in particular the army, and sometimes encountered difficulties in fulfilling themselves and realising their capacities or even utilising the training they received to the full. But partly because of their own assertiveness and partly because of the specific commitment of some leading individuals like Chris Hani, the tendency to marginalise women was combated.

Related to this discussion is Chapter 7 where the thesis addresses the tendency of revolutionary struggles to subsume individual judgments and certain needs that are personal into the collective. There are a variety of ways in which the revolution tends to 'take over' the individual and sideline his or her personal judgment or needs. As with the earlier chapter on gender there are counter-veiling tendencies.

This final chapter shows in a brief overview that underground activity contributed to the opening of a new phase where the ANC moved from rebuilding and defensive action towards an offensive on a wide range of fronts. The creation of new conditions cannot be credited to any one element including the underground, which is the focus of this thesis. It is the total impact of the various forces ranged against the regime (including international diplomatic and solidarity activities, which are not discussed here), which led to a situation where negotiations became an option.

In the period that followed, the apartheid regime was not able to secure an environment where governability could be sustained. At the same time, the forces of liberation, despite their increased range and effectiveness were not of sufficient power to defeat the apartheid government completely. This state of what Gramsci calls 'unstable equilibrium' (Gramsci, 1971) is one where negotiations become an option and which created a situation where the apartheid regime suffered a strategic defeat, being forced to concede democratic rule. It is beyond the scope of this work to discuss the qualifications that might be made on that statement. It is sufficient to note that democratic rule was a strategic victory for the liberation forces and for the purposes of this thesis, that the underground organisation of the ANC was an important element in bringing it about.

In the preface to volume 5 of the famous Karis/Carter/Gerhart collection of documents, Gail Gerhart writes:

> [After the defeats of the mid 1960s] hard questions faced the decimated opposition. How could blacks regroup and resist a white regime that was intransigent, powerfully armed, and bolstered by the major western powers? Could the *liberation movements from exile* effect major change through a strategy of guerrilla warfare, *or* would change depend principally on internal political resistance?…. (1997, preface, xxi. Italics inserted).

The authors ask other questions, but the manner of posing these reflect a dichotomous framework, which is a barrier, rather than an aid in uncovering what in fact happened. It is hoped that this thesis has shown in the first place, that the assumption of a choice

between externally initiated guerrilla warfare and internal political resistance, does not correspond to the way in which resistance politics were played out. In fact, a substantial amount of military activity was initiated inside the country. Also, the notion of the 'liberation movements from exile' or the phrase 'the exiled ANC' in regular use seems to imply that the organisation's existence was entirely tied to its structures outside the country. [93]

This thesis has sought to show that this is not true, especially if we decline a definition of the ANC, which is restricted to formally carrying a membership card, something that was illegal within the country after 1960. Finally, while the authors may pose a choice between guerrilla activity and political resistance, the one allegedly being externally initiated and the other being internal, was it necessary to choose? Or was the necessity rather to find a formula for combining these? The degree to which these were combined, especially in the period after 1976, to that extent the danger for the regime escalated.

In fact, the process of establishing ANC hegemony within the country is the story of the combination of internal and external, of the merging of efforts through a variety of formal and informal organisational methods over a long period.

[93] Similar phrases are found on pp.6, 181 (while on this same page presenting evidence showing its internal, underground existence).

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