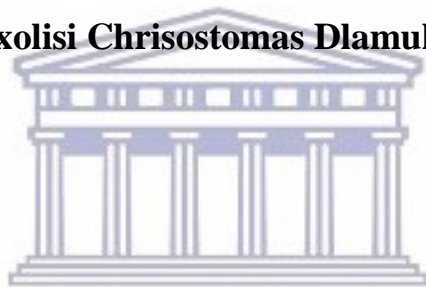


**Connectedness and Disconnectedness in Thembeyakhe Harry
Gwala's Biography, 1920-1995: Rethinking Political Militancy,
Mass Mobilisation and Grassroots Struggles in South Africa**

Mxolisi Chrisostomas Dlamuka



UNIVERSITY *of the*
WESTERN CAPE

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University
of the Western Cape

March 2018

Supervisor: Professor Ciraj Rassool

DECLARATION

I, Mxolisi Chrisostomas Dlamuka, declare that “Connectedness and Disconnectedness in Thembeyakhe Harry Gwala’s Biography, 1920-1995: Rethinking Political Militancy, Mass Mobilisation and Grassroots Struggles in South Africa” is my own work, that it has not been submitted for any degree or examination in any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Mxolisi Dlamuka



2 March 2018

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DEDICATION

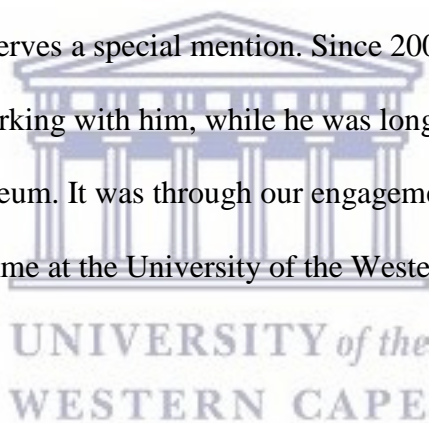
This dissertation is dedicated to all unknown and uncommemorated heroes and heroines who sacrificed their lives in prisons for South Africa to be a free country and a constitutional democracy.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This dissertation has taken many years of research, intellectual growth and encounters with new modes of knowledge and historical sources I never knew existed. It would have been difficult if I did not have the support of many people who made invaluable contributions. I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Professor Ciraj Rassool, for his patience, guidance and constructive critique throughout my doctoral studies. Ciraj was always willing to understand my approaches and constantly challenged me to explore new ways of re-interpreting Harry Gwala. Without his expert, yet accessible supervision, this dissertation would not have come to fruition.

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Throughout the course of this dissertation the Gwala family welcomed me into their homes and accepted me as part of their family. They gave freely of their time and let me have access to family documents and albums. They also allowed me to have access to sensitive classified documents which have never been accessed by any researcher. These are Lindiwe Gwala, Linda Gwala, Duduzile Gwala, and Noluthando Gwala. Noluthando and I exchanged lengthy telephone calls and countless text messages as I tried to determine how the Gwala family was dealing with issues of memorisation and politics. It was through her that I was able to interview a number of individuals whose knowledge of Gwala helped to inform the content of

this dissertation. I am highly indebted to her for her trust in me and her passion for ensuring that the history of her grandfather was told.

Thanks to Dr Frances Jowell, daughter of the late Mrs Helen Suzman, for giving me permission to access the Helen Suzman private papers held at the William Cullen Library's Historical and Literary Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand and the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives at the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

Professor Ari Sitas gave me incisive comments when he was a respondent to my presentation in August 2014 at the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar, hosted jointly by the Centre for Humanities Research and History Department at the University of the Western Cape. We exchanged numerous emails on how to approach my argument. Drs Sibongiseni Mkhize, Tshepo Moloi, Bongani Ndhlovu and Peter Alegi read and commented on draft chapters of this dissertation. I benefited immensely from their constructive criticism.

During the course of writing this dissertation I visited various repositories of knowledge and was warmly welcomed by staff members. At the Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository, Zama Gumede and Thando Maphumulo went out of their way to locate Gwala's court records. The Library of Parliament was helpful and provided me with an enabling environment and access to many literary treasures. I am indebted to the following staff of the Library of Parliament Library for going out of their way to accommodate my never ending requests: Thea Louw, Amanda Mdudu, Funeka Makapela, Fezile Makanda, and many others who took time to make enquiries on my behalf and make countless photocopies. Natalie Skomolo and Zahira Adams of the sensitive documents section at the National Archives of South Africa helped me to go through the process of requesting access Gwala's files in terms of the Promotion of Access to Information Act. Thank you for going out of your way to

ensure that these documents were delivered to me in Cape Town. Busi Khangala of the University of Cape Town's special collections also assisted by downloading electronic documents swiftly and promptly. I accessed newspapers at the National Library of South Africa, Cape Town campus, and the assistance of library staff is much appreciated.

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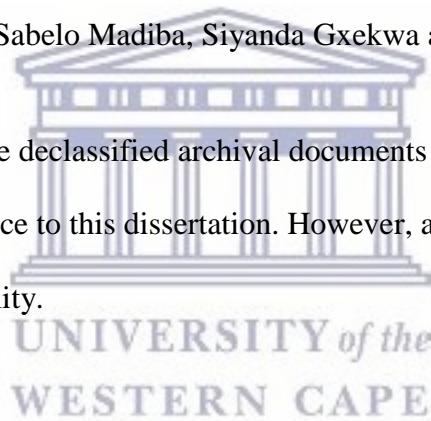
Professor Thomas Karis, a member of the Order of O. R. Tambo, kindly gave me access to his interview with Harry Gwala which was part of the broader ongoing Karis and Carter projects. Sadly, Tom Karis passed away while this dissertation was being finalised.

Large parts of this dissertation were written when I was employed at Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. I would like to thank Honourable J. L. Mahlangu, V. P. Mogotsi, G. A. Grootboom and X. S. Tom for encouraging me. Gadija Abdullatief, my former manager, understood my commitment to this dissertation and ensured that I had sufficient time to focus on it. Towards the end of writing this dissertation I was employed by the Western Cape's Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport. Brent Walters and Guy Redman, allowed me time off to finalise the writing of the dissertation. Ameerah Peters, Aneeqah Brown, Vuyokazi Heli, Noluvo Toto, Nuraan Vallie, Michael Janse van Rensburg and Zwelibanzi Shiceka assisted me in various ways.

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their emphasis on education and excellence, despite the fact that they had very little education themselves. My mother, Nokuphiwa, supported me throughout my journey. I wish to thank the following family members, friends and colleagues for their support and encouragement: Mrs T. B. Blose, the late Michael Blose, Simon Gasas, Ntombizakhona Dlamini, the late Patrick Dlamini, Dumisani Zondi, Bonisiwe Zondi, Nobuhle Mathonsi, Sibusiso Mkhithi, Jabulani Sithole, Muzi Hadebe, Paul Tichmann, Fiona Clayton, Lindokuhle Ngomane, Sthembile Mkhathshwa, Fundiswa Cwele, Nomsa Khumalo, Ntobeko Gumede, Zwelibanzi Masilela, Dr Sibusiso Khuzwayo, Nduduzo Gasas, Musawenkosi Hlengwa, Zwelakhe Cebisa, Nondumiso Mzobe, Nomathemba Hlengwa, Mbongeni Cele, Sphumelele Ntombela, Siphos Zulu, Sinamile Ntombela, Mbulelo Mrubata, Siboniso Dlamuka, Sinenhlanhla Gasas, Sinothi Thabethe, Cebolenkosi Gasas, Sabelo Madiba, Siyanda Gxekwa and Themba Dlamuka.

Stephen Heyns translated some declassified archival documents from Afrikaans to English and provided editorial assistance to this dissertation. However, any errors and omissions remain entirely my responsibility.



ABSTRACT

This dissertation is premised on the notions of connectedness and disconnectedness as a contribution to the field of South African biography. I argue that Harry Gwala's life was characterised by connectedness and disconnectedness and was shaped by his determination to remain connected while the state utilised its coercive power to disconnect him. While South African history has been largely written within the framework of repression and resistance, a study of Gwala's life enables historians to examine twentieth century history from a different perspective which focuses on themes of connectedness and disconnectedness. Gwala's rural background, his training as a teacher and his later involvement in trade unionism enabled him to develop and maintain connectedness with grassroots sentiments. In an attempt to disconnect Gwala from these pursuits, he was occasionally tortured and served with banning orders which restricted his movement and political activities. He was imprisoned on Robben Island between 1964 to 1972 and 1977 to 1987. While disconnected by banning orders and constant harassment by state security agents, Gwala continued to retain his connectedness through underground activities and later through his involvement in re-establishing branches of the African National Congress after his release from prison in 1988. This dissertation argues that Gwala was a product of a complex society and varied social milieux which were all characterised by high levels of class deprivation and exploitation. As he meandered through various social milieux he developed a working class political approach which impelled him towards mass mobilisation and opposition to the state's oppressive notion of race and class. Gwala became a medium to connect various classes and political groupings during the liberation struggle in South Africa. This biography also makes a contribution to the emerging body of literature on the histories of resistance politics at local and national levels in South Africa.

ACRONYMS

AAC	All Africa Convention
ACC	African Congregational Church
AGM	Annual General Meeting
ANC	African National Congress
ANCWL	ANC Women's League
APC	Alan Paton Centre
ARM	African Resistance Movement
ASSECA	Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African
AZAPO	Azanian People's Organisation
AZASCO	Azanian Students' Convention
BCM	Black Consciousness Movement
BPC	Black People's Convention
CBD	Central Business District
CNETU	Council of Non-European Trade Unions
COD	South African Congress of Democrats
CODESA	Convention for a Democratic South Africa
CODESRIA	Council for the Development of Social Science Research in Africa
CONTRALESA	Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
CPSA	Communist Party of South Africa
CYL	Congress Youth League
DBAD	Department of Bantu Administration and Development

DC	Dependants' Conference [of the SACC]
DCC	Dependants' Conference Committee
DOJ	Department of Justice
DOP	Department of Prisons
FC	Football Club
GGSC	Governor General Shield Competition
HRWIU	Howick Rubber Workers' Industrial Union
HRWU	Howick Rubber Workers' Union
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union
IDAF	International Defence Aid Fund
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
IRC	International Red Cross
JRC	Justice and Reconciliation Commission
KZP	KwaZulu Police
MBFA	Maritzburg Bantu Football Association
MDAFA	Maritzburg and District African Football Association
MDFA	Maritzburg District Football Association
MDM	Mass Democratic Movement
MDNFA	Maritzburg and District Native Football Association
MEC	Member of the Executive Council
MFA	Makana Football Association
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
NAD	Native Affairs Department
NAFA	Natal African Football Association

NAR	National Archives Repository
NCC	National Co-ordinating Council
NCL	National Committee for Liberation
NEC	National Executive Committee of the ANC
NEUF	Non-European United Front
NIC	Natal Indian Congress
NICYL	Natal Indian Congress Youth League
NRC	Native Representative Council
NUAY	National Union of African Youth
NWC	National Working Committee of the ANC
PAC	Pan-Africanist Congress
PACSA	Pietermaritzburg Agency for Christian Social Awareness
PAR	Pietermaritzburg Archive Repository
PCC	Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches
PMBC	Pietermaritzburg Council
PWV	Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging
RAB	Release Advisory Board
REC	Regional Executive Committee
RC	Reception Committee
RMC	Release Mandela Campaign
RSC	Regional Supreme Court
RU	Referees' Union
SAAFA	South Africa African Football Association
SACC	South African Council of Churches

SACTU	South African Congress of Trade Unions
SADET	South African Democracy Education Trust
SAFA	South African Football Association
SAHA	South African History Archive
SAIC	South African Indian Congress
SANFA	South African Native Football Association
SAP	South African Police
SASO	South African Students' Organisation
SASSA	South African State Security Archives
SATLC	South African Trade and Labour Council
SAYCO	South African Youth Congress
SDU	Self-Defence Units
TECON	Theatre Council of Natal
TIC	Transvaal Indian Congress
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UDF	United Democratic Front
UNISA	University of South Africa
UWL, HLP	University of Witwatersrand Library Historical and Literary Papers
UWC-RIM	University of the Western Cape-Robben Island Museum Mayibuye Archive

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INTRODUCTION

In June 1995, Robert Haswell, a former member of the Democratic Party who had defected to the African National Congress (ANC), asked Harry Gwala whether he could write his biography 'as it was crucial for his legacy and values to be understood by generations.'¹ Gwala 'reluctantly' agreed but he was soon hospitalised. While in hospital they set the date for an extended recorded biographical interview. However, when Haswell arrived on the set date carrying a tape recorder with him, Gwala opened his eyes, shook his head and said 'I don't think the world is yet ready for my story.'²

A few days later, Gwala died. Why was Gwala reluctant to have his biography written? Perhaps the robust debates that he had with the leadership of both the ANC and the Communist Party during the 1990s could have caused a perception that the world was rebuffing him and not ready for his story. This dissertation locates Gwala's biography as a history which enables us to understand complex relationships between the people and the presence of the past. Having been unable to write Gwala's biography, Haswell opted to write an obituary in which he pondered whether Gwala's 'autobiography could have enriched our understanding of the liberation struggle' and pleaded that a biography be written.³ Even though it has been over 20 years since this call for a biography of Gwala was made, there is still a dearth of academic research on Gwala's life. It is that interest and the longing for Gwala's biography that has prompted me to embark on this dissertation. Gwala's biography fills a lacuna in the history of dis/connectedness in South African political history.

¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

³ R. Haswell, 'Obituaries: Themba Harry Gwala (1920-1995)', *Natalia: Journal of the Natal Society*, Vol. 25, 1995, 90.

The biography of Gwala cannot be written without closing the distinction between history and politics. This dissertation creates modes of understanding Gwala different to the racialised mould that was produced by apartheid historical narratives. Gwala's biography enables the possibility of a new understanding of non-racialism, militancy and political consciousness. The study of Gwala is a re-categorisation of history and a process of establishing a dialogue about the processes of identity formation and political disconnectedness. Furthermore, Gwala's biography is not only a dissertation of history but an analysis of how the relationship between politics, trade unionism and grassroots intellectualism enables us to rethink the history of the liberation struggle, political militancy and warlordism.

The main theoretical interest of this dissertation is a critical examination of the life of Thembeyakhe Harry Gwala and the extent to which he contributed to political change in South Africa from the 1940s until the 1990s. Thus, Gwala's biography is a mediating agency to understand the germination of political ideas and liberation history in South Africa. While this dissertation will contribute towards the filling of a historiographical gap, it does not provide an all-embracing narration of Gwala's life and does not seek to define Gwala as political saint or the most significant intellectual. Instead, through the approaches related to the production of history, the dissertation constructs a chronological narrative of Gwala's life, his contribution to development of political theory and, where possible, does not conceal that he had his frailties, just like any other human being. Throughout this dissertation I explore how Gwala was shaped by material conditions of deprivation and the extent to which these radicalised his politics and his understanding of bringing about social and political change.

This biography takes a form of an intellectual history, in which Gwala's theorisation of the development of political systems in South Africa, his ideas, and his approaches to resistance

are outlined, systematised and critically evaluated. Through the life of an individual, this dissertation demonstrates how silences in history have created an unfinished version of the past which perpetuate disconnectedness and political isolationism in post-apartheid South Africa. The notion of connectedness and disconnectedness enables new understanding of the individual and social processes and of the relationship between biography and history.

Thembeyakhe Harry Gwala, also known as Themba, was born on 20 July 1920. His parents Philemon Mjamane ka Mgingqika and Bella Qhikiza, *nee* Mkhathini, were from KwaSwayimane in the New Hanover district.⁴ The Gwala family's religious denomination had been Lutheran but Philemon converted to the African Congregational Church, where he became a lay preacher. The ACC, previously known as the Zulu Congregational Church, had been established in 1896 in the Mkhambathini area, closer to Swayimane, by Simungu Shibe.⁵ Perhaps, Philemon was attracted by Shibe's stance towards political formations such as Funamalungelo and his assertiveness on the issue of African rights.

Gwala was born into a Natal that had undergone geopolitical transition and resistance in April 1906 which turned into a rebellion with the uprising of the Zondi chief, Bhambatha ka Mancinza.⁶ Chief Swayimana, a loyalist, had sided with the Natal government during the rebellion.⁷ However, by the mid-1920s, he had lost his status as the 'best chief in Natal' as he was at loggerheads with white commercial farmers who kept on extending their farms into his

⁴ The Mkhathini and Gwala clans are the earliest to have settled in the area during the 19th century. Up until recently, they owned large portions of land and wattle plantations in Swayimane, see National Archives Repository (NAR), URU, 136/14/376/73, visit of chief Swayimana of Natal to Witwatersrand, correspondence from the Secretary of Native Affairs to the Director of Native Labour, 10 August 1932. The New Hanover magisterial district forms part of the Mshwathi Local Municipality, in the south eastern part of the uMgungundlovu District Municipality (greater Pietermaritzburg area).

⁵ H. Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L. Dube, founding president of the ANC* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011), 100-101.

⁶ J. Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: Africans and the State in Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995).

⁷ M. R. Mahoney, 'Racial Formation and Ethnogenesis from Below: The Zulu Case, 1879-1906', *International Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 576.

land.⁸ As large portions of fertile land, wattle and timber plantations that previously belonged to local black farmers were forcibly taken, Chief Swayimana was agitated and became embroiled in a bitter struggle with white farmers over land ownership. Drawing from oral sources, Mlindeli Gcumisa argues that after the fallout with the Natal government over boundaries, a plot was orchestrated with a dentist in New Hanover to remove all the chief's teeth without anaesthesia.⁹ As result of this procedure, Swayimana bled for weeks and eventually died.

The great depression of 1929 had a devastating impact on the price of wattle which had been a source of income for many families in Swayimane area.¹⁰ Philemon, although having been a prosperous peasant compared to other Africans in the area, lost his fortune, resulting in Bella having to find employment in New Hanover as a domestic worker.¹¹ Gwala remembered how his family had, for the first time, little food and was affected by hunger and poverty like many other African families. As a boy Gwala emphasised that his 'grandmother used to get up before dawn together with other women of the area to do what was commonly known as *togt* labour at the neighbouring white farms and paid about 9 cents a day.'¹² Gwala recalled how his 'grandmother used to return from work at dark into the cold and there was frost, so she used to wear on her feet old rags to protect them from frost.'¹³ Such conditions would

⁸ For a detailed discussion on the role of Chief Swayimana, see J. Guy, *The Maphumulo Uprising: War, Law and Ritual in the Zulu Rebellion* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2005); NAR, DNL, 136/14/376(71), correspondence from the Chief Native Commissioner in Natal, 27 April 1923.

⁹ M. S. S. Gcumisa, *Awuwelwa Umngeni* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1995).

¹⁰ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala. I am grateful to Professor Thomas Karis for providing me with a copy of this interview ahead of its use in the broader ongoing Karis and Carter projects. Even though Professor Thomas Karis recorded that the interview was held in Durban, after listening to it, I have realised that the interview was in fact conducted at Gwala's home in Dambuza, Pietermaritzburg; Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹¹ Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), Regional Supreme Court, Natal (RSC), box 1/1/1011, vol. 39, cc 108/76, State v Themba H. Gwala and 9 others: mitigating statement by Themba H. Gwala, 5253; Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives (APC), PC76/1/1/1, 'Harry Gwala obituary by the Pietermaritzburg regional office of the SACP', Harry Gwala Collection.

¹² Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

¹³ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

later have an indelible impact on his theorisation of South African politics which linked the liberation struggle and trade unionism.

During the 1920s, there were no schools in KwaSwayimane area. The only schools available to Africans in the New Hanover Magisterial district were provided by missionaries, located 20 kilometres from Gwala's home. It is for this reason that Gwala attended a Presbyterian Mission School in Mpolweni (near New Hanover) until standard seven (grade 9).¹⁴ Gwala had intended to pursue further studies as he wanted to become a medical doctor, but economic circumstances forced him to leave high school, especially after his father died. Nevertheless, in 1940 he enrolled at the Adams College to complete his secondary education and train as a teacher. It was at Adams College where Gwala's life began to take a different course which shaped the rest of his life. Gwala passed away on 20 June 1995 at the age of 75 years, bringing to an end a career of political activism and broad-based mass political engagement in the Natal Midlands.

This dissertation covers 53 years of the life of a formidable political activist and trade union leader. It has six chapters. Chapter One explores theoretical approaches that underpin the production of biographies in post-apartheid South Africa. It further explains how connectedness and disconnectedness have been used as a lens through which historical moments in Gwala's life are seen.

Chapter Two examines the politicisation of Gwala by looking at the political environment that shaped his life during the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. During this era, Gwala concerned himself with trade unionism, resuscitating the then moribund Congress Youth League in

¹⁴ APC, PC76/1/1/1-2, Ruth Lundie notes after the interview with Harry Gwala, 10 March 1995.

Natal. Lastly, the chapter examines Gwala involvement in trade union activities in Howick and his broader engagement in national and local politics.

Chapter Three examines the complex interplay between Gwala and the local state, and the control of African leisure time during the 1920s to 1950s. It focuses on how Gwala, mindful of changing urban identities, used football as a tool of political mobilisation in Pietermaritzburg. Gwala's involvement in football led to animosity between him and the Pietermaritzburg Council which opted to support a collaborative football association.

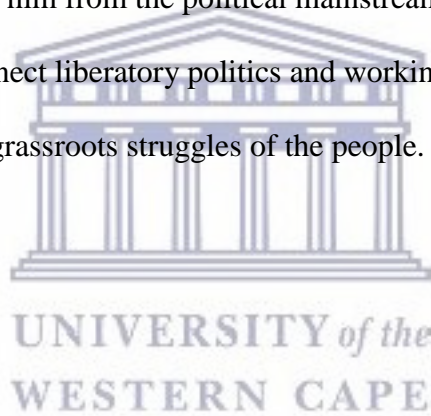
Chapter Four covers the trials on Gwala by the state in 1961, 1964 and 1976. It examines how the state used the courts as sites of exclusion. This chapter argues that it was the treatment by the state, including torture in detention, that resulted in a radical shift in Gwala. This chapter documents the role of Natal in the early years of Umkhonto we Sizwe. The chapter further examines these trials and how they were used as a tool to disconnect Gwala from liberation politics.

The role of Gwala in and his contribution to the development of sport and political education at Robben Island has not been researched in a nuanced way. Chapter Five examines these issues as part of Gwala's life in prison during the two terms he served, 1964-1972 and 1977-1987. The chapter further examines how his wife, Elda, and the children, forged ties with broader social and political forces in order to survive in the absence of Gwala and how they kept his memory alive while he was in prison.

By the mid-1980s the region of Natal and KwaZulu was characterised by violence. After his release from prison in 1988, Gwala featured prominently in the unfolding of violence. Chapter Six examines Gwala's theorisation of violence and how he participated in the political transformation in Natal and KwaZulu, and South Africa as a whole. It further

examines Gwala's interaction with key political role players in the region and contextualises political choices he made during the 1990s.

This dissertation examines Gwala within a hybrid framework of political history and biography in South Africa between 1920 and 1995. While it is biographical with a primary focus on reconstructing Gwala's life, this study places him within historical and political developments in Pietermaritzburg and Natal during the 20th century. Overall, this dissertation argues that Harry Gwala's life and politics epitomised complex relations of connectedness, through his political involvement in the Communist Party, African National Congress and trade unions, and disconnectedness as the state, and later the leadership of the liberation movements, sought to exclude him from the political mainstream. Gwala's life history was one in which he sought to connect liberatory politics and working class struggles, and to maintain his connection with grassroots struggles of the people. This he tried to do in the face of the adversity of repression.



CHAPTER ONE

Connectedness, disconnectedness and Harry Gwala's biography in South African historiography

Introduction

In August 2015, the eThekweni Municipality's Parks, Recreation and Culture unit announced that it was planning to host the Harry Gwala Memorial Lecture on 2 September of the same year. In reaction to the announcement, Zwakele Mncwango, leader of the Democratic Alliance, an official opposition party in the city council, questioned the proposed commemoration of Gwala. Mncwango questioned whether Gwala should be honoured in this way, and suggested that 'the municipality was just looking for an excuse to spend money.'¹ With support from other opposition parties, Mncwango went on to argue that 'Gwala was nobody in Durban, and he was a divisive figure responsible for much bloodshed in the Pietermaritzburg area.'² He emphasised that:

Gwala was hardly someone you can regard as a struggle hero because of his role in the killing of innocent people, he killed many IFP supporters in Pietermaritzburg. Now such a person can't be regarded as a hero of the struggle. Struggle heroes are those who fought against the apartheid regime. He was fighting his own people, he is not one we should celebrate.³

Mncwango's scathing questioning of Gwala's struggle credentials was part of a broad set of dogmatic attitudes towards Gwala that have failed to recognise the contribution he made to the political transformation of Natal and KwaZulu during the twentieth century. The primary aim of this chapter is to set the scene for connectedness and disconnectedness as terminologies of history and how the production of Gwala's life story is understood in this dissertation. The chapter also explores how the main body of biographical knowledge about

¹ Sihle Manda, 'Council squabble over Gwala splurge', *The Mercury*, 28 August 2015.

² Sihle Manda, 'Council squabble over Gwala splurge', *The Mercury*, 28 August 2015.

³ Sihle Manda, 'Council squabble over Gwala splurge', *The Mercury*, 28 August 2015.

Gwala generally has failed to locate his life in historical context, and has perpetuated historical misunderstandings about his role in history. Such has resulted to a biographical distortion that has failed to tell Gwala's story in its historical totality, with appropriate regard for continuity and chronology.⁴ This chapter theorises the production of biographies in post-apartheid South Africa, and provides a critique of the use of documents of repression as texts and sources in the process of writing South African history and biographies. The authority of documents of this nature is tainted by the repressive purposes they were written to serve.

Connectedness, disconnectedness and Gwala's biography

Biographies of key persons tend to put such individuals into a central place in the narrative, with events and their chronology revolving around these individuals.⁵ The discursive and distributive approaches have emerged as a critique of frameworks that project the individual as a self-sustaining and all-knowing figure who occupies the centre as the producer of all historicity in the biographical narrative in question.⁶ These approaches provide a decentring theory that focuses on the question of identification rather than the subject of identity. They seek to locate biographical production within a physical, economic, ecological and socio-political context, and acknowledge the interrelationship between the individual and the contexts within which he or she operated.⁷

According to these critiques, conventional biographies tend to be stories of individuals pulled out of their collective cultures, with the individual under discussion becoming the unit of analysis. In such an analysis, the collective capacity to bring about social change is collapsed

⁴ C. Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History and South African Political Biography', *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2010, 28-49.

⁵ See S. Pile and M. Keith (eds.), *Geographies of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1997).

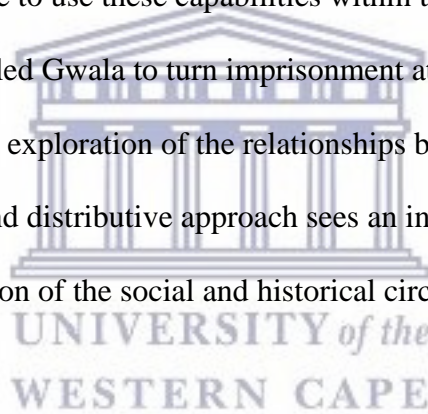
⁶ S. Hall, 'Introduction: Who Needs Identity?' in S. Hall and P. du Gay, (eds.), *Questions of Cultural Identity* (London: Sage, 1996), 1-2; C. Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History in South Africa', PhD dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2004, 12. See also P. Bourdieu, 'The Biographical Illusion', *Working Papers and Proceedings of the Centre for Social Studies*, No. 14, 1987 (Chicago Center for Psychosocial Studies).

⁷ Hall, 'Who Needs Identity', 4.

into the will of the individual concerned. This dissertation deliberately avoids exploring Gwala as a person operating in isolation. Rather, it examines how Gwala's interaction with politics and with other individuals reproduced a complex set of identities. Gwala was a product of a specific set of political circumstances and his contribution to transforming those circumstances was shaped by a complex combination of factors.

The discursive and distributive approaches enable us to understand how, despite the hostile political environment in which he found himself, Gwala was able to create spaces for action and how he took advantage of the social, economic and political systems to advance social change. As Neil Salkind suggests, individuals often possess foresight about the consequences of their behaviour, and are able to use these capabilities within the demands of their context.⁸

It was these abilities that enabled Gwala to turn imprisonment at Robben Island into a site of political struggle. Through the exploration of the relationships between individual and the environment, the discursive and distributive approach sees an individual, in the instance Harry Gwala, as a representation of the social and historical circumstances of the community, as well as an era.⁹



This biography of Gwala seeks to provide an example of a different way to write life history. It aims to bring recognition of the importance of connectedness and disconnectedness as a lens through which to see histories, and to embed this approach in the production of biography. The application of these terms together indicates their intrinsic relationship and predicts their dependency and application in an interchangeable manner.¹⁰ These terms help to describe the complexities of Gwala's relationship with the political processes of liberation

⁸ N. J. Salkind, *An Introduction to Theories of Human Development* (London and New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2004), 210.

⁹ S. Clingman, 'Biography and Representation: Some Analogies from Fiction', unpublished paper presented at the History Workshop Conference, University of Witwatersrand, February 1987, 6.

¹⁰ For detailed discussion of biography and history, see B. Caine, *Biography and History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 69.

organisations and trade unions, as well as with the state and its security enforcement agencies. As Gwala developed his political manoeuvrability, connectedness and disconnectedness became embedded into his identity. It has become impossible to determine whether the state or other political agent was responsible for Gwala's connectedness or disconnectedness at a given time.¹¹ Connectedness and disconnectedness are inherently subjective terminologies. Their application in this dissertation can therefore never be said to be based on objective analysis of the political scenario at a given time.

Gwala's politics of connectedness judged politics and political activism as the responsibility of certain individuals as well as the responsibility of the collective.¹² Thus, those in leadership assumed that they were responsible for representing group interests, which could only be reflected in practice with mandates, ongoing communication, and the renewal of mandates whenever this was necessary. Connectedness repudiates the notion of the 'the great man or woman' in history. It puts forward society, collective leadership and class as key features of identity formation. Gwala based his politics on the belief that resistance against the white minority government required various political forces and classes to converge in order to establish a non-racial and democratic country. However, Gwala's connectedness did not deny the need for the political heterogeneity of ways of responding to oppression.¹³ Gwala's life displayed a complex approach to politics as he could relate well with the masses as well as with senior leadership of both the ANC and Communist Party, and a wider network of trade unions. Gwala represented the early group of Communist Party members of the 1940s who joined the ANC and became channels for connection between the two organisations. Furthermore, given the working class background of the rank and file members

¹¹ For a detailed discussion of connectedness, see F. Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis MN: University of Minnesota, 2003).

¹² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

¹³ South African History Archives (SAHA), AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

of the ANC, Gwala was able to connect with them through his trade union activities. Between 1948 and 1952 he was the secretary of ten trade unions in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Howick. He was also involved in the administration of football, and was active in the Natal Congress Youth League (CYL). Gwala's life was characterised by a deep thread of connectedness, an entanglement with historical and political moments of the kind that later characterised collective resistance and post-liberation politics in South Africa.

This entanglement and these relationships involved proactive ways of interacting with the masses that were rooted in grassroots politics. Susan Magarey has argued that political biographies represent selective aspects of a person's life. The use of connectedness enables us to get a broader insight into Gwala's life and his political choices.¹⁴ Connectedness is the tool that enables readers to understand how politics, trade unionism and the individual have been integral to the production of Gwala's biography. In addition to providing insights into Gwala's life and political choices, connectedness provides a link through which insight can be gained into the broader political context in which he lived his life and made those choices.

Connectedness goes further than chronological narratives and enables us to identify a historical thematic approach which provides a lens through which to view history and the production of biography. The use of connectedness in the production of Gwala's biography in this dissertation does not equate to any notion of historical homogeneity. Rather, it compares different, complex histories of Gwala and how these took different forms over a period of decades.¹⁵ The complexity of Gwala's position as an exempted native and educated member of the *kholwa* elite did not cause him to isolate himself. Instead, he was motivated by a sense

¹⁴ S. Magarey, 'Three Questions for Biographers: Public or Private? Individual or Society? Truth or Beauty?', *Journal of Historical Biography*, Vol. 4, Autumn 2008, 3-15.

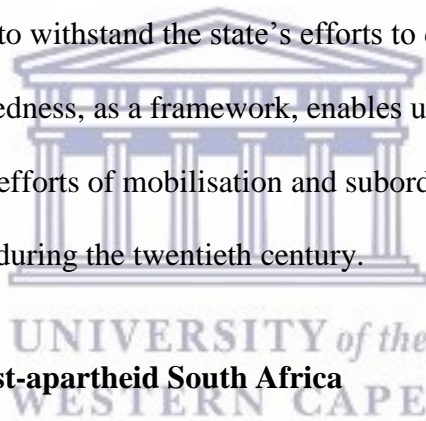
¹⁵ See G. Minkley, 'A Fragile Inheritor': The Post-Apartheid Memorial Complex: AC Jordan and the Re-imagining of Cultural Heritage in the Eastern Cape', *Kronos*, Vol. 34, No. 1, November 2008; C. van Onselen, 'Peasants Speak-The Reconstruction of a Rural Life from Oral Testimony: Critical Notes on the Methodology Employed in the Study of a Black South African Sharecropper', *Journal of Peasant Studies*, Vol.20, No.3, 1993.

of class consciousness and the need to address the political apathy of the majority of the oppressed which became his life's work.¹⁶ Gwala's working-class based intellectual identity was shaped by his rural background, exposure to extreme levels of poverty, and the exploitation of workers in Pietermaritzburg. His background of experiencing the political teachings of Dr Edgar Brooks at Adams College, and witnessing the deplorable conditions of poverty in Edendale became motivating factors for his politicisation and connectedness. Throughout his life Gwala was a connector between disjointed sectors and resistance organisations in South Africa. From being active from the 1940s in the struggles of trade unions and the resuscitation of the Natal Congress Youth League, and later in mass campaigns, political education and sport on Robben Island as well as the re-launching the ANC after 1990, a central theme of Gwala's life was building connectedness and attempting to re-order society along the lines of political co-operation.

Gwala's politics of connectedness often clashed with the disconnectedness of being isolated, rebuffed and imprisoned by the state. During the late 1940s, the state declared him *persona non grata*. There is no doubt that the imposition of disconnectedness inflicted a sense of vulnerability, immobility and marginalisation on him. Due to the complex nature of a liberation politics characterised by personal differences, factionalism and conflicting perspectives about the race question, disconnectedness was not a linear phenomenon. In certain instances, Gwala also became the victim of disconnectedness imposed from within the liberation organisations themselves.

¹⁶ S. Marks, *The Ambiguities of Dependence in South Africa: Class, Nationalism, and the State in Twentieth-Century Natal* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986); P. la Hausse de Lalouviere, *Restless Identities: Signatures of Nationalism, Zulu Ethnicity and History in the Lives of Petros Lamula (c.1881-1948) and Lymon Maling (1889-1936)* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 2000); H. Mokoena, *Magema Fuze: The Making of Kholwa Intellectual* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2011).

Disconnectedness imposed on him by the state took the form of a kind of political castration that sought to leave Gwala in an impotent and ineffectual state of being.¹⁷ Due to the high levels of desperation to isolate Gwala, the state often extended its efforts to disconnect him through subjecting members of his close family (mainly his wife and Lulu, his elder daughter) to monitoring by the Security Branch, and to detention at times. Fred Moten argues that disconnectedness desires to destabilise the originality and the rearrangement of citizenship.¹⁸ The state's imposition of disconnectedness became a tool to criminalise Gwala's identity and to disrupt his political agency. In spite of these attempts, Gwala was able to act on sites of disconnectedness and convert them into zones of connection and affiliation. It was his ability to fuse pragmatism with an understanding of the theory of the resistance that enabled Gwala to withstand the state's efforts to disconnect him. Thus, connectedness and disconnectedness, as a framework, enables us to locate Gwala's biography as an expression of a range of efforts of mobilisation and subordinated subjectivities that have characterised political history during the twentieth century.



Biography and history in post-apartheid South Africa

Up until recently, many South African political biographies have focused largely on 'presidentialism' and the link between individual and national histories. Thus, post-apartheid biographical production has been characterised by narratives that hero-worship individuals, effectively transforming popular reverence into biographical records. These narratives omit key aspects of history that characterised the course of the liberation struggle, especially in Natal where the ANC waged a low-intensity war with Inkatha. This set of events has been less documented by historians and is seldom reflected in biographies. In this dissertation, Gwala's biography is located within broader debates about history in post-apartheid South

¹⁷ Moten, *In the Break*, 4.

¹⁸ Moten, *In the Break*, 5.

Africa and how liberation history has been documented. Premesh Lalu has argued that the ‘appropriation of history to re-envision the nation and identity tends to emphasise rather than displace the disciplinary reason that was the very *modus operandi* of apartheid.’¹⁹ Ciraj Rassool has argued that biography has played a pivotal role in the production of history in the post-apartheid era. He points out that the ‘conception of politics and resistance has remained characterised by a focus on organised bodies, led by great men whose leadership has largely been taken as given.’²⁰ Nevertheless, while Gwala shaped the nature of political discourse in South Africa and played a pivotal role in shaping political education on Robben Island, he is only anecdotally mentioned in Mandela’s *Long Walk to Freedom* and the memoirs of other political peers. The general absence of Gwala in scholarly literature could be attributed to the complex nature of his politics and his hard-line stance towards the leadership of both the ANC and Communist Party on Robben Island and during the 1990s.²¹

The scant attention given to Gwala in scholarly writing is partly a result of the tendency of South African historians to overlook the history of Pietermaritzburg and focus on the histories of the major cosmopolitan cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, East London and Durban. The historiography of Natal and KwaZulu focuses largely on the social history of Durban and the pre-colonial and colonial history of Zululand. This skewed focus has left the social history of the Natal Midlands and its contribution to historical developments in South Africa relatively neglected. A few scholars have contributed to a limited historiography that focuses in Pietermaritzburg. Amongst the issues covered in this work are the role of Pietermaritzburg as an economic hub, centre of education, aspects of sport, as well as mass mobilisation and violence from the second half of the twentieth

¹⁹ P. Lalu, *The Death of Hintsa: Post-Apartheid South Africa and the Shape of Recurring Past* (Cape Town: Human Sciences Research Council, 2009), 8.

²⁰ Rassool, ‘Rethinking Documentary History’, 29.

²¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

century. In addition, the Pietermaritzburg historiography has not devoted much attention to biographies of people from the area, as well as the contribution that Pietermaritzburg and the Natal Midlands made to national struggles.²²

This dissertation seeks, in part, to add to this limited historical scholarship on Pietermaritzburg. It further seeks to dispel the currently held historical illusion which projects Pietermaritzburg as a hub of political violence and which overlooks the contribution of Pietermaritzburg activists to shaping regional and national discourses. This is in no way intended to deny the large-scale violence that took place in Pietermaritzburg and Natal Midlands, as extensively recorded by Anthea Jeffrey and John Aitchison.²³ The intention is to argue that violence was not the only characteristic, or even the dominant characteristic, of the politics of the Natal Midlands. Many other significant historical events took place in this area, and this dissertation seeks, in part, to record those events through telling Gwala's life story. Gwala's biography is used here, in part, to 'document a history of a particular era.'²⁴

A substantial body of work on auto/biographies has grown exponentially in South Africa in the past 20 years. These biographies are largely marked by certain key features. Work by

²² For some of this work see, S. M. Mkhize, 'Mass Mobilisation and Resistance: A Study of Selected Stay-aways and Protest Marches in Pietermaritzburg, 1985-1989', BA Hons thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1995; J. Aitchison, 'Numbering the Dead: The Course and Pattern of Political Violence in the Natal Midlands, 1987-1989', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1993; N. Gwala, 'Inkatha, Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg', paper presented at the Workshop on Regionalism and Restructuring in Natal, University of Natal, Durban, 28-31 January 1988; M. Kentridge, *An Unofficial War: Inside the Conflict in Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990); J. Laband and R. Haswell (eds.), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: A New Portrait of an African City* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1988); G. A. Dominy, 'The Imperial Garrison in Natal with Special Reference to Fort Napier, 1843-1914: Its Social, Cultural and Economic Impact', PhD dissertation, University of London, 1995; R. Gordon, *The Place of the Elephant: A History of Pietermaritzburg* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1981); H. L. Peel, 'Sobantu Village: An Administrative History of a Pietermaritzburg Township', 1924-1929, BA Hons thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1987; D. Bonnin, 'Class Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: The Case of the BTR Sarmcol Workers', M Soc Sc thesis, University of Natal, Durban, 1987; S. M. Mkhize, 'Contexts, Resistance Crowds and Mass Mobilisation: A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Apartheid Politics in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the 1980s', MA thesis, University of Natal, 1998; and N. N. Bhebhe, 'Mobilization, Conflict and Repression: The United Democratic Front and Political Struggles in the Pietermaritzburg Region, 1983-1991', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1996.

²³ A. J. Jeffrey, *The Natal Story: Sixteen Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997); J. Aitchison, *Death from Political Violence in Natal Midlands, 1980-1992* (Pietermaritzburg: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1993).

²⁴ This is what Callinicos observed in relation to Tambo's biography, see L. Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo: Beyond the Engeli Mountains* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2004), 15.

Ciraj Rassool, Jonathan Hyslop and Colin Bundy has summarised some of the main debates and challenges of biography and history in South Africa. Rassool's critique is that 'South African biography has been substantially been driven by documentary approaches to archives as well as historical narration.'²⁵ He suggests that biography should transcend an approach 'that relies on conventional distinctions and hierarchies between history and sources, as well as history and heritage.' Rassool argues that South African biography constructs national histories in which leaders become agencies to narrate a 'national history' of persons and institutions, and that these tend to be formalist and teleological.²⁶ Hyslop concurs with Rassool by saying that South African political biography has been teleological and hero-worshipping. However, he argues against the notion that biographies of key figures in history are not valuable. Instead, he believes that 'strategically placed individuals can, in certain rare circumstances, have a decisive impact on the direction of historical developments.'²⁷

Bundy holds similar views to Rassool and Hyslop, but says biography has the potential to 'omit' certain aspects of history.²⁸ Gwala can be characterised as a complex mixture of a great leader who remained rooted within the masses, who was also seen by his supporters as an ordinary person. This dissertation expands on Rassool's argument that biography should not be formal and teleological. Here I want to suggest that biography should interpret the connectedness between human lives and historical events by considering how the subject reacted to such events rather than provide a chronological narrative of historical events. It is this connectedness between history and human reactions that a biographer should carefully study when writing a political biography.

²⁵ Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History', 29; also see Rassool, 'The Individual, Auto/biography and History'.

²⁶ Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History', 29.

²⁷ J. Hyslop, 'On Biography: A Response to Ciraj Rassool', *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2010, 109.

²⁸ C. Bundy, *Govan Mbeki: A Jacana Pocket Biography* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012), 148 and 154.

Secondly, the proliferation of presidentialism in the production of the post-apartheid biography ignores the value of local particularism and grassroots intellectualism. Much of these presidential biographies focus on the histories of great men and women who played a pivotal role in the liberation struggle in South Africa.²⁹ They tend to oversimplify the liberation struggle by focusing on the role of individuals as sole players and a narrow partisan perspective which systematically overlooks the contribution of broader organisational movements and the political complexities that underpin the twentieth century's history of repression and resistance. In the process of concentrating on presidents, they overlook the role of the masses and local struggles. This approach could lead to historical distortions because the liberation struggle was a mass-based project in which the broader South African underclasses were active participants.³⁰

Thirdly, post-1994 biographies have become a powerful tool to record previously neglected voices in South Africa. The increase of biographical writings is part of a wide movement to reclaim histories of the underclasses and to present them as an integral part of the nation's identity. This has resulted to the increased production of 'heroic biographies' both in the sphere of popular history as well as in the academy. Biography has been utilised as the 'historical reconstruction' of lives of individuals from a variety of sources, and is also perceived as emancipatory.³¹ Thembeke Orié reminds us that biography enables us to see within a historical instance how individuals used the cultural, material and political resources

²⁹ N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (London: Little Brown, 1994); B. Pogrand, *How Can a Man Die Better?: The Life of Robert Sobukwe* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 1997); E. Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2002); R. van Diemel, *In Search of "Freedom, Fair Play and Justice": Josiah Tshangana Gumedé, 1867-1947: A Biography* (Cape Town: Raymond van Diemel, 2001); Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo*; M. Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki: A Dream Deferred* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2007); S. Couper, *Albert Luthuli: Bound by Faith* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010).

³⁰ Marks and Trapido provide a clearer perspective on the relationship between class and liberation politics, for more information, see S. Marks and S. Trapido, *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987); P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds.), *The People's City: African Life in Twentieth Century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996).

³¹ E. Brizuela-Garcia, 'The Past Never Stays Behind: Biographical Narrative and African Colonial History', *Journal of Historical Biography*, Vol. 2, 2007, 65.

at their disposal to shape their own lives and circumstances.³² This dissertation covers the life of a person and an era characterised by much political and economic turbulence.

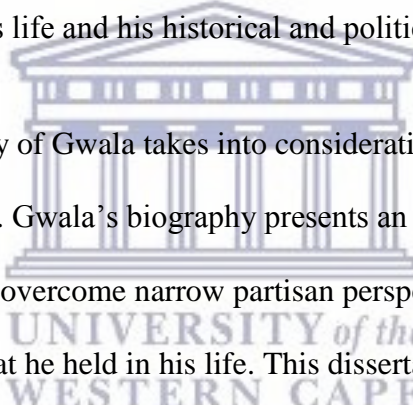
Fourthly, published biographies of Oliver Tambo, Govan Mbeki, Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, John Dube and Kgalema Motlanthe have become powerful political tools in the political domain. However, these have tended to be ceremonial and commemorative in nature. Luli Callinicos's biography of Oliver Tambo and Mark Gevisser's biography of Thabo Mbeki offer examples of how a political biography may be manipulated to serve a political objective of a political entity.³³ Callinicos unearthed the life and a legacy of a charismatic leader of the ANC using a variety of sources including oral interviews and private papers. Published in 2004, Tambo's biography became a tool to celebrate the ten years of South Africa's democratic government and became part of the monumentalisation of his life that served as means to galvanise mass-based support for the ANC during the 2004 general elections.

Due to the fact that Tambo's political life was largely spent in exile than he did in South Africa, the Callinicos biography was intended to connect him with the history of ordinary South Africans. Gevisser's biography of Thabo Mbeki offers a different perspective with which to understand political biographies. The biography was published a month before the ANC's national elective conference in Polokwane where Mbeki was contesting to retain the presidency of the ANC, a contest which he lost to Jacob Zuma. The biography was used unsuccessfully by the Mbeki camp as a tool to legitimise his candidacy.

³² T. Orie, 'Raymond Mhlaba and the Genesis of the Congress Alliance: A Political Biography', MA thesis, University of Cape Town, 1993, 3; T. Vammen, 'Forum: Modern English Auto/Biography and Gender', *Gender and History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 17, 1990; C. N. Parke, *Biography: Writing Lives* (New York: Routledge, 2002); E. Homberger and J. Charmley (eds.), *The Troubled Face of Biography* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

³³ Callinicos, *Oliver Tambo*; H. Hughes, *First President: A Life of John L Dube, Founding President of the ANC* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2011); Gevisser, *Thabo Mbeki*; J. Gordin, *Zuma: A Biography* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2008); E. Harvey, *Kgalema Motlanthe: A Political Biography* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012).

Another characteristic of post-apartheid biographies is that many have largely been produced by journalists rather than academics. The biographies of Jacob Zuma and Kgalema Motlanthe by Jeremy Gordin and Ebrahim Harvey respectively offer very little historical analysis. Rather, they offer a journalistic approach to understanding individual subjects without locating them in a historical context. These studies appear to be populist and lack in-depth historical analysis. In the writing of Gwala's biography, I try to provide a fresh analysis of the relationship between class, political mobilisation and the individual. Through this approach I emphasise that political biographies are about more than a single prominent individual. They are about interactions, parallels and histories of various political groupings and classes. As a result, the connected and disconnected histories of these groupings and classes have also been written in this story of Gwala's life and his historical and political significance.



This critical political biography of Gwala takes into consideration multifaceted factors and reads sources against the grain. Gwala's biography presents an opportunity to unpack biographical complexities that overcome narrow partisan perspectives and highlight the various political viewpoints that he held in his life. This dissertation contributes largely to a resistance and liberation project which informs a closer examination of Gwala in trade union and working class struggles, and political struggles between the 1950s and the 1990s. In many biographies that have been published since the democratic era, Gwala's name is mentioned, but only anecdotally. The dissertation contends that the anecdotal attention that Gwala has received in other writings does not do justice to the contribution he made to the transformation of the South African political landscape. Until now, he has been an obscure character in the annals of South African history.

Arthur Marwick reminds us that biography has 'clearly been invaluable in filling serious gaps in historical knowledge' and has emerged as a popular historical tool to record histories of

previously marginalised groups.³⁴ Historians and other social scientists have contested whether biography should be reconstructionist or re-inventionist in its approach.³⁵ Recent debates between Ciraj Rassool and Jonathan Hyslop have played a vital role in sharpening the theory of biographical writings in South Africa. The works of these academics and that of David William Cohen have sharpened my approach to writing a political biography of Gwala.³⁶ The process of writing Gwala's biography has been more than 'a recitation of facts related to the life of an individual' because it rests on a critical analysis of sources and seeks to properly contextualise the choices that Gwala made at various points in his life.³⁷

Because Gwala lived in a complex society, it goes without saying that any attempt at a biographical study should be analytical rather than descriptive. For this reason, I have adopted a 'critical biography' approach. This dissertation seeks to explore the life of an individual who has been invisible and disappeared from South African historiography. This is the case, notwithstanding the fact that he is recognised by his political peers as one of the most influential leaders in political movements and trade unions in Pietermaritzburg, and on Robben Island during the second half of the twentieth century. As Ebrahim Harvey has correctly argued, 'political biographies are often rough territories' and require a biographer to have an ability to mediate between presumption of omniscience and impartiality.³⁸ This dissertation critically examines Gwala's strengths and weaknesses in the complex interplay of personal, cultural, organisational, political and wider societal factors that framed him.

³⁴ A. Marwick, *The Nature of History* (London: Macmillan, 1989), 138.

³⁵ For a detailed debate on this matter see I. B. Nadel, *Biography: Fiction, Fact, and Form* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1984) and S. B. Oates, *Biography as High Adventure: Life-Writers Speak on Their Art* (Amherst MA: University of Massachusetts, 1986); P. R. Backscheider, *Reflections on Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

³⁶ Rassool, 'Rethinking Documentary History'; Hyslop, 'On Biography'; C. Rassool, 'The Challenge of Rethinking South African Political Biography: A Reply to Jonathan Hyslop', *South African Review of Sociology*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2010; D. W. Cohen, 'Further Thoughts on the Production of History', in Sider, G. and Smith, G. (eds.) *Between History and Histories: The Making of Silences and Commemorations* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

³⁷ Brizuela-Garcia, 'The Past Never Stays Behind', 64.

³⁸ Harvey, *Kgalema Motlanthe*, xiii.

William Beinart has also argued that ‘a chronicle of one man’s life cannot explain or capture the totality of social change, nor can ideology and consciousness be reduced to one man’s ideas.’³⁹ However, an exploration of an individual’s life and experience enables historians to better understand broader patterns of social change and the political environment of the time. Gwala’s biography requires that such concepts as connectedness, disconnectedness, working class identities, popular resistance and political conflict should be critically examined to determine their ability to assist historians to appreciate the history and historiography of the South African liberation struggle more fully.

Documents of repression and Gwala’s biography

Documentary approaches to the production of resistance history in South Africa have proliferated, especially after the publication of the six-volume series *From Protest to Challenge*.⁴⁰ These volumes collected and presented documentary evidence of a history of South Africa struggles, including court documents and oral interviews. In 1983, Tom Lodge published a nuanced documentary history of African resistance since 1945.⁴¹ These studies have presented a ‘case for political biography as a valid arena for academic research and an essential component of scholarly work on South African resistance history.’⁴²

The period up to the 1950s is not well recorded because neither the ANC nor the Communist Party had good administrative systems. Furthermore, they deliberately did not keep proper records for fear of infiltration by state security agencies. This has led to a tendency in

³⁹ W. Beinart, ‘Worker Consciousness, Ethnic Particularism and Nationalism: The Experiences of a South African Migrant, 1930-1960’, in Marks, S. and Trapido, S (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987), 287.

⁴⁰ Volume 1, *Protest and Hope, 1882-1934* was edited by Sheridan Johns; Volume 2, *Hope and Challenge, 1935-1952* was edited by Thomas Karis; Volume 3, *Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964* by Thomas Karis and Gail M. Gerhart, and Volume 4, *Political Profiles, 1882-1964*, by Gail M. Gerhart and Thomas Karis; Volume 5, *Nadir and Resurgence, 1964-1979*, edited by Thomas Karis and Gail M. Gerhart. In 2013 Volume 6, *Challenge and Victory, 1980-1990*, edited by Gail M. Gerhart and Clive L. Glaser was added to the series. For a detailed discussion on the production of the series, see Rassool, ‘Rethinking Documentary History’, 29-55.

⁴¹ T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1983).

⁴² Rassool, ‘Rethinking Documentary History’, 33.

histories and biographies to rely on newspapers articles, oral interviews, praise poetry, party political magazines and private collections.⁴³ Most poignant has been the tendency to rely on court records and other documents produced under conditions of repression as sources for documenting resistance history in South Africa. Ciraj Rassool advises that it is vital that ‘production of political documents, their distribution and redistribution, and the meanings produced and accumulated’ is examined thoroughly.⁴⁴ In his view, the inability to properly interrogate these documents has resulted in the production of resistance histories and biographies that lack proper theoretical grounding.

As Bongani Ndhlovu has recently argued, it is important to adapt a ‘critical reading of the archive and sources along and against the grain.’⁴⁵ This can lead to appreciating different philosophies that shaped individuals like Gwala and their narratives. The critical analysis of sources both with and against the grain enables historians to explore different social layers that shaped and radicalised Gwala. It also serves as a philosophical mechanism to deconstruct the perceived controversies about his personhood by critically examining processes involved in the reproduction of his life. This dissertation does this by asking probing questions about political tensions, political militancy, warlordism, and connections with other individuals within the liberation movement and the many interactions he was privy to.⁴⁶

The dissertation relies on various records such as affidavits, evidence in camera, statements made under duress and court transcripts to reconstruct Gwala’s biography. Franziska Rueedi has warned that the production of historical knowledge through trial records warrants careful

⁴³ P. Limb, *The ANC’s Early Years: Nation, Class and Place in South Africa before 1940* (Pretoria, UNISA Press, 2010).

⁴⁴ Rassool, ‘Rethinking Documentary History’, 34.

⁴⁵ B. C. Ndhlovu, ‘David Cecil Oxford Matiwane and Auto/Biographic Memory: Political Activism, Social Pragmatism and Individual Achievement in Twentieth Century South Africa’, PhD dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2015, 44.

⁴⁶ Rassool, ‘Rethinking Documentary History’, 35.

attention.⁴⁷ While utilising this evidence, this dissertation has been mindful that evidence presented in court is not a transparent medium but rather a ‘historical document in itself’, similar to ‘distorted glass’ whose ‘inherent distortions’ must be understood.⁴⁸ Frans Kunene’s evidence and later affidavit is an example of this kind of distortion. Kunene had been arrested with Gwala in November 1975, due to his alleged involvement in underground ANC operations in Natal. However, while he was in detention, the state offered him immunity from prosecution in exchange for becoming a state witness.⁴⁹

Frans Kunene testified against Gwala and was kept in solitary confinement until the end of the trial. After the trial was concluded, Kunene disclosed that he had been coerced to become a state witness after severe torture by the Security Branch. He further disclosed that the Security Branch coached him on what to say in his testimony before the court. He claimed that he had been forced to rehearse his testimony because the state’s case relied on the presentation of a homogenous and linear version of events that would result in the conviction of the accused and the imposition of severe sentences.⁵⁰ During the process of coaching Kunene to give evidence, state agents removed ambiguities and contradictions from his version of events to make the state’s case more convincing. It is possible that Bruno Mtolo had been subjected to a similar process of coercion and coaching as he became a trained state witness in major political trials from the 1960s and 1970s.

Jeff Peires and Premesh Lalu have cautioned against the use of documents of repression as primary sources of evidence since these are riddled with lies, both deliberate lies and self-

⁴⁷ F. Rueedi, ‘Narratives on Trial: Ideology, Violence and the Struggle Over Political Legitimacy in the Case of the Delmas Treason Trial, 1985-1989’, *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 67, No. 3, 2015, 341.

⁴⁸ C. Ginzburg, ‘Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian’, *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No.1, 1991, 83-84; Rueedi, ‘Narratives on Trial’, 341.

⁴⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Frans Kunene, 8 February 1977.

⁵⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Frans Kunene, 8 February 1977; Rueedi, ‘Narratives on Trial’, 341.

delusion as well as innuendo.⁵¹ The usefulness of these records is limited because they were produced to criminalise accused persons and reproduce a certain false version of history. Lalu argues that documents of this nature provide a legal fiction which was intended to appeal to certain official structures and set legal precedents for repressive purposes.⁵² I have used these documents with caution and in some case have verified them with knowledge generated through oral interviews.

The dissertation has extensively utilised documents that were produced by the state intelligence services. I am mindful that these documents were produced as records of affirmation and documents of repression to justify political ideologies, cement power relations, and become a pretext for state violence. Ben Martins has also cautioned that documents of this nature should be regarded with suspicion and distrust.⁵³ Martins questions the motive for generating the information they present and the purpose they served. His argument is that state intelligence reports were produced for nefarious purposes, and these were often disseminated to divide the leadership of the ANC. Martins is correctly sceptical about the use of state intelligence documents as sources for documenting the history of the ANC and the liberation struggle.

In South Africa, access to classified documents is regulated by the Promotion of Access to Information Act. This law has bureaucratised access to primary documents, thus limiting the ability of scholars to gain access to certain historical sources. Even when access is granted, the names of other participants in certain historical events are masked, reducing the ability of researchers to connect history and individuality. Although documents of repression have been

⁵¹ P. Lalu, 'The Grammar of Domination and the Subjection of Agency: Colonial Text and Modes of Evidence', *History and Theory*, Issue 39, December 2000, 45-68; J. B. Peires, *The Dead Will Arise: Nongqawuse and the Great Xhosa Cattle-Killing Movement of 1856-7* (Johannesburg: Ravan, 1989).

⁵² P. Lalu, 'Sara's Suicide: History and the Representational Limit', *Kronos*, No. 26, 2000, 96.

⁵³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Dikobe Martins.

extensively utilised throughout this dissertation, these have not been taken at face value. Where possible, I tested their reliability through oral interviews, cross-referencing, and comparing the content with secondary sources.

Most importantly, I have made use of accounts of Harry Gwala's life that he himself presented, through interviews with a number of researchers and journalists. Although mediated, in some way access to Gwala's own accounts of his life has enabled me to overcome some of the problem of repressive sources.

The case for Harry Gwala's political biography

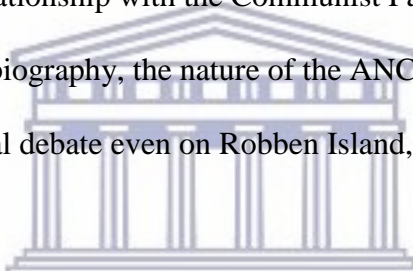
Anthony Butler has argued that the twentieth century history of South Africa was dominated by racial segregation and apartheid.⁵⁴ Gwala, on the other hand, argued that while race was a fundamental dividing feature of the twentieth century South African state, class was a transversal unifying feature. For this reason, he said that the South African struggle should be seen as a class struggle rather than a race struggle. This is why Gwala joined the Communist Party in 1942.⁵⁵ Since much of South African political history from the 1940s until the 1990s has been dominated by a focus on the role of resistance politics, there has been a rise of official narrative of the liberation struggle that is centred on the ANC and that romanticises its part in the struggle to make it the dominant player in the story. While it is undisputed that the ANC was a leading political force, especially from the mid-1940s, the role of other components of the liberation struggle should not be forgotten. The history of resistance cannot be studied without also examining the symbiotic relationship between trade union movements, the Communist Party, and the ANC, especially from the 1940s. It is these

⁵⁴ A. M. Butler, *Contemporary South Africa* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 2.

⁵⁵ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

connections that strengthened mass mobilisation and that became the main source of class consciousness among the oppressed.

Since the 1920s, the relationship between the ANC and the Communist Party has been marked by robust political disagreement that had the result of the parties not being able to work closely with each other. Josiah Gumede laid the foundations for the birth of the ANC-Communist Party alliance during his term as ANC president general (1927-1930). Gumede's overtures towards the communists put him in a difficult position within the ANC. He lost the ANC presidency in 1930, largely because his alliance with the Communist Party had generated so much opposition within the ANC.⁵⁶ It was not until the 1940s that the ANC started to develop a cordial relationship with the Communist Party. However, as Nelson Mandela conceded in his autobiography, the nature of the ANC-Communist Party alliance was a subject of robust political debate even on Robben Island, a debate which was never resolved. In Mandela's words:



We were constantly engaged in political debates. Some were dispatched in a day, others were disputed for years. I have always enjoyed the cut and thrust of debating, and was a ready participant. One of our earliest and longest debates concerned the relationship between the ANC and the Communist Party. Some of the men, especially those MK soldiers who had been trained in socialist countries, believed that the ANC and the party were one and the same. Even some very senior ANC colleagues, such as Govan Mbeki and Harry Gwala, subscribed to this theory.⁵⁷

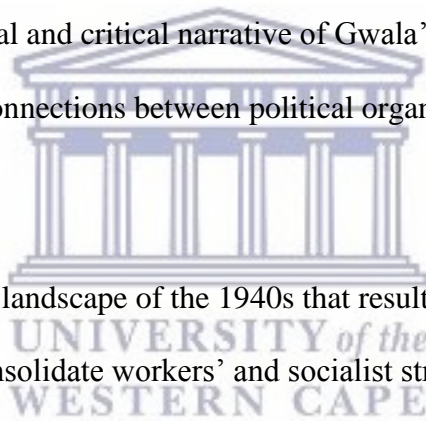
As Ahmed Kathrada asserts, these debates should not give an 'impression that the congress organisation was split into two distinct or antagonistic camps' even though 'they were tense and heated.'⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Van Diemel, 'In Search of Freedom', 120.

⁵⁷ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 374.

⁵⁸ A. Kathrada, *Memoirs* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004), 291; Raymond Suttner also provides an overview of the relationship between the ANC and the Communist Party, see R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976: A Social and Political Study* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008), 151.

While many biographies have concentrated on formal politics as a point to understand the liberation struggle, here I rather concentrate on the interconnectedness between the ANC, Communist Party, trade unionism and class consciousness. Gwala's life was strongly affected by these struggles. Gwala's political biography enables us to understand such class identities and the formation of political consciousness in Pietermaritzburg. There is sufficient evidence to suggest that there were relations between the ANC, Communist Party and trade unions from the early 1940s. However, this relationship has not been adequately documented in South African historiography. This dissertation documents this largely undocumented relationship between political and shop floor struggles of the 1940s and 1950s, and how trade unions became a vanguard of the development of political consciousness. The dissertation provides a discursive, analytical and critical narrative of Gwala's life and focuses on the political connections and disconnections between political organisations, trade unions and mass mobilisation.



The changing socio-economic landscape of the 1940s that resulted in massive urbanisation provided an opportunity to consolidate workers' and socialist struggles. Iain Edwards asserts that the 1940s constituted a 'politically crucial decade with greater attention devoted towards various aspects of African city life.'⁵⁹ However, much of the work done focuses mainly on Durban and other major metropolises in South Africa, and this topic has not been studied through the life of an individual whose history is intrinsically linked to these struggles. This dissertation provides an opportunity to document broader political struggles in Pietermaritzburg and the extent to which urban and rural struggles interfaced with one other between the 1940s and the 1990s. It explores Gwala's role in the establishment of mass-based

⁵⁹ I. Edwards, 'Swing the Assegai Peacefully? 'New Africa', Mkhumbane, the Co-operative Movements and Attempts to Transform Durban Society in the Late Nineteen-Forties', in Bonner, P., Hofmeyr, I., James, D. and Lodge, T. (eds.), *Class, Locality and Culture in the 19th and 20th Century South Africa* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 1989), 60; Vahed pursues a similar argument, see G. Vahed, 'The Making of "Indianess": Indian Politics in South Africa During the 1930s and 1940s', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. 17, 1997, 1-36.

worker-oriented politics whose multiple discourses and influences are seldom recorded in South African historiography. This dissertation argues that Gwala was a significant figure in the Natal Midlands, in spite of the low profile accorded him in the scholarship.

As demonstrated by the University of the Witwatersrand's History Workshop and the South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET) project, South African local particularism should be an important focus in the production of a national historical narrative. Through Gwala's biography I argue that the narrative of South African history should recognise local particularism as a historical genre that contributes immensely to the broader national narrative.⁶⁰ Gwala's life displayed a complex approach to politics as he could relate with the masses as well as with senior leadership of both the ANC and Communist Party. This involved proactive ways of interacting with the masses and consistently remaining connected with grassroots politics. It is this character and political approach that became the cornerstone of the liberation movement's success in Pietermaritzburg, Natal and elsewhere in South Africa from the late 1940s. Gwala spent nineteen years on Robben Island and, because of his role in prison and in Natal, he commanded a high level of respect within political circles in South Africa.

When Gwala was transferred from Robben Island in 1987 and eventually released in 1988, he arrived to a Natal and Zululand that was different from the one he had left in the mid-1970s. From the 1980s, violence had escalated to extreme levels that resulted in a state of ungovernability in townships.⁶¹ The relationship between Mangosuthu Buthelezi and Gwala

⁶⁰ Tshepo Moloi's doctoral dissertation on the politics of Kroonstad bears testimony to this, see T. C. Moloi, 'Black Politics in Kroonstad: Political Mobilisation, Protests, Local Government, and Generational Struggles, 1976-1995', PhD dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, 2012, 7.

⁶¹ D. R. Bonnin, 'Space, Place and Identity: Political Violence in Mpumalanga Township, KwaZulu-Natal, 1987-1993', PhD dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 2007; J. Aitchison, *Death from Political Violence in Natal Midlands, 1980-1992* (Pietermaritzburg: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1993); Jeffrey, 'The Natal Story'; A. Truluck, *No Blood on our Hands: Political Violence in the Natal Midlands 1987-1992, and the Role of the State, "White" Political Parties and Business* (Pietermaritzburg: Black Sash, 1992); J. E. Spence, 'The Military in South African Politics', in Johnson, S. (ed.), *South Africa: No Turning Back* (London: Macmillan, 1988), 240-257; J. Sithole, 'The ANC Underground,

deteriorated and Gwala called for *amaqabane*⁶² to defend themselves and publicly used the phrase '*kuzokhala isigwagwagwa*'⁶³ at political rallies. By 1990 Gwala's politics had undergone a metamorphosis that fused radical Marxism and militant activism. He became more confrontational as he had to defend ANC-aligned people in Natal and Zululand against Inkatha violent attacks. In 1992 the London's *Daily Telegraph* listed Gwala as one of the world's top 30 warlords.⁶⁴ There is a body of literature that has not been able to problematise Gwala which simply regurgitates the warlordism stance as propounded by media and apartheid government.⁶⁵

Paul Maylam has correctly argued that 'biographic writing about prominent historical figures who have been widely admired in their lifetime carries with it certain difficulties.'⁶⁶ He cautions that this could lead to hagiography with popular reverence being simply transcribed into the biography. Undoubtedly, such reverence becomes more vivid during the interaction with Gwala's former comrades and his family. There is a danger of making conclusive statements about certain controversy as aspect of life of Gwala and those around him, such as the fact that his elder daughter, Lulu, headed the family at times.⁶⁷ In accordance with Maylam's caution, this dissertation problematises Gwala and examines his life within the social and political context in which he lived. Unlike existing literature, I interrogate the use

Armed Actions and Popular Resistance in Pietermaritzburg and the Surrounding Natal Midlands Townships', in *The South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 4* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004), 531-568.

⁶² UDF/ANC supporters were referred to *amaqabane* or comrades.

⁶³ This is Zulu expression refers to the rattling of a machine gun.

⁶⁴ Political correspondent, 'World's Top 30 Warlords', *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1991.

⁶⁵ See R. M. Mchunu, 'A History of Political Violence in KwaShange, Vulindlela district and of its effects on the memories of survivors (1987-2008)', PhD dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013, 19; R. W. Johnson, *South Africa's Brave New World: The Beloved Country Since the End of Apartheid* (London: Penguin, 2009), 508-510; P. O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* New York: Penguin, 2007).

⁶⁶ P. Maylam, "Jawaharlal Nehru and Nelson Mandela: Parallel Lives Compared", *Journal of Historical Biography*, Vol. 15, Spring 2014, 1.

⁶⁷ After the death of Gwala's wife Elda, Lulu became the head of the Gwala family. She already had two children and was responsible for supporting her siblings. She had been harassed by the Security Branch and her employer instructed to 'get rid of her within three months'. She relied mainly on the support from international donor funding and Dependants' Conference of the South African Council of Churches. There are a few instances where Lulu could not adequately account for funds she had received from donors, see APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, Lulu Gwala to Tom Montala, 26 February 1985; APC, PC16/15/2/5/17, Peter Brown to Norman Abraham, 5 May 1987.

of the term ‘warlord’ and try to contextualise Gwala in the particular socio-political background that had such a profound influence on his life and the lives of the broader African population during the twentieth century.

As South Africa enters what has been broadly referred to as the ‘second transition to democracy’, issues of economic emancipation and class formation have become central arenas of historical and political engagement.⁶⁸ The examination of Gwala’s life is an opportunity to understand the history of class identities and provides a platform to understand the history of inequalities. Gwala referred to the Freedom Charter as the first step toward socialism and said the liberation struggle should result in ‘people’s democracy which would provide a clear framework for economic transformation.’⁶⁹ Since the circulation of the Inqindi-Marxism document at Robben Island prison in 1978, the South African liberation and post-liberation politics has always seen complex debates about whether the post-apartheid dispensation should be a peoples’ democracy or a bourgeois democracy.⁷⁰ This political biography provides a platform for these debates to be unpacked and historicised.

Throughout his life, Gwala associated himself with various groupings and, in certain instances, was involved in complex political relationships. After his release from prison in 1988, his public utterances were often militant, radical and controversial and he had a complicated relationship with the national leadership of the ANC, the Communist Party and with Mangosuthu Buthelezi. The existing historical literature does not enable historians and ordinary people to understand these complexities and seeming contradictions in Gwala’s life.

⁶⁸ ‘THE SECOND TRANSITION? Building a national democratic society and the balance of forces in 2012’, A discussion document towards the ANC National Policy Conference, Version 7.0 as amended by the Special NEC 27 February 2012, <http://www.anc.org.za/docs/discus/2012/transition.pdf>, accessed on 31 July 2017.

⁶⁹ Padraig O’Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

⁷⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

Post-apartheid historical studies have largely been characterised by the proliferation of pro-ANC history and the appropriation by the ANC of the liberation movement as almost entirely its project. This has marginalised the role that other political movements played in the struggle against apartheid. This biased approach has downplayed complex relationships between different political systems and schools of thought, and presents the struggle as a monolithic project. This perspective overlooks the complex relationships and heterogeneity of liberation history in South Africa. It is vital to point out that multiracial cooperation took place at time of racial turmoil in Natal, which culminated in the so-called 1949 African-Indian riots. Gwala took advantage of the ‘Doctors’ Pact’ to consolidate trade unions across racial backgrounds. Although shaky, these mobilisations helped to establish a more durable Congress Alliance unity from the 1950s, especially in Natal.⁷¹

Gwala’s biography and oral sources

Varying degrees of exclusion and marginalisation are apparent when one assesses how Harry Gwala has been profiled within the corpus of liberation history in South Africa after 1994. Although a brief profile of Gwala appears in *From Protest to Challenge*, this is limited to his involvement in the trade union activities in the late 1940s.

The first attempt to document Gwala’s biographic trajectory was done by state intelligence agents who wrote a short biographical sketch of Gwala’s family background, place of birth and potential sources of his politicisation.⁷² This biographical sketch was linked to Gwala’s political activities and it was updated regularly through ongoing surveillance. It was through this process that government bureaucrats turned Gwala into a subject. In other words, they

⁷¹ D. Everatt, *The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009).

⁷² NAR, Department of Justice (DOJ) papers, file no. 2/1/53, top secret document: Memorandum of the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

subjectified him. This became a biographical text and was used to build a state-imposed criminal identity on Gwala which led to his prosecution during the period between 1964 and 1976.

At the end of the trial in July 1977, Gwala was found guilty of high treason. As accused number one, he was expected to plead in mitigation of sentence by speaking about the broad political environment that had led him to undertake the actions that resulted in their convictions. Gwala used this platform as a moment of autobiographical narration. He contextualised his experiences in the prevailing political environment in which he lived. For him, the socio-political environment was an important impetus for political germination.⁷³ He concluded his autobiographical statement by emphasising that ‘the lives of the people are much more important than [his] individual life’, thus indicating that he was prepared to pay with his own life.⁷⁴ By opting to utilise the rhetoric that had been used by Nelson Mandela during the Rivonia trial in 1964, Gwala was entangling the two trials. Perhaps, mindful of the media coverage of the trial and attendance in the court gallery, he was giving a message of hope that the state had not succeeded in stopping the liberation struggle by arresting Mandela and the other Rivonia trialists.

The life imprisonment imposed in Gwala seemed to lead the state to lose interest in him. It was not until the mid-1980s that a new kind of state biography of Gwala began to emerge, the biography of imminent death. Once Gwala was confirmed to have contracted motor neuron disease, an incurable and progressive condition, the state began to document his deteriorating health. State medical practitioners even predicted that he would not live for more than two

⁷³ PAR, RSC, box 1/1/1011, vol. 39, cc 108/76, *State v Themba H. Gwala and 9 others: mitigating statement by Themba H. Gwala*, 5253.

⁷⁴ PAR, RSC, box 1/1/1011, vol. 39, criminal case (cc) 108/76, *State v Themba H. Gwala and 9 others: statement in mitigation by Themba H. Gwala*, 1976, 5253.

years and advised that he should be released to avoid a situation where he could be seen as a martyr who died in prison. These biographical statements were intended to intimidate Gwala into becoming a compliant pacifist and collaborator.

Once Gwala was released in 1988, Mzala (the pseudonym of Jabulani Nxumalo, a theoretician of the Communist Party) showed interest in writing Gwala's biography. Mzala interviewed Gwala using both video and audio equipment and was said to have produced a manuscript. However, Mzala's untimely death on 22 February 1991 stopped this biographic project. No such manuscript has been located, although it was reported as being among Mzala's papers which were still unsorted in Ngoje, his birth place.⁷⁵

Several researchers interviewed Gwala on a wide range of issues before his death. However, none of these were used to produce a published book or an academic dissertation on Gwala's political career. I utilised a large number of interviews conducted by other researchers on topics relevant to this dissertation.⁷⁶ In addition, I conducted interviews with a number of people who were associated with Gwala in various ways. These include ex-political prisoners on Robben Island, his former comrades in Natal, members of the family, and other people who worked closely with Gwala. I also drew on interviews with key individuals who worked closely with Gwala which are held by the Alan Paton Centre and Struggle Archives.

SADET has made an important contribution in assembling the previously unrecorded history of the liberation struggle in South Africa. This research has been published in a number of volumes that focus on various periods of the liberation struggle, one decade at a time. This

⁷⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka telephone interview with Mpho Nxumalo, Mzala's widow.

⁷⁶ These include interviews by Tony Karon (8 January 1989); Brian Bunting (October 1989), Thomas Karis (15 December 1989) Padraig O'Malley (8 January 1993, 10 November 1993 and 21 November 1994); and Ruth Lundie (1995). Furthermore, Gwala was interviewed on video by Cassius Lubisi, Mzala, and an unidentified person during the 1990s.

study adds to Jabulani Sithole's contribution to the history of Natal Midlands.⁷⁷ The existing literature provides limited insights into Gwala's life as it tends to be biased towards producing a broader history of the ANC. This dissertation uses Gwala's life as a prism to understand broader societal 'struggles' and the way in which these struggles were undertaken by ordinary people. I argue that the history of the liberation struggle in South African cannot be understood without taking into consideration the symbiotic interconnectedness between labour and political formations.

Leslie and Andrew Bank have reminded us of the 'ethical issues that are involved in the writing of other people's life stories.'⁷⁸ A study of this nature requires an analysis of sources that need to be read carefully as they were generated within a particular political milieu. The interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi provides an example. He argues that he had a good relationship with Gwala during the late 1970s and up to his release from prison in 1988. Buthelezi claims that he offered Gwala R2 000 on his release from prison in order to perform a Zulu cultural cleansing ritual. He further claimed that he was surprised when Gwala rebuked him in the early 1990s and said he did not know what caused such hostility.⁷⁹ This information should to be treated with circumspection because, although Buthelezi may be aware of the cause of political turmoil between him and Gwala, he may not be willing to admit it.

⁷⁷ See J. Sithole, 'The ANC underground and the armed action in Northern Natal', The South African Democracy Education Trust (SADET), *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 4, 1980-1990* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010); J. Sithole, 'The ANC underground and the armed action in Southern Natal', SADET, *The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 4, 1980-1990*, (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2010).

⁷⁸ L. J. Bank and A. Bank, 'Untangling the Lion's Tale: Violent Masculinity and the Ethics of Biography in the "Curious" Case of the Apartheid-Era Policeman Donald Card', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 39, No. 1, 8.

⁷⁹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

Gwala, memory and history

In the week between the day Gwala died and his funeral, there was a notable interest in his history and his political contribution to the liberation struggle. However, soon afterwards, this interest came to an end. Between 1995 and 1999, there was a lull of public imagery and iconography that featured Gwala. His role in the liberation was lambasted in Padraig O'Malley's biography of Mac Maharaj and very few people were willing to mention Gwala's name in public.⁸⁰ It was not until 1999, when South Africa was hosting its second national and provincial elections, that Gwala's name reappeared when Msunduzi Local Municipality, that incorporated Pietermaritzburg and surrounding townships, announcing its intention to rename Jan Smuts Stadium after Gwala. The proposal to rename the stadium after Gwala was prompted by the desperation of the ANC to increase its electoral support in KwaZulu-Natal, especially in Pietermaritzburg. The wide range of opposition expressed in the local newspapers about this proposal indicated a complete lack of awareness of any positive role of Gwala in any struggle and confirmed that the memory in the public imagination that had stuck was that of a warlord. This dissertation fills this historical void by producing a political biography that enables South Africans to understand Harry Gwala more fully and appreciate his role in liberation history in a new, more comprehensive, more nuanced, light.

Since Gwala's death, a number of tributes have been paid to his role in mobilising and resuscitating ANC branches in Natal and Zululand. Kgalema Motlanthe has lamented the absence of a clear record which reflects Gwala's deep understanding of democratic process within the ANC and the manner in which he articulated himself during the first elective conference of the ANC in 1991.⁸¹ Rob Haswell and Shakes Cele have asserted that, had it not

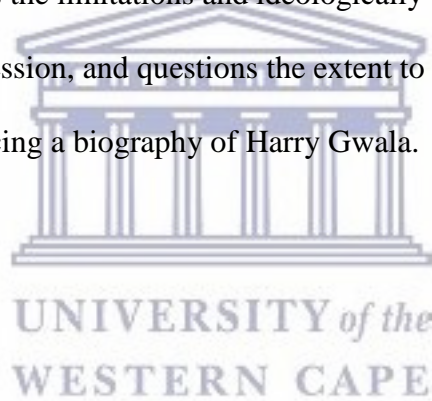
⁸⁰ P. O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* (New York: Penguin, 2007), 286-291.

⁸¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe; Kgalema Motlanthe, address at the inaugural Harry Gwala Memorial Lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013 (unpublished).

been for Gwala, the political dynamic in KwaZulu and Natal would have been very different during the early 1990s. Without Gwala's contribution, the ANC would have struggled to generate any significant following against the well-supported Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).⁸²

Conclusion

This chapter explains how processes of connectedness and disconnectedness, especially links with historical events, have shaped the production of Gwala's life trajectory. It argues that Gwala's biography cannot be written in isolation from historical events because he was both an active participant in the making of history, and he was its product. The chapter also argues that a political biography of Gwala is necessary to acknowledge the contribution he has made in history. Finally, it examines the limitations and ideologically biased content of texts that were produced as part of repression, and questions the extent to which they are useful sources of primary material for producing a biography of Harry Gwala.



⁸² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell; Mxolisi Dlamuka telephone interview with Shakes Cele, 8 March 2013. Jay Naidoo also makes reference to Harry Gwala's hard line stance and its impact on the ANC's performance in Natal, see J. Naidoo, *Fighting for Justice: A Lifetime of Political and Social Activism* (Johannesburg: Picador Africa, 2010), 151.

CHAPTER TWO

Mass mobilisation, non-racialism and the politics of connectedness, 1942-1960

Introduction

This chapter traces the origins and development of Harry Gwala's political consciousness from 1942 to 1960. It locates him within the broader scope of resistance politics that unfolded during the 1940s and 1950s. It traces the genesis of his politics of connectedness as he mobilised workers and ordinary citizens across racial lines. The chapter shows how Gwala was a product of socio-political conditions that were not of his own making by exploring three interrelated aspects of his politics of connectedness between 1942 and 1960. It begins by examining the genesis of Gwala's politicisation and his role in the proliferation of radical politics in Natal and in the popularisation of the Congress Youth League (CYL). There has been extensive research on the contribution of the CYL to reviving the moribund Natal ANC and changing the nature of South African liberation politics in the 1940s.¹ However, Gwala's contribution to establishing the CYL in Natal and the modalities of connectedness and disconnectedness that underpinned the relationship between the Natal CYL and the Communist Party in Natal has not received sufficient scholarly attention. Gwala's contribution has been minimised by an over-emphasis on the contributions of Anton Lembede, Jordan Ngubane and A. P. Mda.

¹ The CYL and the political dynamics of Natal during the 1940s are discussed on in passing by R. Edgar and L. ka Msumza (eds.), *Freedom in Our Lifetime: The Collected Writings of Anton Muziwakhe Lembede* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1996); R. Edgar, 'Changing the Old Guard: A. P. Mda and the ANC Youth League, 1944-1949', in S. Dubow and A. Jeeves (eds.), *South Africa's 1940s: World of Possibilities* (Cape Town: Double Storey, 2005); G. Rosenberg, 'Auto/Biographical Narratives and the Lives of Jordan Ngubane', *Alternation*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2000; K. A. Eales, 'Jordan Ngubane, Inkundla Ya Bantu and the African National Congress Youth League, 1944-1951', BA Hons thesis, University of Natal, 1984; T. Couzens, *The New African: A Study of the Life and Work of H. I. E. Dhlomo* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1985).

This chapter goes on to examine Gwala's politics of class consciousness through his involvement in the Communist Party and non-racial trade unions in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Howick, and how he connected these with the broader struggle for the national liberation of South Africa. The nature of Gwala's life and politics displayed interconnectedness between the individual, society and the prevailing political milieu. The germination of Gwala's political consciousness was a product of a wider range of historical and political conditions that prevailed during the 1930s and 1940s.

Tom Lodge, Saul Dubow and Dunbar Moodie are among the academics who have characterised the 1940s as a 'crisis' and as a 'turbulent' decade. They have argued that the 1940s were a 'watershed in the development of African politics in South Africa' as this decade witnessed the rapid transformation of resistance politics in South Africa.² This chapter seeks to extend these insights by asserting that the 1940s and 1950s constituted a crucial era in Gwala's politics of connectedness, as he began to interweave African nationalism with class struggles. In addition, just as Iain Edwards and Jon Soske have cautioned against the tendency to 'generalise regarding South African developments on the basis of events and alliances that are largely confined to Johannesburg', this chapter focuses on Gwala's political activism in Natal and, to a limited extent, KwaZulu.³ Nieftagodien has argued that 'place shapes struggle in important ways and should therefore play a more central role in the analysis of resistance.'⁴ This, I suggest, is a critical aspect of understanding Gwala's politics of connectedness. Furthermore, in analysing Gwala and the network of political relations in

² T. Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa Since 1945* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1983), 1; S. Dubow, 'Introduction: South Africa's 1940s'; T. D. Moodie, 'The South African State and Industrial Conflict in the 1940s', *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 1 (1988), 21-61.

³ J. Soske, "'Wash Me Black Again': African Nationalism, the Indian Diaspora, and Kwa-Zulu Natal, 1944-1960", PhD dissertation, University of Toronto, 2009, 64; I. Edwards, 'Mkhumbane Our Home: African Shantytown Society in Cato Manor, 1946-1960', PhD dissertation, University of Natal, 1989.

⁴ N. Nieftagodien, 'Popular Movements, Contentious Spaces and the ANC, 1943-1956' in A. Lissoni, J. Soske, N. Erlank, N. Nieftagodien and O. Badsha (eds.), *One Hundred Years of the ANC: Debating Liberation Histories Today* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2012), 137.

Natal from 1940s to 1960, I utilised the ‘geography of resistance’ framework to suggest that the modalities of constructing historical knowledge should recognise the role of local particularism which emancipates historically silenced regional voices.⁵ The period from the 1940s to 1960 was characterised by robust, defiant politics that shaped the nature of resistance throughout the struggle for liberation of South Africa. However, this chapter suggests that there were important geographical and regional variations.

When rethinking Gwala’s politics, it is imperative that he is placed within the complexity of class and racial relations that characterised Natal, mainly Durban and Pietermaritzburg, against the backdrop of an exclusive African nationalism that constituted the dominant form of radical politics from the 1940s. Even though the Communist Party supported the need for national liberation before class-based struggle, race relations were complex in Natal, mainly between Africans and Indians. In addition, as David Everatt has argued, ‘progressive whites exerted undue influence over the nature and course of African nationalism in South Africa.’⁶ This chapter argues that, in Natal, Gwala connected African nationalism and class struggle in a manner that was relevant to all non-European groups. Gwala’s politics between 1942 and 1960 epitomises the fusion of multiracialism and non-racialism and the various forms it took, especially during the late 1940s and 1950s.

Connectedness and the Congress Youth League in Natal

In a memorandum submitted to the Minister of Justice, the Commissioner of Police listed a series of Gwala’s political activities that state intelligence had gathered since 1942.⁷ Gwala

⁵ For more discussion on the relationship between geography and resistance, see H. Sapire, ‘African Organisation in Brakpan Location in the 1950s’ in P. Bonner, P. Delius and D. Posel (eds.), *Apartheid Genesis, 1935-1962* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1993); S. Pile and M. Keith (eds.), *Geographies of Resistance* (London: Routledge, 1997).

⁶ D. Everatt, *The Origins of Non-Racialism: White Opposition to Apartheid in the 1950s* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2009), 18.

⁷ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, top secret document: Memorandum of the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

was identified as a key figure in the political landscape in Natal's Communist Party and the Natal Congress Youth League. This memorandum is a testament to how the state's bureaucratic systems were manipulated to construct a criminal identity for Gwala that became a tool to disconnect him throughout his life. It also marked the beginning of Gwala's political objectification by the state which became the baseline for constructing relations of confrontation, antagonism and criminality.

Material conditions that characterised the ANC prior to the 1940s shaped Gwala's politics. As Clive Glaser and Colin Bundy have argued, after its 'flirtation with radicalism' in the early 1920s, the ANC experience some decay during the 1930s.⁸ Pixley ka-Isaka Seme had replaced Josiah Gumede, whose radical and pro-Communist approach was cut short because he had openly embraced the Communist Party and had participated in the activities of the African trade unions.⁹ Gumede attended the League Against Imperialism conference held in Brussels in 1927 together with two South African Communists, James La Guma and Dan Colraine. Gumede spoke at the conference about the plight of Africans in South Africa, concluding that 'I am glad to say that in South Africa there are Communists. I am not a Communist, but we find that the CPSA [Communist Party of South Africa] are the only people who are with us in spirit and we are watching them.'¹⁰ Gumede was one of the South Africans to visit the Soviet Union as a tourist while he was president-general of the ANC. Although Gumede was 'previously sceptical about the usefulness of communist revolutionary

⁸ C. Glaser, *A Jacana Pocket History: The ANC Youth League* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012), 12; C. Bundy, 'Land and Liberation: The South African National Liberation Movements and the Agrarian Question, 1920s-1960s', *Review of African Political Economy*, No. 29, July 1984, 14-29.

⁹ Van Diemel, 'In Search of Freedom', 294; T. Karis, 'Revolution in the Making: Black Politics in South Africa', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 1983, 381.

¹⁰ *The South African Worker*, 14 April 1927, cited in Van Diemel, 'In Search of Freedom', 100.

methods to his cause,' his exposure to the communist world at the 1927 Brussels conference had a positive impact upon him.¹¹

Gumede's pro-Communist stance did not go down well with the 'old guard' who were opposed to collaboration with the Communist Party. Gumede was repudiated by the old guard and lost the presidency of the ANC in 1930. He then seemingly retreated to his home town, Pietermaritzburg, where he spent most of his time working with local trade unions. Moreover, Seme's approach toward government policy disillusioned Gumede and he began to align himself with the rank and file in the Communist Party in Pietermaritzburg.¹² Perhaps Gwala was inspired by Gumede's belief that constitutional and peaceful extra-parliamentary means of struggle had long been exhausted.

Between 1940 and 1941 Gwala was enrolled as a student at Adams College to 'further higher education and train as a teacher.'¹³ While at Adams College, Gwala was influenced by Dr Edgar Brookes and Chief Albert Luthuli.¹⁴ Gwala claimed to have been politically conscientised by Dr Brookes as he had introduced a 'subject that was not in the syllabus, called Civics.'¹⁵ Through this subject Gwala 'began to know something about the society.'¹⁶

¹¹ I. Filatova and A. Davidson, *The Hidden Thread: Russia and South Africa in the Soviet Era* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2013), 149.

¹² Van Diemel, 'In Search of Freedom', 298.

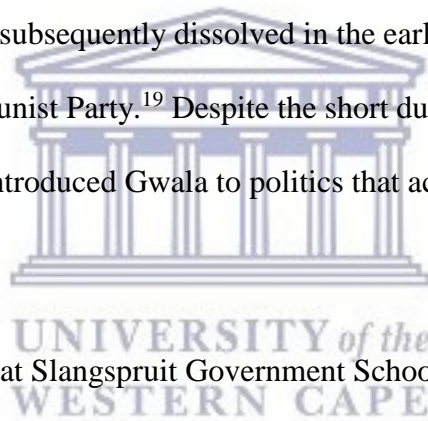
¹³ Neame, Sylvia interview with Harry Gwala, 29 October 1989, Berlin. University of Witwatersrand Library (UWL) Historical and Literary Papers (HLP), Sylvia Neame Collection, A2729, E2.

¹⁴ Brookes was born in England and came to Natal with his parents in 1901 when he was four years old. Together with CT Loram, J. D. Rheinallt Jones, D. D. T. Jabavu, R. F. A. Hoernle and Leo Marquard, he established the South African Institute of Race Relations in 1929. Between 1934 and 1945, Brookes was a principal of Adams College while a Senator representing the Africans of Natal from 1937 to 1952, see C. de B. Webb, 'Edgar Harry Brookes, 1897-1979', *Natalia: Journal of Natal Society Foundation*, No. 9, 1979, 39-42; Albert John Mvumbi Luthuli was born sometime around 1898 near Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia, the son of a Seventh Day Adventist missionary. In 1908 he was sent to his ancestral home at Groutville, Natal where he went to the mission school. Having first trained as a teacher at Edendale, near Pietermaritzburg, Luthuli attended additional courses at Adam's College (in 1920), and went on to become part of the college staff. He remained at the college until 1935. In 1935 Luthuli accepted the chieftaincy of the Groutville reserve. Chief Albert Luthuli joined the ANC in 1945 and was elected Natal provincial president in 1951. In 1946 he joined the Natives Representative Council. In 1952 Chief Luthuli was one of the leading lights behind the Defiance Campaign. At the end of 1952, Albert Luthuli was elected President-General of the ANC, a position he held until his death in 1967, see A. J. Luthuli, *Let My People Go: An Autobiography of a Great South African Leader* (London: Collins, 1962).

¹⁵ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁶ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

Luthuli had resigned from teaching at Adams College before Gwala was a student but ‘used to visit the school’ to talk to students about issues related to segregation and Africans. In 1941, while on school holidays in Pietermaritzburg, Gwala ‘passed through an Indian restaurant and saw some books, one of which was about pass laws, and the *Guardian* newspaper.’¹⁷ Gwala was eager to read these materials but did not have money to buy them. When the owner realised that Gwala had an interest, he gave him two items of literature for free. It was this exposure to leftist literature that stimulated Gwala’s interest in the Communist Party. After he started teaching, he was ‘taken to a meeting of the Non-European United Front’ (NEUF) by one of his colleagues.¹⁸ The NEUF had been established in 1939 as a leftist-dominated organisation and soon fell under the influence of Trotskyists. It became active in Pietermaritzburg but subsequently dissolved in the early 1940s and its members were absorbed into the Communist Party.¹⁹ Despite the short duration of its activities in Pietermaritzburg, the NEUF introduced Gwala to politics that accorded with his own viewpoints.



In 1942 Gwala was employed at Slangspruit Government School in Pietermaritzburg. As a teacher dealing with a large number of children from poor families, Gwala witnessed firsthand the appalling socio-economic conditions in which African people were living. In an interview, Gwala recalled seeing that some of these children ‘were dozing while he was teaching and he was wondering why that was so.’²⁰ Gwala keenly felt the contradiction of teaching school children from poverty-stricken family backgrounds about ‘physiology and hygiene.’ Inspired by the civics classes that he had participated in while at Adams College,

¹⁷ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁹ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala; P. Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism in South Africa: The African National Congress, 1912-1952*, (London: C Hurst & Company, 1970), 186.

²⁰ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala; African Communists, ‘The Socialist Path is the only one open to the oppressed everywhere: An interview with Harry Gwala’, *The African Communist: Journal of the South African Communist Party* (South African on the March), No. 120, 1990, 61.

Gwala decided to visit the families of school children in order to understand their conditions at home. This enabled him to gain first-hand experience of the deplorable circumstances in which these children and their parents lived in. Gwala was convinced that children's lack of participation in the classroom was a symptom of the broader political system, and this required that he conscientised both children and their parents.²¹ This resulted in the establishment of 'Intathakusa Youth Club' which became a political forum to conscientise the community of Slangspruit about segregation and its impact on the livelihoods of Africans.²² It was through this initiative that Moses Mabhida, one of Gwala's students, was recruited to the Communist Party during the mid-1940s.

The Communist Party was active in Natal and it had a local office in Pietermaritzburg. While Gwala was still employed as a teacher, he attended political classes conducted under the auspices of its Pietermaritzburg branch. Just as in Johannesburg, the Communist Party offices in Pietermaritzburg became a 'rendezvous of natives.'²³ As Lionel Bernstein asserts, most 'Communist Party members were involved either in the trade union movement or in the Party's most important activity, the running of night-schools for adult black workers.'²⁴ While a growing network of these schools was provided with basic tuition in reading, writing and arithmetic, they also became the vanguard of political education for African migrants who had recently moved to the cities. Bernstein believed that through the night schools, the 'Party was making contact with serious and responsible men and women, and introducing

²¹ A survey of the African community in Edendale highlighted dietary deficiencies, both in terms of quality and in terms of the lack of many of the nutrients were necessary for the maintenance of good health. In addition, it was found that only 14 per cent of the population had access to milk and potatoes and fewer than 5 per cent to vegetables and eggs, see University of Natal, Department of Economics, *Experiment at Edendale: A Study of non-European Settlement with Special Reference to Food Expenditure and Nutrition* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1951), 234.

²² NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret document: Memorandum of the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

²³ E. Roux, *Time Longer than Rope: A History of the Black Man's Struggle for Freedom in South Africa*, (London: Victor Gollancz, 1948), 215.

²⁴ R. Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting: Memoirs from a Life in South African Politics, 1938-1964* (London: Penguin, 1999), 40.

them to social and political ideas.²⁵ In Pietermaritzburg, these political classes were conducted by a certain James Corrighan, who was an architect, and John Heckslet, a local baker. Gwala's interest in reading Communist literature grew substantially, and he was recruited as a member of the Communist Party in June 1942 by Peter Martindale, who was branch secretary of the Pietermaritzburg Communist Party.²⁶ Gwala recalled that the Pietermaritzburg branch of the Communist Party consisted mainly of whites and a few Indians, while he and Selby Mazibuko were the only Africans.²⁷

By 1943, Gwala had been nominated by the Pietermaritzburg branch to attend a Communist Party school in Johannesburg where he met Lionel 'Rusty' Bernstein, Hilda Bernstein, Yusuf Dadoo and Violet Weinberg, all of who had an influential role in shaping his politics of connectedness. It was at the Communist Party's school that Gwala learned about the history of the ANC, about why it was important to be involved in the ANC's activities, and about African nationalism.²⁸ He joined the ANC in 1944, having been a member of the Communist Party since 1942. Gwala emphasised in two interviews that 'there was no African National Congress in Natal' during the early 1940s.²⁹ His membership of the Communist Party gave him direct access to the literature and intellectual training that was part of the Communist Party's summer school syllabus. It also sowed the seeds of disconnectedness among those within the ANC who were suspicious of Communists, and also drew interest from the South African state, which perceived Communists as a threat to its dominance. Gwala joined the ANC as it was being revived in Natal, and at the same time as the CYL was being

²⁵ Bernstein, *Memory Against Forgetting*, 40; R. Suttner, 'The Character and Formation of Intellectuals Within the ANC-led South African Liberation Movement', in T. Mkwandawire (ed.), *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development* (Dakar: CODESRIA Books, 2005), 126-127.

²⁶ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

²⁷ Mazibuko's career in politics is obscure but he emerged as a staunch ally of Gwala in the sport fraternity during the late 1940s, see Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala.

²⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala; African Communist, 'The Socialist Path is the Only One Open to the Oppressed Everywhere: An interview with Harry Gwala', *The African Communist: Journal of the South African Communist Party*, No. 120, 1990, 63.

²⁹ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala; Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

established. Having been influenced by Josiah Gumede's views, Gwala sought to use the CYL as a vanguard to transform the moribund Natal ANC into an active political player in the liberation struggle.

The origins of the CYL date back to the late 1930s when Manasseh T. Moerane, a school teacher at uMpumulo High School in Natal and Secretary of the Natal Bantu Teachers' Association, attended the ANC conference in Bloemfontein. After his return, Moerane suggested to Jordan Ngubane that a youth league should be formed.³⁰ The National Union of African Youth (NUAY) was duly established in 1939 with Moerane as the 'head' and Jordan Ngubane as secretary. The NUAY attracted over a 'dozen members, mostly young teachers, who met every weekend and published a newsletter.'³¹ In its brief manifesto, written mainly by Moerane, the NUAY's stated goals were to 'stir the political consciousness of African youth and to set the pace for the development towards freedom.' When Moerane was forced by the Department of Education to withdraw from the NUAY, and after Jordan Ngubane moved to Johannesburg to become the assistant to Selope Thema, editor of the *Bantu World*, the NUAY disappeared from the political landscape.

Gwala argued that the initiative for the formation of the Youth League came from the Party. He remembered:

We in the Party had the Young Communist League, but we had a problem of getting the YCL into the townships. So it was felt that a Youth League should be formed in the ANC and this would provide the basis for recruitment into the YCL. I remember that this issue was discussed when I attended a Party school in Johannesburg in [June/July] 1943.³²

³⁰ T. Karis and G. M. Carter (eds.), *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1964*, Vol.2 (Stanford, CA: Hoover Institution Press), 99.

³¹ Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol.2, 99; Edgar and ka Msumza, *Freedom in Our Lifetime*, 30.

³² 'The Socialist Path is the only one open to the oppressed everywhere: an interview with Harry Gwala', *The African Communist: Journal of the South African Communist Party* (South African on the March), No. 120, 1990, 65.

Despite Gwala's assertion here, it was not until the December 1943 ANC conference in Durban that Moerane proposed a resolution to organise a 'youth conference in each province with the ultimate aim of establishing a Congress Youth League.'³³ While ANC president of the time, Alfred Xuma did not necessarily embrace the CYL's ideas and tactics, he gave his blessing for its establishment, despite a warning from A. W. G. Champion.³⁴ Although Xuma had an ambivalent attitude towards the CYL, he attended its inaugural meeting at the Bantu Men's Social Centre in Johannesburg during the Easter weekend of 1944. W. F. Nkomo and Lionel Majombozi were elected as provisional chair and secretary respectively until the CYL had drafted its constitution and conducted its formal elections of office bearers. While Nkomo and Majombozi enjoyed widespread popularity among the Youth Leaguers, they were viewed as 'transitional appointments' since it was known they would not have sufficient time to focus on the CYL as both were medical students at the University of Witwatersrand.³⁵ In addition, Lembede and other Youth Leaguers believed Nkomo was secretly a member of the Communist Party and had 'suggested a wording for the youth league manifesto which would have given it a communist slant.'³⁶ When the elections took place in September 1944, Nkomo and Majombozi stepped aside and Anton Lembede was elected as the first president of the CYL. Lembede was a devout Catholic as well as an uncompromising anti-Communist. The CYL delegated the drafting of a manifesto to A. P. Mda, Anton Lembede and Jordan Ngubane.³⁷ The manifesto positioned the CYL as an 'answer and assurance to the critics of

³³ *Bantu World*, 8 January 1944; Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol.2, 99.

³⁴ S. Gish, *Alfred B. Xuma: African, American, South African* (Cape Town: South African History Online, 2012), 101; Couzens, *The New African*, 259.

³⁵ Edgar and ka Msuza, *Freedom in Our Lifetime*, 33.

³⁶ Edgar and ka Msuza, *Freedom in Our Lifetime*, 33.

³⁷ Edgar, 'Changing the Old Guard', 158.

the national movement [ANC] that African Youth will not allow the struggle and sacrifices of their fathers to have been in vain.³⁸

The CYL was conceived to be the brains-trust and a power-station of the spirit of African nationalism. However, as Robert Edgar has also argued, while ‘the manifesto provided a liberatory creed, it did not spell out how freedom was to be achieved, concentrating instead on creating a space for the CYL within the ANC.’³⁹ Lembede, Mda and Ngubane agitated for Africans to be ‘self-reliant’ and were suspicious of alliances with non-Africans, calling on the ANC not to cooperate with Indians and Communists. Lembede, Mda and Ngubane believed that the Communist Party was dominated by whites who ‘did not really have African interests at heart.’⁴⁰ Thus, Lembede’s ‘African nationalism’ was conceptualised as a mechanism to overcome Africans’ sense of inferiority and drew on the ‘rich cultural traditions of Africa’ which encouraged them to take ‘pride of their identity, an identity rooted in the “soil” of Africa.’⁴¹ Peter Walshe argues that Lembede, Mda and Ngubane’s conception of African nationalism was meant to mobilise ‘mass support in preparation for the emergence of Africans as the predominant political power in the Union.’⁴² Between 1944 and 1947, the CYL established provincial branches in Transvaal and Natal. The Transvaal CYL became stronger and subsequently became a ‘mantle of the CYL.’⁴³

Jon Soske has argued that developments within Indian politics and Indian congresses in Natal had an influence on the ‘development of African nationalist politics during the 1940s.’⁴⁴

Soske shows that CYL activist like Lembede and Nelson Mandela ‘avidly studied the

³⁸ Document 48: ‘Congress Youth League Manifesto.’ Issued by the Provisional Committee of the Congress Youth League, March 1944, cited in Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 2, 300-308.

³⁹ Edgar, ‘Changing the Old Guard’, 159.

⁴⁰ Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, 23.

⁴¹ Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, 26.

⁴² Walshe, *The Rise of African Nationalism*, 278.

⁴³ Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, 26.

⁴⁴ Soske, ‘Wash Me Black Again’, 62.

writings of Nehru, especially his semi-autobiographical *Discovery of India*, and frequently quoted him in their writings and speeches.⁴⁵ Against this background, the establishment of the CYL in Natal was inspired by the developments in the Natal Indian Congress Youth League (NICYL). Formed in February 1939 with George Poonen as vice-president, the NICYL brought together about 40 sectoral and religious youth bodies. By the mid-1940s, Poonen had already formed a Worker's Study Circle in Clairwood, while George Singh organised the Merebank Literary and Debating Society. These two organisations focused mainly on organising classes in political economy, grammar, and public speaking.⁴⁶ Poonen was a respected activist within the Indian community in Durban. He had been recruited to the Communist Party by Edward Roux in 1934. About a month thereafter, the Communist Party held its annual general meeting (AGM) in Durban. Only seven individuals attended the meeting, and Poonen was elected party organiser for the Durban district. By 1938, Poonen had progressed to be chairperson of the Durban branch of the Communist Party.⁴⁷ The NICYL became an active force in galvanising political interest among the Indian youth in Natal. By the late 1950s it had started working with the South African Congress of Democrats to host conferences that dealt with politics, sport and culture.⁴⁸

Moerane formally introduced the CYL in Natal.⁴⁹ The inaugural meeting was held on 20 May 1944 at the Bantu Social Centre in Durban. Moerane professed that the meeting would be attended by the 'cream of the nation' and the Youth would be 'united by a common loyalty.'⁵⁰ The meeting established the Natal CYL and elected a 'committee' comprised of

⁴⁵ J. Soske, 'Unravelling the 1947 'Doctors' Pact': Race, Metonymy and the Evasion of Nationalist History', in Lissoni et al, 167; N. Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela*, (London: Little, Brown, 1994); P. Maylam, 'Jawaharlal Nehru and Nelson Mandela: Parallel Lives Compared', *Journal of Historical Biography*, 15 (Spring 2014), 1-33.

⁴⁶ G. H. Vahed, 'The Making of Indian Identity in Durban, 1914-1949', PhD Dissertation, Indiana University, 1995, 233.

⁴⁷ Vahed, 'The Making of Indian Identity in Durban', 233.

⁴⁸ UWL, HLP, Auden House Collection, Natal Indian Youth Congress, AD 2179, letter from the general secretary of the Natal Indian Congress to Ben Turok, national secretary of the South African Congress of Democrats, 27 July 1959.

⁴⁹ Couzens, *The New African*, 262.

⁵⁰ Staff reporter, 'African Congress Youth League', *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 17 May 1944.

Selby Ngcobo, Wilson Cele, Congress Mbata, A.T. Hadebi, Herbert Dhlomo, and Jordan Ngubane, with Moerane as president.⁵¹ Despite a well-attended inaugural meeting, the Natal CYL became dysfunctional because of factionalism in its executive. In addition, two of its committee members, Herbert Dhlomo and Jordan Ngubane, were elected onto the executive of the Natal ANC in April 1945 under Champion's leadership. Neither had much time to deal with Natal CYL executive matters as both held portfolios in the Natal ANC while also holding down permanent jobs as journalists.⁵² Soon after the South African state found out about Moerane's political activities, he was again relieved of his duties as a teacher. Glaser has argued that 'prior to 1948 the Congress Youth League consciously kept its official membership small as it had hoped to radicalise the ANC through internal pressure group politics.'⁵³

Under the leadership of Lembede, the old guard fended off the CYL's attempts to influence the ANC's national policy.⁵⁴ Lembede's presidency was characterised by attempts to cut off Communists and reduce their influence on the ANC. The ANC executive turned down Lembede's proposal to prohibit members of other political organisations from serving on the ANC provincial and national executive, which was aimed at limiting Communist involvement in the ANC.⁵⁵ Despite several requests to 'all the provinces of the Union and protectorates' to commence organising the CYL, it was not until 1948 that an 'active' branch of the CYL was launched in Natal.⁵⁶ This was the first branch to be launched outside the Witwatersrand area, something made possible by A. P. Mda's pragmatic stance of allowing

⁵¹ Staff reporter, 'African Congress Youth League', *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 31 May 1944.

⁵² Couzens, *The New African*, 275.

⁵³ C. Glaser, 'Students, Tsotsis and the Congress Youth League: Youth Organisation on the Rand in the 1940s and 1950s', unpublished paper presented at the "The Making of Class" Conference, 9-14 February 1987, University of Witwatersrand.

⁵⁴ Edgar, 'Changing the Old Guard', 160.

⁵⁵ Gish, *Alfred B. Xuma*, 102.

⁵⁶ Staff reporter, 'Call to Youth', *Inkundla ya Bantu*, Vol. ix, No. 131, January 1947; Staff reporter, 'Congress Youth League', *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 2 June 1948.

Communists to play a pivotal role in the CYL.⁵⁷ Mda had been elected president of the CYL after the death of Lembede in 1947. In addition, as Glaser shows, after 1948 the CYL made a concerted ‘effort to go national.’⁵⁸ Thus provincial CYL branches were established in Natal, Orange Free State and the Cape, with the latter branch’s membership concentrated at the University of Fort Hare.

In March 1948, Messrs. Nivard J. Dlamini, Caiphaz D. Madwe, Edgar S. Mefereka, Zablom M. Madela and Abner Makhaye called ‘young men of Durban’ to work towards the ‘establishment of the Congress Youth League of Natal.’ They considered the CYL to be a vanguard that would ‘develop the spirit of African nationalism as propounded by Lembede.’⁵⁹ Dlamini’s team remained suspicious of Communists and their influence in the ANC. At the same time as Dlamini and his team were trying to mobilise support for the establishment of the CYL in Natal, another committee comprising of Percy Khumalo, Selby Msimang, H. T. Gwala, E. O. Msimang, H. I. Dhlomo and Reggy Moses, most of whom were from Pietermaritzburg, was also mobilising towards the same goal.⁶⁰ This committee consisted of both African nationalists and Communists, with Gwala known to be a member of the Communist Party. Percy Khumalo’s committee received an ‘encouraging response and the approval of the majority of organisations in Natal and Zululand.’ There is no archival evidence that Dlamini’s committee succeeded in hosting the meeting they had envisaged. Percy Khumalo admitted that a meeting was scheduled to take place in May, but ‘due to unforeseen circumstances the meeting had to be postponed.’⁶¹

⁵⁷ C. Giffard, ‘“The Hour of the Youth Has Struck”: The African National Congress Youth League and the Struggle for a Mass Base, 1943-1952’, BA Hons dissertation, University of Cape Town, 1984, 34-36.

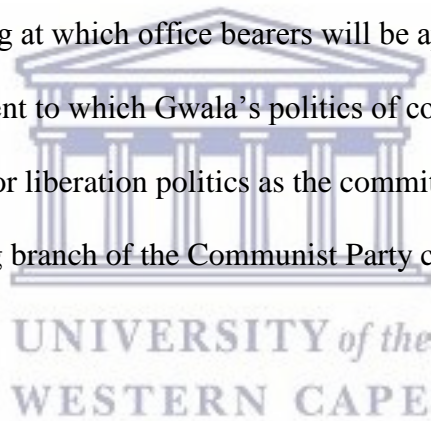
⁵⁸ Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, 34-35.

⁵⁹ Staff reporter, ‘Congress Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 20 March 1948.

⁶⁰ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁶¹ Staff reporter, ‘Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 July 1948.

Gwala's committee managed to host the inaugural meeting of the Natal CYL on 4 July 1948. The meeting was to be held at Durban Bantu Social Centre, but the Durban Town Clerk turned down the application for a permit and the meeting was moved to Baumannville Hall. Gwala presided over the meeting while Percy Khumalo gave a 'well-thought-out and challenging speech which focused on the history, aims, objects and programme of the League.'⁶² The meeting was 'well attended by delegates from various regions in Natal and KwaZulu' and after discussion delegates 'showed a great enthusiasm for a new organisation and the cause.' The meeting decided 'unanimously to constitute itself as the Congress Youth League of Natal and elected a committee of six members with Mr T. H. Gwala as a Chairman and Mr. Yengwa as Secretary.'⁶³ Gwala and M. B. Yengwa's committee was given a mandate to 'organise for a mass meeting at which office bearers will be appointed.' The success of the meeting demonstrated the extent to which Gwala's politics of connectedness was beginning to generate positive spinoffs for liberation politics as the committee was mainly driven by him, with the Pietermaritzburg branch of the Communist Party covering the costs of the meeting.⁶⁴



Gwala was aware of the antagonistic stance of the Natal ANC towards the CYL. In an open letter to the readers of *Ilanga lase Natal*, he anticipated that some would 'look at the new organisation as a movement of the intelligentsia while some Congress die-hards will probably look at it as a rival organisation to the ANC.'⁶⁵ He described the newly formed CYL as 'an organisation of all young people formed for the purpose of giving political, economic and social education to young people so that they can take a conscious active part in the liberation of their own nation.' Gwala argued that political organisations were a product of the

⁶² Staff reporter, 'Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 July 1948.

⁶³ Staff reporter, 'Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 July 1948.

⁶⁴ Staff reporter, 'Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 July 1948; Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁶⁵ Gwala T. H., 'Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 17 July 1948.

conditions of their era, and he considered the formation of the ANC to be a product of the establishment of the Union of South Africa. For Gwala, the CYL arose out of the conditions that 'non-whites' faced during the 1940s.⁶⁶

Soon after Gwala's committee was elected, A. W. G. Champion launched a scathing attack on the Natal CYL. What Champion articulated openly had been the cause of a dilemma for Xuma, who also viewed the Communist Party as both 'a potential ally and potential rivals.'⁶⁷

Unlike Xuma, Champion was open about his dislike for the CYL and referred to the League as 'men who are full of book education-theorists, who have just mastered the studies of Karl Marx, Gandhi and the rest of the reformers and want to step into their shoes without taking the trouble to study the local conditions, disrespecting advices from well and tried field officers.'⁶⁸ Champion was a Durban-based politician who had been a leader of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU), a member of the Native Representative Council (NRC) and the president of the Natal ANC between 1945 and 1951.⁶⁹ Champion and the executive of the Natal ANC viewed the state 'as something that could be persuaded rather than resisted and felt it was worth working strategically within the state-subsidised advisory structures, such as township Advisory Boards.'⁷⁰

Champion had been invited to Gwala's inaugural meeting but it appears that he was not informed that the venue had been changed from the Bantu Social Centre to Baumannville Hall. He claimed to have gone to the Bantu Social Centre on the day of the meeting and

⁶⁶ Gwala T. H., 'Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 17 July 1948.

⁶⁷ Gish, *Alfred B. Xuma*, 103.

⁶⁸ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da106, letter from Champion to Dr S. M. Molema, 11 August 1950.

⁶⁹ See P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds.), *The People's City: African Life in Twentieth Century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996); M. W. Swanson (ed.), *The Views of Mahlathi: Writings of AWG Champion, a Black South African* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1983).

⁷⁰ Political reporter, 'Presidential Address: African National Congress Natal Province', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 7 August 1948. Glaser and Sambureni's work emphasised on Champion's moderate relations with the state, see Glaser, *The ANC Youth League*, 18-19; N. T. Sambureni, 'From Mainstream Politics to Township Politics: Resistance and Collaboration in Durban, 1960 to 1975', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, No. 19, 1997, 47-59.

realised the meeting was not taking place. Champion claimed to have been ‘surprised’ by Gwala’s report in the *Ilanga lase Natal* newspaper on the following weekend that said that the meeting did in fact take place, but at Baumannville Hall, and that an interim committee had been elected under Gwala’s chairmanship. It is quite unlikely that, given his leadership position and political stature in Natal, Champion would have taken a whole week to find out that a meeting of such significance in the politics of Natal had taken place. Although Champion had been invited to the meeting, it is intriguing that he was not on the list of speakers. Yet, Selby Msimang spoke in his capacity as the secretary of the Natal ANC.⁷¹

Champion was known for his dislike of Communists and asserted that Gwala and Percy Khumalo’s intentions for the Natal CYL were different from those of the Transvaal CYL. Thus, Champion saw ‘Gwala’s CYL’ as a rival to the Natal ANC rather than a cooperative body. This is because ‘Gwala’s CYL’ did not seek approval from the ANC and did not work with Jordan Ngubane, who, he claimed, had been assigned in 1945 to assist in the formation of the Congress Youth League in Natal.⁷² Champion’s suspicions of the Pietermaritzburg committee were based on his often acrimonious relationship with Selby Msimang and E. O. Msimang over their accommodating attitudes towards Communists and their stance on multiracialism. Champion claimed that Msimang was ‘not clear about the Youth League’ which he considered to be a parallel organisation to the Natal ANC.⁷³

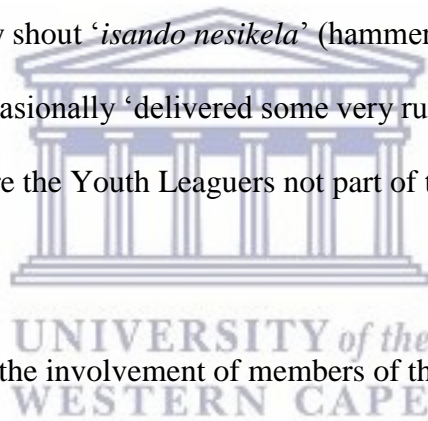
The election of Gwala and M.B. Yengwa to lead the organising committee further fuelled tension in the already tense relationship between the new body and Champion, as Gwala was a well-known Communist and Yengwa was known to be sympathetic to Communists and was

⁷¹ Staff reporter, ‘Congress Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 26 June 1948.

⁷² Staff reporter, ‘Congress Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 14 August 1948.

⁷³ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da110, letter from Champion to Selby Msimang, 15 September 1950.

already working closely with the Communist Party in Durban.⁷⁴ There were also underlying animosities between certain other members of the Natal ANC executive and Youth League about its approach to, and relationship with, the Communist Party. The Youth League denied that it was a front for the Communist Party.⁷⁵ It emphasised that it was still committed to African nationalism, which was perceived to be the antithesis of the Communist Party.⁷⁶ Champion was openly hostile to the CYL and claimed that it was disrespectful to the ‘old guard.’ He said that the CYL had been established because its members did not want to be under the leadership of this old guard. Champion claimed that the Natal CYL comprised of his ‘old enemies in Chesterville politics and Durban’ and Gwala and Wilson Cele were known members of the Communist Party.⁷⁷ Gwala remembered that in some meetings Champion would emphatically shout ‘*isando nesikela*’ (hammer and sickle) just before Gwala spoke.⁷⁸ Champion occasionally ‘delivered some very rude remarks’ about the Natal CYL, stating that not only were the Youth Leaguers not part of the Congress, they were enemies of Congress.⁷⁹



David Everatt has argued that the involvement of members of the Communist Party in the radicalisation of the ANC ‘exacerbated ideological differences among socialists and communists.’⁸⁰ The Communist Party was divided in its understanding of and response to the growth of African nationalism and the ANC. Everatt shows that some ‘party members, located largely in the Cape, warned of the dangers of African nationalism and called for a

⁷⁴ The location of the newly established Natal CYL from Lakhani Chambers, offices of the Communist Party in Durban, strengthened Champion’s suspicions about M.B. Yengwa’s Communist inclinations, staff reporter, ‘African National Congress Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 7 August 1948.

⁷⁵ D. Everatt, ‘Alliance Politics of a Special Type: The Roots of the ANC/SACP Alliance, 1950-1954’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1992, 19-39 (Special Issue: Social History of Resistance in South Africa).

⁷⁶ UWL, HLP, Records of the African National Congress, AD 2186, Ga30, letter from the ANCYL to ‘My dear Francis’, 6 October 1949.

⁷⁷ Staff reporter, ‘uCongress nabaXovi’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 29 April 1950.

⁷⁸ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala.

⁷⁹ Editorial, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 22 April 1950.

⁸⁰ Everatt, ‘Alliance Politics of a Special Type’, 20.

greater concentration on the pursuance of class struggle.⁸¹ Gwala was part of a group, which together with other Communist Party members from Transvaal, began to develop a theory of internal colonialism which saw national struggle as a natural and necessary response to colonial forms of oppression by means of which the white minority controlled the black majority.

Against the background of this antagonism from the Natal ANC, especially from Champion, Gwala's committee mobilised youth in Natal and Zululand to attend the elective meeting of the Natal CYL on 4 September 1948 at the Bantu Social Centre in Durban.⁸² Gwala chaired the meeting, which was 'well attended by young men and women from various walks of life.' Jordan Ngubane gave an overview of race relations from the turn of the century up to the 1940s. Thereafter Herbert Dhlomo delivered an address which 'galvanised the youth to take charge of their own lives by joining the CYL.'⁸³ After a robust debate and a heated discussion, delegates agreed to formalise the establishment of the Natal CYL. The League then elected the following executive: Jordan Ngubane (president); H. T. Gwala (vice president); S. B. Ngcobo (treasurer); Percy Khumalo (organiser); M. B. Yengwa (secretary); B. Nomvete (assistant secretary); and M. T. Moerane (additional member).⁸⁴

During the meeting delegates were encouraged to join the CYL and Yengwa was given the task of managing membership. Delegates were also encouraged to establish branches and hold regular meetings. The influence of the Communist Party and that of Gwala became clear when branches were 'encouraged to host debating clubs and study groups' that focused on

⁸¹ Everatt, 'Alliance Politics of a Special Type', 20.

⁸² Staff reporter, 'African National Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 7 August 1948; Staff reporter, 'Umhlangano we-Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 September 1948.

⁸³ Staff reporter, 'African National Congress Youth League (Natal)', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 October 1948.

⁸⁴ Staff reporter, 'Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 11 September 1948; Staff reporter, 'African National Congress Youth League (Natal)', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 October 1948.

promoting an understanding of South African politics.⁸⁵ Furthermore, Gwala emphasised that it was important for Natal CYL's branches to teach illiterate members how to read and write through night schools. The meeting also mandated the Natal CYL executive to investigate the possibility of establishing its own newspaper which would be responsible for publicising 'CYL activities in Natal.'⁸⁶ Jordan Ngubane only had a short stint as president. Early in 1949 he fell ill, was given medical advice to 'do as little work as possible', and was moved from Durban to recuperate in Rosetta, near Estcourt in the Natal Midlands.⁸⁷ Jordan Ngubane's long absence meant that Gwala was at the helm of the Natal CYL, and he seems to have preferred working closely with Yengwa.

Although Champion had been invited to the September 1948 meeting, he did not attend and sent an apology indicating that he had prior engagements.⁸⁸ As meeting chairperson, Gwala read Champion's apology and made it clear that the executive of the Natal ANC had been invited to attend. It is possible that Champion did not attend because of his stance on the Natal CYL and the animosity that had emerged earlier that year with his erstwhile friend, Jordan Ngubane.

Before his election to the Natal ANC in 1945, Jordan Ngubane had been based in Johannesburg. He was instrumental in the establishment of the CYL and assisted Mda and Lembede to write its constitution and its manifesto. He served on the propaganda committee of the CYL with Lembede and Walter Sisulu.⁸⁹ He returned to Natal in 1944 to become the editor of *Inkundla ya Bantu*, by that time a monthly journal serving mainly northern Transkei

⁸⁵ Staff reporter, 'African National Congress Youth League (Natal)', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 October 1948.

⁸⁶ Staff reporter, 'African National Congress Youth League (Natal)', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 October 1948; Provincial CYL had their newspapers that became their mouthpieces, namely: The Lodestar Voice of the Youth, The African Vanguard: Voice of the Youth; Isizwe; the Pioneer. Natal CYL established Uvukayibambe as its own newspaper.

⁸⁷ UWL, HLP, African National Congress Collection, AD 2186, La4.37, letter from Jordan Ngubane to G. M. Pitje, 26 October 1949.

⁸⁸ Staff reporter, 'African National Congress Youth League (Natal)', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 2 October 1948.

⁸⁹ UWL, HLP, African National Congress Collection, AD 2186, La2.3, Minutes of the committee to draft the memorandum, 2 March 1944.

and southern Natal.⁹⁰ Under Jordan Ngubane's editorship, *Inkundla ya Bantu* became a 'leading forum for the expression of African political opinions.'⁹¹ Although Ngubane served on the executive of the Natal ANC under the presidency of Champion, he openly campaigned against Champion in favour of Chief Albert Luthuli in 1951.

The Natal CYL was active during its infancy. Gwala and the provincial executive committee met the CYL national president, A. P. Mda in Durban and discussed with him 'various matters connected with the League and the general position of Africans in South African society.'⁹² The meeting also discussed the position of the Natal CYL with regard to the ongoing animosity between itself and the executive of the Natal ANC. Mda toured all provinces in an attempt to increase the membership of the CYL. While the Natal CYL had many branches throughout Natal and Zululand, the Durban branch provided effective organisational machinery and became its *de facto* provincial headquarters. By 10 December 1948, the Durban branch of the Natal CYL had organised a 'Parliamentary Debate Society' along the same lines as that of the Natal Indian Congress Youth League. The aim of the debating society was to 'bring together all those interested in the welfare of the nation to come and study in an interesting and objective way the many problems that face the race.' The debating society was meant to have 'a practical and healthy effect in the public life of the community.'⁹³ The effectiveness of the Durban branch could be attributed to Gwala's presence after the Communist Party had moved him to Durban to be a full-time trade union organiser. Both Gwala and Yengwa ensured effective coordination of the Natal CYL's activities and were able to communicate efficiently through *Ilanga lase Natal* and *Inkundla ya Bantu*.

⁹⁰ Rosenberg, 'Auto/Biographical Narratives', 62-96.

⁹¹ Karis and Carter, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 4, 114-115.

⁹² Staff reporter, 'Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 9 October 1948.

⁹³ Umfundi weLanga, 'Impendulo nge African National Congress Youth League', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 11 December 1948.

Non-racialism and the politics of cooperation in Natal

In the late 1940s, South African liberation politics were characterised by robust discussion and contradictory debates about cooperation with the Indian political structures. Initially the CYL was not in favour of forging relations with other non-European communities. However, after the Passive Resistance campaign, H. E. I. Dhlomo and Jordan Ngubane began to advocate for cooperation with the Natal Indian Congress (NIC).⁹⁴ Dhlomo spoke on behalf of the Natal ANC at the demonstration that launched the Passive Resistance movement and wrote a series of articles in *Ilanga lase Natal* on the significance of the campaign for Africans.

Similarly, Jordan Ngubane argued that ‘the Indian’s battle is ours’ and cautioned Africans not to fall for the propaganda of whites wishing to promote animosity between Africans and Indians.⁹⁵ Having made this point, Jordan Ngubane immediately contradicted himself by saying ‘it is true that the Indian community on the whole is interested only in making money out of us and when it has done this, it avoids doing anything tangible to help the African march to a better life.’⁹⁶ Similar contradictions in the relationship between the ANC and Indians had emerged when Lembede surprised his CYL colleagues by enthusiastically supporting the 1947 Doctors’ Pact, a cooperation agreement signed by Yusuf Dadoo, Monty Naicker and Xuma. However, Lembede’s untimely death shortly after its signing ‘render[ed] actual positions an open question’ within the CYL politics.⁹⁷ It remains unclear whether his devotion to African nationalism would have excluded the possibility of active cooperation with other non-white groups in South Africa.

⁹⁴ Staff reporter, ‘Straight thinking on the Indian problem’, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 20 February 1947; ‘Significance of the Passive Resistance Campaign’, *Indian Opinion*, 12 July 1946; B. Pachai, *The International Aspects of the South Africa Indian Question, 1860-1971* (Cape Town: Struik, 1971), 190.

⁹⁵ Staff reporter, ‘Straight thinking on the Indian problem’, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 20 February 1947.

⁹⁶ Staff reporter, ‘Straight thinking on the Indian problem’, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 20 February 1947.

⁹⁷ E. Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu: In Our Lifetime* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2003), 113.

Soske argues that, after the death of Lembede in 1947, a section of the CYL began to distance itself from his extreme views and adopted the cooperation rhetoric developed earlier in Natal.⁹⁸ Ngubane introduced a new narrative that argued that ‘Indians did not come to Africa as exploiters and conquerors but as exploited.’⁹⁹ This new rhetoric enabled the Natal CYL to locate itself within a framework of non-racialism. This was reciprocated by some within the leadership of the NIC throughout Natal. George Ellary, an honorary secretary of the Natal Indian Congress, sent the greetings of the Dannhauser Branch of the NIC to the Natal ANC president. Ellary wished the Natal ANC well in its forthcoming conference and indicated that his ‘earnest hope was that sooner the different sections of the Non-European will unite to fight the common cause of freedom.’¹⁰⁰

Gwala was determined to undo Lembede’s earlier legacy of racial chauvinism that emphasised African nationalism and self-emancipation, which compelled the CYL to reject cooperation with other non-Europeans.¹⁰¹ Gwala persuaded the Natal CYL to establish relations with the NICYL and build on the rhetoric of political cooperation between Indians and Africans contained in the Doctors’ Pact. The Natal ANC executive refrained from supporting the Pact because it felt there had been insufficient consultation with the provincial structures. Msimang argued that neither the NIC nor the Transvaal Indian Congress (TIC) were competent to negotiate national interests as ‘these congresses did not fall within the category of national organisations.’¹⁰² According to Msimang, the Natal ANC felt that ‘negotiations with provincial organisations should be effected through provincial congresses subject to confirmation or ratification of the National Executive Committee or the South

⁹⁸ Soske, ‘Wash Me Black Again’, 62.

⁹⁹ Editorial, ‘What is African Nationalism’, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 25 September 1948.

¹⁰⁰ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da113, letter from George Ellary to the President of African National Congress, Durban, undated.

¹⁰¹ Staff reporter, ‘Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 9 October 1948; for Lembede’s views on non-racialism see, Edgar and ka Msumza, *Freedom in Our Lifetime*, 181-202.

¹⁰² UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da63, letter from Selby Msimang to James A. Calata, 30 June 1947.

African conference.’¹⁰³ The Natal ANC claimed that no province of the Union was competent to negotiate cooperation with the Indians other than Natal itself since the preponderance of the Indian population was in Natal. It suggested that before an agreement could be reached with the Indians, very ‘important and vital issues involving political, economic and social differences would have to be examined and determined in the light of the very strained relations between Indians and Africans’ in Natal.¹⁰⁴

Msimang questioned whether ‘the agreement was signed by Dr Naicker on behalf of the NIC.’ He claimed that Dr Naicker ‘represented a Province in which he had, insofar as the executive committee was aware, done nothing to foster the spirit of cooperation which involves the fulfilment of certain vital conditions responsible for the very strained relations between the two races.’¹⁰⁵ As a clear sign of repudiating the Pact and the spirit of cooperation, Msimang and the Natal ANC executive stated that ‘in the absence of indications that the cooperation sought would guarantee the Africans a measure of protection from the Indian, it would not be possible for Natal to accept an agreement in the framing of which she had not been consulted or given an opportunity to express her wishes and opinions.’¹⁰⁶ Vahed suggests that although the agreement intended to herald significant joint political campaigns, ‘the attempt by the Natal ANC to forge non-racial identity led only to unity at the national level.’ Despite attempts to repudiate it, the Pact was an ‘important precursor to the multi-racial alliance of the 1950s.’¹⁰⁷

¹⁰³ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da63, letter from Selby Msimang to James A. Calata, 30 June 1947.

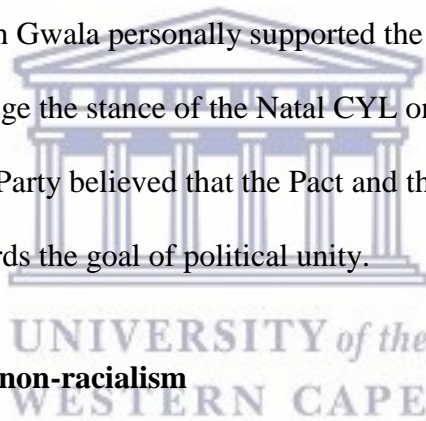
¹⁰⁴ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da63, letter from Selby Msimang to James A. Calata, 30 June 1947.

¹⁰⁵ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da63, letter from Selby Msimang to James A. Calata, 30 June 1947.

¹⁰⁶ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da63, letter from Selby Msimang to James A. Calata, 30 June 1947.

¹⁰⁷ See Vahed, ‘The Making of Indian Identity in Durban’, 256; Soske, ‘Wash Me Black Again’, 66-89; V. Prashad, *Everyone Was Kung Fu Fighting: Afro-Asian Connections and the Myth of Cultural Purity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2001), 95-96.

These attempts of broad political collaboration had an influence on the politics of the CYL. In December 1948, the CYL accepted in principle a merger with the All African Convention (AAC) which had been established in 1935 as a militant opposition to the Hertzog Bills. The ANC had withdrawn from the AAC, leaving it to the influence of leftist intellectuals who were members of the underground Workers Party. The CYL, however, felt that concentration should be directed to the basis of the unification and the adoption of a Programme of Action that allowed for the aspirations of various political groups, subject to the 'condition that the method adopted create or give expression to such unity not in any way militate against the spread and growth of African nationalism.'¹⁰⁸ However, as Vahed posits, the spirit of cooperation 'did not permeate to the masses' as tension intensified between Africans and Indians in Durban.¹⁰⁹ Although Gwala personally supported the idea of cooperation with Indians, he was unable to change the stance of the Natal CYL on the Indian question. Nevertheless, the Communist Party believed that the Pact and the cooperation it proposed represented the first step towards the goal of political unity.



Gwala and the challenges of non-racialism

At the same time as prospects for cooperation were emerging, the simmering tension which had been caused mainly by competition for scarce resources between Africans and Indians boiled over on 13 January 1949, and a large-scale riot broke out in Durban. Although it was centred mainly in Durban, the riots spread to many areas of Natal. From the time of his appointment in 1944 by the Communist Party to work as a full-time trade union organiser, Gwala had established himself as a non-racialist and a large number of his trade union members were Indians.¹¹⁰ The 1949 riots had a devastating impact on race relations in Natal,

¹⁰⁸ UWL, HLP, African National Congress Collection, AD 2186, La2.4, minutes of the CYL, 2 December 1948.

¹⁰⁹ Vahed, 'The Making of Indian Identity in Durban', 256.

¹¹⁰ UWL, HLP, South African Trades and Labour Council files, AH 646. DC 8.97, statement by T. H. Gwala, 2 May 1951.

mainly in Durban and Pietermaritzburg where large numbers of Indians resided. The Natal CYL worked closely with the national office to defuse racial tension between Africans and Indians. The National Working Committee of the CYL visited Durban and had a lengthy meeting to discuss the riots. It argued that:

In a view of the critical and dangerous situation in Natal, the National Working Committee of the Congress Youth League of South Africa appeals to the Executives of the African National Congress and the South African Indian Congress, as well as other Africans and peoples organisations, to establish a joint peoples Commission of Inquiry at once, to enquire into the causes of and remedies for, the Indo-African fraction in Natal, the Commission to include other centres of Indo-African population in the Union where inter-racial strife might arise in future.¹¹¹

While the National Working Committee believed that ‘racial clashes’ were a direct result of the policy of segregation and of white domination, it also believed that there were secondary causes which were traceable to the immediate economic and social relationship between Indians and Africans. It proposed the establishment of a Commission of Inquiry composed of ‘non-European’ organisations. It urged the Commission to be a ‘useful solution to both the African and the Indian leadership in their attempts to normalise relations between the sections on a ‘foundation of understanding and justice.’¹¹²

The 1949 riots left executives of both the Natal ANC and CYL riddled with division, inconsistency and contradictions. Champion, Yengwa and Jordan Ngubane rejected the violence at the same time as endorsing confrontation with Indians. Champion and Yengwa cooperated with the NIC, and simultaneously justified the riots. Gwala had a clearer stance on the events that unfolded in January 1949, as he rejected the riots and any attacks on Indians

¹¹¹ A. P. Mda, ‘Congress Youth League-South Africa’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12 March 1949, 14.

¹¹² Staff reporter, ‘Congress Youth League-South Africa’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 12 March 1949; UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da101, letter from General Secretary of the NIC to AWG Champion, 12 April 1949.

outright. During a meeting soon after the 1949 riots, Gwala decided to stage a walkout because he ‘could not stomach the racist approach’ that was being articulated by participants.¹¹³ Champion and Yengwa used the riots and subsequent boycott to advance their own business interests as they invested in the Zulu Hlanganani cooperative in Cato Manor.¹¹⁴ Internal divisions in the Natal CYL were exacerbated after the 1949 riots. Internal conflicts over these events paralysed both the Natal ANC and Natal CYL.

The ineffectiveness of the Natal CYL disappointed some of its members who seem to have had higher expectations, especially those who had attended the meeting of July 1948. A certain H. Pamla, a ‘staunch supporter’, claimed to have attended the meeting of the CYL in 1948 which was held in Durban, and became disillusioned and disappointed because no public meetings had been held since the election of the executive.¹¹⁵ Pamla urged the executive emphatically to convene a meeting ‘anywhere in Natal and arrange to hold it immediately before we start to criticise you.’¹¹⁶ In its June/July 1950 newsletter, *Uvukayibambe iAfrika*, the Natal CYL conceded that ‘even though the CYL was well known, there was still a proportion of youth that did not understand its political tactics to attain freedom.’¹¹⁷

In January 1950, the Natal CYL held its annual conference at the Bantu Social Centre in Durban. In his capacity as the vice-president, Gwala chaired the meeting since Jordan Ngubane had not yet recuperated from his illness. In his opening address, Gwala observed that many oppressed countries throughout the world were pressing with their demands for

¹¹³ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹¹⁴ I. Edwards, ‘Mkhumbane Our Home’, 214.

¹¹⁵ H. Pamla, ‘Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 23 April 1949, 15.

¹¹⁶ H. Pamla, ‘Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 23 April 1949, 15.

¹¹⁷ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Ec7, *Uvukayibambe iAfrika*, Natal Congress Youth League newsletter, June/July 1950.

liberation and that some were very close to achieving freedom.¹¹⁸ Yengwa, the secretary, conceded that the executive had not achieved its goals due to the illness of Messrs M. T. Moerane and Jordan Ngubane, and because Mr Nomvete was unable to participate in the activities of the Natal CYL as he had received a job transfer to Cape Town.¹¹⁹ Yengwa downplayed the impact of the acrimonious relations between the Natal CYL and the conservative ANC leadership in Natal. Both Yengwa and Gwala emphasised that, despite challenges, the Natal CYL had managed to assist in the establishment of the Durban and Pietermaritzburg branches, both of which provided support for the organisation's activities. Yengwa reported on the establishment of the newsletter, *Uvukuyibambe iAfrika*, which was distributed to the membership for the first time at the event. The conference resolved that the Natal CYL would oppose the apartheid system of the Nationalist Party government and would not participate in the Natives' Advisory Board and the Native Representative Council.¹²⁰ During the January 1950 conference, Jordan Ngubane and Gwala were re-elected as the president and vice president respectively.¹²¹

After the 1950 conference, the CYL seemed to have regained its strength and held regular meetings in both Durban and Pietermaritzburg. In Durban, Yengwa was elected chairperson while Gwala organised regular Pietermaritzburg branch meetings in Sobantu Hall.¹²² The Natal CYL expanded its scope of activities to challenge the extension of pass laws to women and Gwala led a women's march to the Durban City Hall. Through Yengwa, the Natal CYL

¹¹⁸ Staff reporter, 'Umhlangano we Provincial Conference ye Congress Youth League eThekwini', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 March 1950.

¹¹⁹ Staff reporter, 'Umhlangano we Provincial Conference ye Congress Youth League eThekwini', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 March 1950.

¹²⁰ Staff reporter, 'Umhlangano we Provincial Conference ye Congress Youth League eThekwini', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 March 1950.

¹²¹ Staff reporter, 'Umhlangano we Provincial Conference ye Congress Youth League eThekwini', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 4 March 1950.

¹²² In March 1950, Harry Gwala, S. Mazibuko and C. D. Mngadi issued a statement for a meeting of the CYL in Sobantu Hall, 'Umhlangano Wentsha ka Khongolose', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 April 1950; Staff reporter, 'Umhlangano kaCongress eMgungundlovu', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 11 March 1950.

issued an invitation to all women, members and non-members, to attend a meeting in April 1950 to discuss the impact of the proposed extension of pass laws to women. Gwala delivered the keynote address.¹²³ Although there was a renewed level of activism within the Natal CYL, there is little evidence to indicate that it had expanded beyond Durban and Pietermaritzburg.

By the beginning of 1950, the state introduced the Unlawful Organisations Bill which gave a clear indication that the Communist Party was about to be banned. Gwala remembered that the Communist Party ‘came up with a very precise analysis of the Bill which indicated that it was going to affect everything democratic’ in South Africa.¹²⁴ The Communist Party published a booklet entitled *Malan’s Madness in South Africa* and Gwala translated it into Zulu. The Communist Party mobilised various political formations to reject the Bill. Gwala reminisced that ‘when the Nationalist Party realised that other people other than Communists were raising their ire against the Bill, they immediately changed it to the Suppression of Communism Bill’ in order to defuse opposition from the broader political fraternity.¹²⁵ Soon afterwards, the only political formations that opposed the Bill were the Communist Party, the South African Indian Congress (SAIC) and the ANC. The Communist Party organised joint meetings with the SAIC and the ANC throughout the country to explain the threat of being banned and rally opposition against the Bill.

A top secret Commissioner of Police’s report listed numerous instances where Gwala was either a speaker or provided interpretation at various meetings for speakers who were not conversant in Zulu.¹²⁶ Before the Programme of Action could be implemented, several

¹²³ Staff reporter, ‘Umhlangano omkhulu we Youth League’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 April 1950.

¹²⁴ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹²⁵ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹²⁶ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

organisations combined to organise May Day demonstrations on the Rand.¹²⁷ During these demonstrations, some 19 Africans were killed and others wounded in Benoni, Orlando, Alexandra and Sophiatown.¹²⁸ This brought about ‘a union-wide feeling of sympathy and a determination among Africans, and it was felt that the time for action had come.’¹²⁹ The act of repression convinced the ANC, Communist Party, SAIC and African People’s Organisation to call for a national day of stoppage of work to protest against the killing of demonstrators during the May Day demonstrations and against the proposed Suppression of Communism Bill.¹³⁰

The decision to protest was initially taken by the ANC executive as a ‘National Day of Mourning and Protest’, as purely an ‘African decision.’¹³¹ However, it received ‘a universal approval among Africans of every political shade and everyone was prepared to make it succeed.’ Dr James Moroka, president general of the ANC, visited Natal to address public meetings. Local Natal Indians and coloureds pledged their support for the stoppage. Due to the renegade attitude of the Natal ANC under Champion’s leadership, Walter Sisulu, the national secretary of the ANC, was sent to Natal to further ‘negotiate with the Indian Congress, African People’s Organisation and with African leaders.’¹³² Sibongiseni Mkhize argues that, although Champion remained resolutely opposed to the protest action, Msimang gave his unequivocal support to the Day of Protest.¹³³ The extent of Msimang’s involvement was to collect ‘some money from other Non-European groups.’ While Msimang was the

¹²⁷ For a detailed discussion on popular movements, see Nieftagodien, ‘Popular Movements, Contentious Spaces and the ANC’.

¹²⁸ See ‘draft report of the National Executive Committee’, submitted to the ANC Annual Conference, December 15-17, 1950, in Karis and Carter, ‘From Protest to Challenge’, Vol. 2, 452.

¹²⁹ Staff reporter, ‘National Day of Protest’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 July 1950.

¹³⁰ Staff reporter, ‘National Day of Protest’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 July 1950.

¹³¹ Staff reporter, ‘National Day of Protest’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 July 1950.

¹³² Staff reporter, ‘National Day of Protest’, *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 July 1950.

¹³³ S. M. Mkhize, ‘Class Consciousness, Non-racialism and Political Pragmatism: A Political Biography of Henry Selby Msimang, 1886-1982’, PhD dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, 2015, 245.

organiser in Natal, Gwala's role was to mobilise grassroots support for the day of protest.¹³⁴

Gwala argued that the National Stoppage Day marked the beginning of the implementation of the Programme of Action which had been adopted during the 1949 ANC national conference in Bloemfontein.¹³⁵ This marked a major shift in the politics of liberation as it heralded the era of mass demonstrations and robust protest politics.

It was through Gwala's involvement in the National Stoppage Day that he met a youthful Mangosuthu Buthelezi in the ANC offices in 1950. This was after Buthelezi had been expelled from Fort Hare University for opposing the visit by the Governor-General of South Africa.¹³⁶ Buthelezi had been politicised by his association with the Fort Hare CYL and had been introduced to the Natal ANC in Durban during the 1949 riots.¹³⁷ Gwala and Buthelezi were tasked by the organising committee to ensure that 'the message reach every nook and corner of South Africa.' They 'distributed leaflets and hosted meetings jointly throughout Natal and Zululand.'¹³⁸ *Inkundla ya Bantu* reported that 70 per cent of the African workers in the textile, tobacco and furniture industries had stayed away from work in Durban and the overall absenteeism rate was about 60 per cent.¹³⁹ Champion's renegade stance had serious implications for his political career. Jordan Ngubane had already been using *Inkundla ya Bantu* to ridicule him openly and support Chief Albert Luthuli as the next president of the Natal ANC, and the Natal CYL rejected Champion in support of Luthuli. Moreover, Champion's stance on the Day of Protest worsened the already acrimonious atmosphere between him and Msimang.

¹³⁴ Umfndi weLanga, 'Ukubulawa kwezinhlangano uHulumeni', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 June 1950.

¹³⁵ Staff reporter, 'National Day of Protest', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 1 July 1950.

¹³⁶ SAHA, Natal Indian Congress Collection, AL 2421, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from Mr. T. H. Gwala to Mtwana [Dr M. G. Buthelezi], 20 December 1988.

¹³⁷ B. Temkin, *Buthelezi: A Biography* (London: Frank Cass, 2003), 30-31.

¹³⁸ SAHA, Natal Indian Congress Collection, AL 2421, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from Mr T. H. Gwala to Mtwana [Dr M. G. Buthelezi], 20 December 1988.

¹³⁹ Staff reporter, 'June 26th stay away', *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 1 July 1950.

With the imminent promulgation of the Suppression of Communism Act, in anticipation of being banned, the Central Executive Committee decided to dissolve the Communist Party.¹⁴⁰ The Communist Party was dissolved on 20 June 1950, the same day on which Parliament passed the Suppression of Communism Bill which was eventually signed into law on 14 July 1950. The dissolution came as a surprise to Gwala as the decision was taken by the Central Executive Committee, and there was insufficient time to properly communicate this to all Communist Party structures.

As the state began to serve banning orders on those aligned with the Communist Party, Gwala predicted that his political activism was going to be severely affected.¹⁴¹ By the end of 1950 Gwala had decided to allow his term to expire without seeking re-election to the Natal CYL executive. He was 'not going to play any leadership role in active politics' but remained active in organising secret meetings of the Natal CYL.¹⁴² Despite the difficulties he experienced throughout his tenure on the Natal CYL executive, Gwala 'credited Communist Party members who went out of their way to first accommodate these people and then embark on a campaign of educating them to real politics, which they did successfully.'¹⁴³

Anton Xaba, a Sobantu ANC and Communist Party activist who had been recruited by Gwala during the 1940s, credited Gwala for mobilising both for the Natal CYL in Pietermaritzburg and for the Natal ANC.¹⁴⁴ Xaba argued that Gwala 'brought the ANC to ordinary people in

¹⁴⁰ R. Suttner, 'The Reconstruction of the South African Communist Party as an Underground Organisation', *Journal of Contemporary African Studies*, Vol. 22, No.1, 2003, 43-46.

¹⁴¹ 'Ukubulawa kwezinhlangano uHulumeni', *Ilanga lase Natal*, 10 June 1950.

¹⁴² Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala; NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

¹⁴³ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁴⁴ David Anton Ndoda 'Mfenendala' Xaba was born in Sobantu Village in Pietermaritzburg. He left school in the late 1940s and was recruited to the Communist Party by Gwala. Xaba joined the ANC in 1953 at Emsizini in Durban at a meeting that was addressed by the then ANC President, Chief Albert John Luthuli. He played a prominent role in the formation of the Sobantu branch of the ANC. Xaba was subsequently arrested and charged with arson after all the township schools were set on fire during the 1959 uprisings. He was later acquitted. During the March 1960 state of emergency, he was among many ANC, National Indian Congress (NIC) and Liberal Party activists and leaders who were detained. Xaba was among the first recruits of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) (by Gwala) that were sent outside the country to undergo military training. However, the journey to Tanzania went awry and all the recruits were arrested by the British Colonial Police in Northern Rhodesia and

factories, sporting fields, taxis and sheebens.’ Xaba said he had been politically conscientised and introduced to the ANC by Gwala in the late 1940s, and recruited by Gwala into the Communist Party. Both mobilised Sobantu, a village for Africans, so that it became a hotbed of support for the ANC and the CYL. Many meetings of the Natal ANC took place at the Bantu Social Centre in Durban or in Sobantu Hall in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁴⁵ Even though the Natal CYL was characterised by simmering tensions within its executive, and had a frosty relationship with Champion’s conservative ANC faction, it produced a generation of dedicated stalwarts who were significant in directing the South African freedom struggle for many decades.¹⁴⁶ Furthermore, under Gwala’s influence, the Natal CYL managed to transform the ANC from being an organisation of ‘elite in African terms’ and connected it with the ‘growing ranks of the working class.’ However, it was unable to sustain its linkages with the struggles of the working class despite its radical political rhetoric.¹⁴⁷

Gwala’s politics of connectedness developed significantly between the 1940s and 1951. At the same time as being vice president of the Natal CYL, Gwala was also an ‘office bearer of approximately ten trade unions in Durban, Pietermaritzburg and Howick, respectively and active in Communist Party activities.’¹⁴⁸ A memorandum from the Commissioner of Police listed various meetings of the Communist Party in which Gwala participated actively, and recorded that, in certain meetings Gwala gave addresses that ‘incited people to disobey the

sent back to South Africa through Southern Rhodesia to stand trial for leaving the country illegally and for membership of a banned organisation. They went on trial at the Supreme Court in College Road, Pietermaritzburg in 1963. Anton Xaba was sentenced to ten years on Robben Island, while the other four were sentenced to nine years each. He was released from prison in 1973. Upon his release he participated actively in the revival of the ANC/MK underground in the Natal Midlands area. Following the workers’ Stay-At-Homes in August-September 1976 the regime banned 24 trade unionists active in organizing African workers. He was among those tried during the 1976 Pietermaritzburg Treason Trial and with Gwala, John Nene, Mathews Meyiwa and Zakhele Mdlalose, they were sentenced to life imprisonment at Robben Island. Xaba was released in 1990 after spending almost 26 years on Robben Island, see <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/anton-ndoda-xaba>, accessed on 11 April 2015; Ruth Lundie, Interview with Anton Xaba, 31 May 1995, Pietermaritzburg, Alan Paton Centre, Oral History Collection, 95 APB.

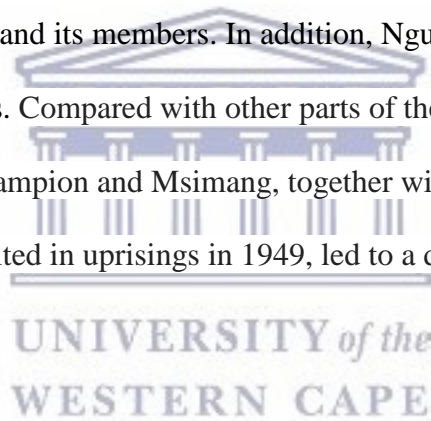
¹⁴⁵ Ruth Lundie, interview with Anton Xaba.

¹⁴⁶ Edgar, ‘Changing the Old Guard’, 149.

¹⁴⁷ Soske, ‘Wash Me Black Again’, 62; Nieftagodien, ‘Popular Movements, Contentious Spaces and the ANC’, 150.

¹⁴⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

law.¹⁴⁹ Gwala's continued involvement in Communist Party activities fuelled further animosity between him and Jordan Ngubane and Champion. Relationships in the Natal CYL executive were characterised by quarrels and intense disagreements.¹⁵⁰ As soon as he had recuperated from his long illness, Jordan Ngubane issued statements to the effect that communists were lesser evils than apartheid as they 'were using the Congress as a big stick with which to flog the Capitalists for their own ends.'¹⁵¹ Ngubane hated communists and claimed that 'they want to keep us a proletariat community while the other racial groups become the ruling hierarchy.'¹⁵² By the beginning of 1951, the political differences between Gwala and Jordan Ngubane reached boiling point. Gwala emphasised that Jordan Ngubane, like many members of the CYL during the 1940s, was not just negative but very hostile towards the Communist Party and its members. In addition, Ngubane resisted the notion of cooperation with non-Africans. Compared with other parts of the country, differences between Gwala, Ngubane, Champion and Msimang, together with acrimony between Africans and Indians that resulted in uprisings in 1949, led to a delay in the Defiance Campaign in Natal.



Connectedness and working class struggles in Natal

The 1939-40 Native Affairs Commission noted the 'rise of an industrial class among the Bantu' which was being influenced by 'agitators' and that 'their power cannot be ignored.' It further acknowledged that by 1940 there were already 'a number of 'native trade unions demanding recognition.'¹⁵³ The report suggested that these trade unions were organised by

¹⁴⁹ The Commissioner of Police reported that Gwala had addressed a meeting on 28 October 1948 at Nicole Square which was organised by the Durban and District Committee of the Communist Party, NAR, DOJ papers, file 2/1/53, declassified memorandum of the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

¹⁵⁰ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁵¹ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁵² 'Editorial', *Inkundla ya Bantu*, 10 December 1949.

¹⁵³ Union of South Africa, *Report of the Native Affairs Commission for the years 1939 and 1940* (Pretoria, 1941), U. G. 42, 7.

‘Europeans some of whom perceived this as a means of improving the lot of the native worker.’ The Commission assured the government that although ‘industrial solidarity’ has proven to be ‘fruitful in attaining the position occupied by the trade union world in Western Europe,’ it would not be successful in ‘South Africa for the Bantu workers.’¹⁵⁴ It argued that the success of trade union movement in Europe was due to the leadership ‘by men of experience and outstanding common sense,’ while in the South African context, it was led by ‘a people just emerging from barbarism, with no industrial experience, no elementary acquaintance with economics.’¹⁵⁵ While the Commission underestimated the potential of the mushrooming African trade unions, it advised the government to establish a mechanism to provide ‘some form of recognition’ for African trade unions.¹⁵⁶ It recommended that such recognition should be in a form that would ‘prevent Native workers from becoming the dupes of Europeans who seek to exploit their grievance for their own profit.’¹⁵⁷ The Commission was oblivious to the impact political education was to have on emerging African trade unionists such as Gwala, Steven Dlamini and Moses Mabhidia.

Tim Nuttall argues that, from the late 1930s, Communist Party activists assisted in establishing non-racial trade unions in keeping with principles it adopted when the Party was revived.¹⁵⁸ This, however, did not mean that the Communist Party was better organised, as it remained a small organisation with a membership of approximately 280, half of whom were based in Johannesburg. In 1940, as Communist Party influence on trade unions was limited, Moses Kotane, its secretary general, urged members to ‘pay much closer attention to local

¹⁵⁴ ‘Report of the Native Affairs Commission’, 7.

¹⁵⁵ ‘Report of the Native Affairs Commission’, 7.

¹⁵⁶ ‘Report of the Native Affairs Commission’, 8.

¹⁵⁷ ‘Report of the Native Affairs Commission’, 8.

¹⁵⁸ T. A. Nuttall ‘The Leaves in the Trees are Proclaiming Our Slavery: African Trade Union Organisation, 1937-1949’ in P. Maylam and I. Edwards (eds.) *The People’s City: African Life in Twentieth Century Durban* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1996), 180; I. Edwards, ‘Recollection: The Communist Party and Worker Militancy in Durban, early 1940s’, *South African Labour Bulletin*, Vol. 11, No. 4, 1986, 73-74.

township politics.¹⁵⁹ The growth of the Communist Party's influence among mainly non-European trade unions should be understood against the background of extreme poverty and deplorable living conditions, especially among urbanised groups, mainly Africans.

On the other hand, the industrial expansion unleashed by the war required that the state relax influx control laws in order to attract cheap African labour. As Vishnu Padayachee, Shahid Vawda and Paul Tichmann have argued, wartime economic growth resulted in a dramatic increase in the employment of African workers in more semi-skilled positions and thus increased their bargaining power.¹⁶⁰ The Communist Party extended its influence amongst the newly urbanised African working class as it attracted young educated and semi-educated migrants through its night school programmes and reading clubs.¹⁶¹ Gwala was among the first Africans who rebuilt the Communist Party in Pietermaritzburg and subsequently participated in linking class struggles with the broader politics of African nationalism. As the Communist Party was being rejuvenated, its membership grew rapidly, and its influence in the emerging trade unions became apparent.¹⁶²

Michael Hanagan and Charles Stephenson have argued that there is a relationship between industrialisation and greater class consciousness of the working class.¹⁶³ Industrial expansion in South Africa in the 1940s led to proletarianisation which subsequently expanded into urban class formation. This section extends Hanagan and Stephenson's analysis by arguing

¹⁵⁹ D. Fortescue, 'The Communist Party of South Africa and the African Working Class in the 1940s', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 3, 1991, 484; G. Vahed, 'Race or Class? Community and Conflict Amongst Indian Municipal Employees in Durban, 1914-1949', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2001, 105-125.

¹⁶⁰ V. Padayachee, S. Vawda and P. Tichmann, *Indian Workers and Trades Unions in Durban: 1930-1950*, Durban: (University of Durban-Westville: Institute for Social and Economic Research, 1985), 15.

¹⁶¹ Fortescue, 'The Communist Party of South Africa', 481-512; Moodie, 'The South African State and Industrial Conflict in the 1940s', 21-61; D. Hemson, 'Dock Workers, Labour Circulation, and Class Struggles in Durban, 1940-59', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 4, No.1, 88-124.

¹⁶² E. Maloka, *The South African Communist Party in Exile, 1963-1990* (Pretoria: Africa Institute of South Africa, 2002), 2.

¹⁶³ M. Hanagan and C. Stephenson (eds.), *Proletarians and Protest: The Roots of Class Formation in an Industrializing World* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986), 4.

that Gwala's focus on workers' mobilisation enabled the creation of working class identities in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and Howick that transcended pre-existing class, racial and sometimes ethnic backgrounds. As the Communist Party in 1943 encouraged its members to join the ANC, Gwala developed a complex class analysis which connected class with the politics of African nationalism. Although African trade unions were almost obliterated during the 1930s, the 1940s marked a new era, as the Communist Party rooted itself within the struggles that were affecting non-Europeans.¹⁶⁴

Edward Roux noted that in Natal, Communists were busy organising Indians, Africans, and sometimes whites as well, into new industrial unions. In 1941 a number of African unions came together to form the Council of non-European Trade Unions (CNETU).¹⁶⁵ Although CNETU remained largely based in the Witwatersrand, it managed to inspire the establishment of trade unions in industries that had previously not had any. While CNETU had a relatively short life, it succeeded in drawing links between labour and political questions. This was made possible by CNETU's ability to draw its leadership largely from political activists. Steven Friedman has argued that CNETU was the first African union movement to create a local leadership.¹⁶⁶ By January 1946, the African trade union movement had grown to such an extent that A. B. Xuma remarked that 'the African worker is becoming more conscious of his needs and his rights and is becoming to understand the value of trade union organisation and collective bargaining.'¹⁶⁷

The Communist Party's summer schools model provided a platform for educating newly recruited members on the intellectual foundations of the Party. Gwala's participation in these

¹⁶⁴ See Sylvia Neame, Interview with Harry Gwala, 29 October 1989, Berlin. UWL, HLP, A2729, E2, Sylvia Neame Collection; Sylvia Neame, Interview with Fred Carneson, 15 May 1986, UWL, HLP, E2, Sylvia Neame Collection.

¹⁶⁵ Roux, 'Time Longer Than Rope', 338.

¹⁶⁶ S. Friedman, *Building Tomorrow Today: African Workers in Trade Unions, 1970-1984* (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1987), 23.

¹⁶⁷ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Ec2, broadcast by Dr A. B. Xuma, 14 January 1946.

schools introduced him to trade unionism. Naboth Mokgatle has noted that ‘at the school a long range of subjects were taught: political economy, socialism in general, trade unionism, the difference between the Communist Party and Labour party, social democracy and communism, the origin of man and society, civics, the meaning of democracy, the right of people in society and state.’¹⁶⁸ There is no doubt that some of these subjects helped to shape Gwala’s politics because he soon started to incorporate what he had learned in his own school teaching. Some of these teachings expressed themselves later during his incarceration on Robben Island.

While Gwala was becoming more involved in the activities of the Communist Party, the state’s security agencies were also scrutinising his political activities very closely since he was still employed as a full-time teacher. The Commissioner of Police notified the headmaster of Slangspruit Government School about Gwala’s political activities.¹⁶⁹ In January 1944, he was charged by the Department of Education for propagating communism in a school. Although Gwala was acquitted from the charges, by June 1944 he had resigned from teaching after the Communist Party asked him ‘to leave teaching and do trade union work’ full time.¹⁷⁰ Gwala was tasked with focusing on organising trade unions in Pietermaritzburg, Durban and, later, Howick, and he was also actively involved in the activities of the Communist Party in Pietermaritzburg.

Gwala’s first trade union responsibility was to organise the distributive workers, and sweet workers and municipal workers in Pietermaritzburg as well as rubber workers at Howick. As

¹⁶⁸ N. Mokgatle, *The Autobiography of an Unknown South African* (London: C Hurst, 1971), 240; for more discussion on Party schooling see I. Filatova, ‘Indoctrination or Scholarship? Education of Africans at the Communist University of the Toilers of the East in the Soviet Union, 1923-1937’, *Paedagogica Historica: International Journal of the History of Education*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

¹⁷⁰ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

a trade union organiser, Gwala 'used to go out to factory meetings and address workers on issues that affected their livelihood.'¹⁷¹ Between 1944 and 1948 Gwala showed how it might be possible to build a vibrant trade union consciousness in Pietermaritzburg. By the end of the 1940s, Gwala was secretary general of ten trade unions in Natal.¹⁷²

In July 1948, the Natal Communist Party deployed Gwala to Durban to organise the Textile Workers' Union. While in Durban, Gwala seemed to be more preoccupied with the work of the Durban and District Committee of the Communist Party than trade unionism. Gwala became an organiser of the Durban and District Committee of the Communist Party and was responsible for conscientising Africans, Indians and coloureds about the dangers of apartheid that had been introduced by the National Party. In one meeting organised by the Communist Party in October 1948, Gwala warned the audience that the National Party wanted to deport them from town and that this would have negative consequences on their livelihoods.¹⁷³

Although Gwala was based in Durban, he remained connected with Pietermaritzburg even though the Pietermaritzburg City Council described him as 'not a Native citizen of this city' and that 'he had no *locus standi* to represent local natives.'¹⁷⁴ His family remained in Ockertskraal near Pietermaritzburg, and he normally spent weekends at home. Towards the end of 1949, Gwala returned to Pietermaritzburg not having achieved much in Durban. He

¹⁷¹ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁷² Gwala was secretary general of the following trade unions: Ice Cream & Dairy Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Commercial & Distributive Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Municipal Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Textile Workers' Union, Ladysmith; Wattle & Extract Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Nestle Sweet Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Builders and Allied Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Brick & Tile Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; The Sutherlands Tannery Workers' Union, Pietermaritzburg; Howick Rubber Workers' Union, Howick, see NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated; Pietermaritzburg Archives Repository (PAR), Registrar of the Supreme Court (RSC), 1/1/384, ref no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no.: 904/61, exhibit "B".

¹⁷³ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated; PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, vol.32, record 11, State vs Harry Gwala and Others, evidence of Themba Harry Gwala.

¹⁷⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, letter from the Native Administration Affairs Manager to the Town Clerk, 15 May 1950.

found Durban's politics more complicated, as it was characterised by racial animosity between Africans and Indians.¹⁷⁵

Howick and Gwala's underground activities

In 1985, over 1 000 workers were fired at BTR Sarmcol in Howick after they were involved in a legal strike. Mkhize argues that 'it all began when Harry Gwala was unionising workers at Sarmcol.'¹⁷⁶ Moreover, when interviewed, some of these workers claimed to be products of 'Gwala's unions' of the 1950s and early 1960s. How did it happen that despite being banned, restricted to his magisterial district without any right to hold public meeting or to speak to the public, and imprisoned at Robben Island, the stories of Gwala's unions were never forgotten, even in the mid-1980s? Why, despite being disconnected for over thirty years, was Gwala's political activism still visible among the working class and people in the political sphere?

As Debby Bonnin has argued 'Gwala left behind a one message, unity.'¹⁷⁷ Before Gwala was deployed to Durban in 1948, he had already identified the industrial workers in Howick as a group to work with. He had been surprised that, despite the deplorable conditions under which they worked, they were not organised and had no trade unions. More than any other sector, Howick presented an opportunity as 'there were over a thousand industrial workers concentrated in one place.'¹⁷⁸ After the Suppression of Communism Act was signed into law, Gwala's politics shifted significantly. He had to contend with the state's intention to include

¹⁷⁵ See B. Freund, *Insiders and Outsiders: The Indian Working Class of Durban, 1910-1990* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1995)

¹⁷⁶ S. M. Mkhize, 'Contexts, Resistance Crowds and Mass Mobilisation: A Comparative Analysis of Anti-Apartheid Politics in Pietermaritzburg during the 1950s and the 1980s', MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1998, 123.

¹⁷⁷ D. Bonnin, "'We Went to Arm Ourselves at the Field of Suffering": Traditions, Experiences and Grassroots Intellectuals in the Making of Class', *Labour, Capital and Society*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 1999. Ari Sitas scholarly work on cultural productions provides another aspect of workers' resilience, see A. Sitas, *Voices that Reason – Theoretical Parables* (Pretoria: University of South Africa Press, 2004); A. Sitas, 'Neither gold nor bile: Industrial and Labour Studies of Socio-Economic Transformation and Cultural Formations in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', *African Sociology Review*, 1, vol. 1, 1997; A. Sitas, 'Traditions of Poetry in Natal', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, vol. 16, 1, 1990.

¹⁷⁸ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

his name in a list of persons who were associated with the banned Communist Party. As a consequence, the focus of his work became mobilising industrial workers in Howick.

As early as 1946, Gwala's political activities fell under state surveillance and a top secret report proclaimed him to be a 'danger to state's security.'¹⁷⁹ He was believed to have appeared at Communist Party public gatherings and made statements that 'incite violence and hatred of the state.'¹⁸⁰ Based on such surveillance, on 6 September 1950 Gwala was informed that the Minister of Justice intended to list him. He was required to make representation within twenty days to 'show why his name should not be included in a list of persons who had been office bearers, officers, members or active supporters of the Communist Party.'¹⁸¹ Despite Gwala's record of political activism, the Minister of Justice highlighted the basis of listing Gwala as 'evidence that he had been a member of the Pietermaritzburg District Committee of the Communist Party and a chairperson.'¹⁸² Gwala claimed to have received the letter on 18 September and, based on the 'delay', he requested an extension as he was 'seeking a legal opinion in the matter.'¹⁸³

Gwala sought the services of R. I. Arenstein attorneys to handle his legal battle with the Minister of Justice. Rowley Arenstein had joined the Communist Party in 1938, becoming an organiser for the Durban and District branch. In 1947, he withdrew from active politics in order to concentrate on his legal practice, but did participate in activities of the Durban branch of the COD in the 1950s. Arenstein worked closely with Chief Albert Luthuli and Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. After Buthelezi was expelled from Fort Hare University for his

¹⁷⁹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

¹⁸⁰ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

¹⁸¹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no. 2/50/53, letter from the Liquidator to TH Gwala, 6 September 1950.

¹⁸² NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no. 2/50/53, letter from the Liquidator to TH Gwala, 6 September 1950.

¹⁸³ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no. 2/50/53, letter HT Gwala to the Liquidator, 26 September 1950.

ANC activities, he had come to work at the Durban Commissioner's Court to gain administrative experience that could be useful to the future chief. Arenstein and Buthelezi became close friends. Buthelezi became one of Arenstein's articled clerks. When the chieftaincy of the Buthelezi clan was offered to Buthelezi, Arenstein helped him defeat an early challenge to his position and became his legal adviser. Arenstein was first barred from political activities in 1953 when he was banned. During this period, he was active in organising opposition to the new laws enforcing apartheid and in establishing labour unions in Durban. Arenstein suffered the longest period of banning (33 years) in South African history and endured the longest house arrest (18 years). Though banned, he continued to defend persons accused of political offences. In 1988, despite the vehement protests of the government, Buthelezi nominated Arenstein as a member of his negotiating committee with Pretoria. Thus, Arenstein also served as a legal advisor for the Inkatha Freedom Party.¹⁸⁴

Arenstein and Gwala developed an argument that sought to disconnect Gwala from 'comrade Gwala' thus arguing that 'there was no empirical evidence that suggested that Gwala and 'comrade Gwala' were in fact one person.¹⁸⁵ It appears, however, that Arenstein backtracked from the earlier argument to disconnect Gwala from the identity of 'comrade Gwala'. By August 1951 Arenstein admitted Gwala's involvement in Communist Party activities. Arenstein's argument focused on the legitimacy of Gwala's participation in the Communist Party during the 1940s as it was still a 'perfectly legal organisation in the same way as any other political organisation' before the Suppression of Communism Act was signed into law on 14 July 1950.¹⁸⁶ Because this had happened prior to the passing of the Act, Arenstein claimed that Gwala had not contravened any law of South Africa. Arenstein further claimed

¹⁸⁴ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/rowley-israel-arenstein>, accessed on 13 April 2015.

¹⁸⁵ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no.12/4/4/425, letter from R. I. Arenstein to Mr J de Villiers Louw, Department of Justice, 14 March 1951.

¹⁸⁶ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no.12/4/4/425, letter from R. I. Arenstein to Mr J de Villiers Louw, Department of Justice, 24 August 1951.

that ‘neither at any time has Gwala done anything of which he should be ashamed.’ He pointed out that on the contrary Gwala ‘upheld and strove for progressive ideals such as a social system free from exploitation of man by man. Gwala upheld the principle that all men should have equality of opportunity irrespective of race, colour and creed.’¹⁸⁷ Despite Arenstein’s representations that Gwala’s political activities were legitimate and justified, his name was ‘included in the list on the grounds that he had been a member and active supporter’ of the Communist Party.¹⁸⁸ The listing of Gwala’s name marked the beginning of the phase of the state’s imposition of disconnectedness that was to impact upon Gwala’s politics until the 1990s.

While Gwala was fighting for his name not to be included in the list, he was simultaneously organising workers in Howick, which led to the formation of the Howick Rubber Workers’ Union (HRWU) in September 1951.¹⁸⁹ The union was primarily formed to improve the wages and working conditions of its members. Although the constitution of the union referred to the ‘Howick Rubber Workers’ Industrial Union’ it was popularly known as the Howick Rubber Workers’ Union and its letterhead carried the latter name.¹⁹⁰ In line with Gwala’s politics of connectedness, the union positioned itself as a vanguard of the oppressed groups in society to such an extent that the unemployed people of Howick were eligible to be members. Gwala was the secretary while a certain David Sewdan was chairperson. The union applied for registration with the Department of Labour on 26 October 1951 and reported that it had 150 members in good standing while 550 were in arrears with their subscriptions.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁷ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no.12/4/4/425, letter from R. I. Arenstein to Mr J de Villiers Louw, Department of Justice, 14 March 1951.

¹⁸⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no.2/50/33, letter from Mr J de Villiers Louw to R. I. Arenstein, 4 September 1951.

¹⁸⁹ D. R. Bonnin, ‘Class, Consciousness and Conflict in the Natal Midlands, 1940-1987: The Case of the BTR Sarmcol Workers’, MA thesis, University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg, 1987, 139.

¹⁹⁰ UWL, HLP, South African Trades and Labour Council: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, Constitution of the Howick Rubber Workers’ Industrial Union.

¹⁹¹ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, application for membership.

In line with Gwala's non-racialism, the union was open to coloureds, Indians and Africans. This caused a delay in its registration as Africans were not defined as employees according to the Industrial Conciliation Act. While its registration took an unprecedentedly long time to be approved, the union affiliated with the South African Trades and Labour Council (SATLC).¹⁹² In the meantime, the union became more active at Sarmcol as over 75% of Sarmcol employees were reported to be members of 'Gwala's union.' It continually petitioned Sarmcol's management with a list of workers' demands. One such petition was a demand for higher wages and the improvement of the conditions of employment that the union submitted to the Sarmcol management on 11 October 1951. Although the union had the support of close to 900 employees, Sarmcol management disregarded its demands and did not reply to its petition.¹⁹³ Sarmcol did not respond because it refused to recognise Gwala's union. The company prevented him from entering its premises to conduct trade union activities. In the meantime, Sarmcol management offered to appoint a 'committee to convey grievances of the workers to the management.' This was unanimously rejected by the workers, as they were convinced the 'committee was going to circumvent any appointment of a conciliation board at Sarmcol.'¹⁹⁴

The union remained a powerful voice in Sarmcol because it drew support across the racial divide. Gwala was forced to resign as a secretary after he was served with a banning order in April 1952. Gwala's resignation did not paralyse the workers' activism that had developed in Sarmcol. Worker militancy continued even after Gwala was no longer a union official. In addition, as Clemence Gumede testified, even though he was banned, Gwala continued to

¹⁹² UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, letter from H. S. Boyder to the secretary of the Howick Rubber Workers' Union, 8 May 1952.

¹⁹³ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, letters from T. H. Gwala to Sarmcol management, 11 October 1951 and 19 November 1951.

¹⁹⁴ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, statement by S. B. Maharaj, 16 June 1952.

support the union's activities and had secret meetings with union members under a tree.¹⁹⁵

Norman Levy also asserts that Gwala disregarded the banning order and instead continued to build non-racial worker militancy throughout the 1950s.¹⁹⁶ While the Department of Labour delayed the registration of the union because its membership included non-Europeans, employees of Sarmcol appointed a certain S. B. Maharaj to be their negotiator and acting union secretary.¹⁹⁷ Soon after his appointment, Maharaj applied for the appointment of an arbitrator and asked the SATLC to intervene. Sarmcol management remained unwilling to engage with either the union or the SATLC. Sarmcol claimed that its 'employees have at all times direct access to the higher management, for the purpose of discussing any question bearing on their employment.' They further claimed to be 'very close indeed to all workers including Indians, Coloureds and Natives, and they were satisfied that there was no genuine dissatisfaction amongst them.'¹⁹⁸

Instead of recognising the union, the labour department opted to intimidate workers by sending petition forms to the Indian and coloured employees of Sarmcol. Each petitioner was called by the Sarmcol management to ascertain whether they were signatories to the application for a conciliation board. Fearing victimisation, many employees denied that they had signed the application for a conciliation board.¹⁹⁹ After protracted negotiations and demands by both the union and SATLC, the Howick Rubber Workers' Industrial Union was registered towards the end of 1953. This meant that Sarmcol management was forced to

¹⁹⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, ref. no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no.: 904/61, evidence of Clemence Gumede; UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, statement by S. B. Maharaj, 16 June 1952.

¹⁹⁶ See N. Levy, *The Final Prize: My Life in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Cape Town: South African History Online, 2011).

¹⁹⁷ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, statement by S. B. Maharaj, 16 June 1952 and letter from S. B. Maharaj to the joint secretary of the SATLC, 27 August 1952.

¹⁹⁸ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, letters from Sarmcol's general manager to H. S. Boyder, 21 August 1952 and from H. S. Boyder to the secretary, Howick Rubber Workers Union, 29 August 1952.

¹⁹⁹ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, letter from S. B. Maharaj to the joint secretary of the SATLC, 27 August 1952.

recognise the union.²⁰⁰ Through Gwala's influence, Moses Mabhida became secretary of the union in 1953.²⁰¹ However, the union did not survive long because the management of Sarmcol made it difficult for it to function and, in 1955, Mabhida was moved to organise trade unions in Durban. The union was finally deregistered in 1958 by the Department of Labour 'for its failure to comply with the provisions of the law' and inability to submit audited financial statements.²⁰²

In 1953, the Communist Party was formally reconstituted as an underground organisation.²⁰³ Gwala was not aware that the Communist Party was being re-established but, in 1954, he received a clandestine note in his post-box that Marxist discussion cells were being resuscitated. Gwala was committed to defying his banning order, made contact with Mabhida, Selby Mazibuko, Bobby Pillay and Goolam Rasool, and they started a cell in Pietermaritzburg.²⁰⁴ This cell grew to become the centre of political discussion and underground operation in Pietermaritzburg. When his banning order expired in 1954, he was served with another ban on 7 June 1954. The order 'prohibited him attending, during the period of two years, any gathering in any place within South Africa.'²⁰⁵

In 1953, Gwala worked for a law firm in Pietermaritzburg as a typist. In 1954, he worked as a typist in the laboratory at Edendale Hospital.²⁰⁶ The Edendale job placed Gwala in an advantageous position since, as a typist, he had access to government printing facilities. He utilised the hospital printing facilities to print propaganda material of the ANC and the newly

²⁰⁰ UWL, HLP, SATLC: Disputes, 1951-1954, AH646/DC 8.91-111, box 93, South African Government Gazette No, 4919, 5 September 1952.

²⁰¹ PAR, RSC, Vol.1/1/384, criminal case no. 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, evidence of Mr Naidoo.

²⁰² PAR, RSC, Vol.1/1/384, criminal case no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, evidence of Dirk Johannes Odendaal.

²⁰³ R. Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976: A Social and Political Study* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008), 39.

²⁰⁴ Sylvia Neame interview with Harry Gwala.

²⁰⁵ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, ref. no 2/50/33, notice in terms of paragraph (e) of subsection one of section five of the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950, as amended [banning order].

²⁰⁶ Sylvia Neame, interview with Harry Gwala.

regenerated Communist Party. Gwala's employment at Edendale Hospital provided more opportunities to develop clandestine material for the Pietermaritzburg cell. He was also central in organising the Natal Midlands delegation which attended the Congress of the People in Kliptown in 1955.²⁰⁷

Gwala's banning order was renewed every two years while state security kept him under close surveillance. Intelligence reports were used by the security service to justify the renewal of his banning order.²⁰⁸ However, in 1956, in defiance of the banning order and the conditions attached to it, Gwala's political outlook underwent a metamorphosis as he openly engaged in protest politics. During the mid-1950s *The New Age* had become an organ of ANC expression under the editorship of Brain Bunting, a member of the Communist Party.²⁰⁹ *The New Age* covered the intersection of economic, cultural, social and historical issues, and reported avidly about protest politics in South Africa. Because the political leadership and its constituency was drawn from a rejuvenated social class that was increasingly literate and urbanised, newspapers that were linked to the liberation struggle became an instrumental tool to express and exchange political opinions, and a means to connect readers with the mainstream politics of liberation.

In July 1956, *The New Age* announced that it was hosting the 'New Age Short Story Competition' and invited its readers to submit their short stories for consideration. It appointed Phyllis Altman, Harry Bloom, Duma Nokwe and Michael Harmel as the competition judges. Nokwe and Harmel were openly associated with both the ANC and the

²⁰⁷ R. Haswell, 'Themba Harry Gwala (1920-1995)', *Natalia: Journal of the Natal Society*, No. 25, December 1995, 88-90; A. S. Chetty, Archie Gumede, Dr C. Motala and D. C. O. Matiwane were also involved in organising the Midlands delegation to the Congress of the People.

²⁰⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified reports/memoranda of the South African Commissioner of Police (secret services), 1945-1976.

²⁰⁹ L. Switzer (ed.), *South Africa's Alternative Press: Voices of Protest and Resistance, 1880-1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 276.

Communist Party. ‘Thirty-odd stories that were submitted came from every quarter of the country’ and attracted authors from diverse cultural and racial backgrounds.²¹⁰ In their report, the judges acknowledged the ‘varying degrees of literary merit’ of each competition contributor and noted that each story ‘presented a vivid and realistic portrayal of different aspects of life in South Africa.’²¹¹ Submitted short stories were of such a high quality that more than a third were recommended for publication. The judge’s adjudication did not focus on issues of syntax and grammar; rather it weighed up the ‘imponderable qualities such as artistic truth and significance.’

A defiant Gwala, who was still banned, contributed to the competition with a short story entitled ‘On That Hillock’, which intertwined issues of forced labour, poll tax and an ‘overseer’ who symbolised oppression and white superiority. Gwala’s short story invoked a memory of the last armed resistance to British colonialism in South Africa, the 1906 Bhambatha Rebellion. Gwala’s focus on the Bhambatha Rebellion should be understood in the light of the ANC having already agreed in 1953 that a plan would be drawn up to prepare the organisation to operate underground in the event that it was banned.²¹² It is possible that since Gwala had been made aware of the re-emergence of the Communist Party, he might also have been informed about plans for the armed struggle. Gwala interpreted the 1906 Rebellion as an anecdote of the struggle against a system of capitalist domination while emphasising that it was not against white people as a race. Gwala cautioned that ‘better methods of warfare’ and strategies should be adopted in armed struggle.²¹³ Gwala’s short story drew parallels between the 1906 Rebellion and the armed struggle. While he conceded the defeat of Africans during the rebellion, he also emphasised that although ‘some battles

²¹⁰ Staff reporter, ‘A Pleasure and a Privilege: The Judges Report’, *The New Age*, 11 October 1956.

²¹¹ Staff reporter, ‘A Pleasure and a Privilege: The Judges Report’, *The New Age*, 11 October 1956.

²¹² Suttner, *The ANC Underground*, 18.

²¹³ H. T. Gwala, ‘On That Hillock’, *The New Age*, 22 November 1956.

could be lost the final victory is certain.’ The short story presented the 1906 Rebellion as the foundation for the armed struggle for the liberation of South Africa.

Gwala shared third prize with Alfred Hutchinson.²¹⁴ The judges described Gwala as having ‘developing qualities of a first class writer’ with the ability to create a stirring reconstruction of the day of the Bhambatha Rebellion. They also acknowledged Gwala’s ‘talent of bringing history to life.’²¹⁵ It was due to this story that the Commissioner of Police argued that Gwala’s ‘sympathy continued to lie with the Communists and he will return to his old ways as soon as he is no longer subjected to his restrictions.’²¹⁶

Gwala, now a regular contributor to the newspapers, continued to use the Bhambatha Rebellion as a metaphor. In the December 1956 volume of *Fighting Talk*, a pro-Communist magazine edited by Ruth First, Gwala’s short story, ‘The Trial’, was published. This story dramatised the agony and trauma of the trial that followed the Bhambatha Rebellion.²¹⁷ Gwala’s short story was written against the backdrop of the government’s swooping arrest of 156 Congress leaders in the early hours of 5 December 1956, after which they were put on trial for high treason. Gwala’s short story drew parallels between the Bhambatha trial and the 1956 treason trial as both were ‘based on the premise that the King could do no wrong but men could and always did wrong.’²¹⁸ Gwala’s stories were widely read and ‘stimulated a sense of pride to the histories of the African people.’²¹⁹

There were robust debates about the direction of the Congress movement in 1949, and Gwala was among those in Natal who supported the Programme of Action. Gwala was supportive to

²¹⁴ Staff reporter, ‘A Pleasure and a Privilege: The Judges Report’, *The New Age*, 11 October 1956.

²¹⁵ Staff reporter, ‘A Pleasure and a Privilege: The Judges Report’, *The New Age*, 11 October 1956.

²¹⁶ NAR, SDC 2/1/53, file 2/50/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 18 March 1963.

²¹⁷ APC, PC76/1/1/1, ‘The Trial’, a short story by T. H. Gwala, *Fighting Talk*, December 1965.

²¹⁸ APC, PC76/1/1/1, ‘The Trial’, a short story by T. H. Gwala, *Fighting Talk*, December 1965.

²¹⁹ NAR, Department of Prisons papers, file no. 1238, correspondence from M. B. Yengwa to Harry Gwala, 7 June 1984.

strikes actions, boycotts and other forms of civil disobedience. Nevertheless, he was unable to be at a forefront due to restrictions that had been imposed to him by the regime. Gwala viewed his employment at Edendale Hospital as an opportunity to continue with the key principles of the Programme of Action. He helped to establish a workers' union at Edendale Hospital that included hospital nurses, doctors and other staff. Gwala organised the first ever doctors' strike at Edendale Hospital in 1957.

As soon as the South African Congress of Trade Unions (SACTU) was launched in 1955, Moses Mabhida, Gwala's protégé and confidante, was tasked with establishing its Natal offices in Durban and Pietermaritzburg and to mobilise workers. In August 1955, the ANC, South African Congress of Democrats, SAIC and SACTU established the National Co-ordinating Council (NCC) that comprised elected representatives from all Congress organisations. During May 1957, the NCC called for a national strike on June 26th, which culminated in the '£1 a Day' campaign. While the Transvaal and the Cape were more militant, the Natal leadership adopted a 'cautious approach throughout 1957' because they felt that mobilisation on a mass scale was not possible while trade unions were relatively weak.²²⁰ As the Natal leadership was cognisant of its limitations, it diluted the strike call issued by the national leadership. However, Gwala mobilised the hospital staff to participate in the £1 a Day campaign. While there is no clear evidence that hospital staff did participate, the hospital management dismissed Gwala in January 1958 after being instructed to do so by state security agencies.

The sacking of Gwala coincided with the expiry of his banning order that had been issued in 1956. To Gwala this meant a temporary relief. Although he had been previously ordered to

²²⁰ R. V. Lambert, 'Political Unionism in South Africa: The South African Congress of Trade Unions, 1955-1965', PhD dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1988, 379.

resign from his trade union positions, the expiry of the banning order allowed him to be politically active again.²²¹ By mid-1958, Gwala had already started reorganising BTR Sarmcol workers which resulted in the re-emergence of the Howick Rubber Workers' Union in 1960. Although the new union was in fact a resuscitation of the Howick Rubber Industrial Workers' Union which had been established in early 1950s, it omitted the name 'industrial' since Gwala was prohibited from participating in the activities of a union under that name.²²² The members of the union executive were Clemence Gumede, Felix Ngcobo, Joseph Nduli and Frans Ross.²²³ Although Clemence Gumede was the elected chairperson, he requested Gwala to address many members' meetings. The union did not elect a secretary but 'took Gwala as organising secretary.'

Because Gwala was prohibited from entering the premises of BTR Sarmcol, union meetings were held under a tree outside the premises, and these were mainly addressed by Gwala. The union continued to adhere to its non-racial character as it drew its membership from non-European BTR Sarmcol workers.²²⁴ The union had a strong political inclination because its leadership comprised ANC activists. One such was Jacob Zuma who was at that time an ANC activist in Natal and shop steward of the union.²²⁵ Gwala, Zuma and Joseph Nduli also addressed meetings of the union and urged workers to 'unite and go to the employers and demand to be paid one pound a day.'²²⁶

²²¹ Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

²²² PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, criminal case no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Mr Naidoo.

²²³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, criminal case no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Frans Ross.

²²⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, criminal case no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Frans Ross.

²²⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, criminal case no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Mr Naidoo.

²²⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, criminal case no.134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Bernard Zuma.

From 1958 Gwala's politics seem to have gravitated towards a militant political stance as he reconnected himself with national and class struggles.²²⁷ This development might have been prompted by the manner in which the state security apparatus had disconnected him. This was also motivated by the fact that discussions about the armed struggle were taking place within Communist Party cells. In addition, his banning order had expired and had not been renewed. Gwala took advantage of being a 'free person' and immersed himself in the political rhetoric around the £1 a Day campaign and other ANC mass mobilisation activities.²²⁸ In February 1958, Gwala attended a conference of the £1 a Day campaign in Durban organised by SACTU.

At the same time, Gwala was also preoccupied with women's struggles and played an active role in the mobilising women against the government instruction that they were to carry reference books (passes). He continued to play a pivotal role in shaping the direction of the ANC and participated in both its provincial and national conference that were held in Natal. It was because of his active role that Gwala was elected to the Natal Provincial Executive Committee of the ANC in 1959. The declaration of the State of Emergency in 1960 after the massacres of Sharpeville and Langa on 21 March made Gwala realise that time was right to embark on the armed struggle.²²⁹ Soon afterwards the state 'introduced a battery of draconian measures: the ANC and Pan Africanist Congress were banned and security laws and institutions were extended and reinforced.'²³⁰

²²⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Monde Mkhunqwana. Mkhunqwana was imprisoned with Gwala on Robben Island during the 1960s.

²²⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, undated.

²²⁹ Sylvia Neame interview with Harry Gwala; Tony Karon interview with Harry Gwala.

²³⁰ B. Magubane, 'Introduction: The political context' in SADET, *Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 1, 1960-1970* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004), 1.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that the period between 1942 and 1960 marked the germination of Gwala's politics of connectedness. The chapter has examined complex political environments under which Gwala's politics of connectedness developed and located Gwala within the historical trajectory of the emergence of youth politics, mass mobilisation and the fusing of African nationalism with class imperatives. The chapter has argued that the development of African nationalism can only be understood within an examination of wider political developments that unfolded within Indian politics and the politics of the Communist Party. In order to understand the development of mass-based radical politics in Natal that characterised the 1950s, the chapter demonstrates how Gwala's non-racialism played a fundamental role in connecting the various opponents of the state's segregationist apartheid laws.

Gwala's politics coincided with pervasive negative perceptions of the Communist Party. This created turmoil between the conservative Natal ANC executive and the Natal CYL while the Natal CYL was unable to take advantage of the support of white liberals due to its Communist links. While Gwala emerged as a connector, he was simultaneously disconnected mainly by the state apparatus as well as within the Natal CYL. Yet, a politically conscious and determined Gwala continued to work with the ANC to strengthen mass mobilisation and liberation politics. Gwala's resilience and connectedness enabled him to avert criminalisation and disconnection as he continued to hold secret meetings in pursuit of his goals of mass mobilisation and connectedness. Although Gwala left active participation in the Natal CYL, in 1951 he played a vital role in advocating for the transformation of the Natal ANC leadership which resulted in the defeat of AWG Champion and the ascendance of Chief Albert Luthuli to the chairpersonship. After Champion lost the presidency of the Natal ANC,

he indicated that he was ‘pulling out of the Congress’ because he had ‘never found a good home in the Congress.’²³¹

It was the political activism of Gwala, Moses Mabhida and Stephen Dlamini during the 1940s and 1950s which laid the ground for the interweaving of class and trade unionism which became the basis of forging connectedness in the liberation struggle. In many ways, these connections provided the foundation for the tripartite alliance between the ANC, Communist Party and trade unions.



²³¹ UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, C58, letter from Champion to Clements Kadalie, 21 November 1951. The exchange of letters between Champion and Selby Msimang indicates heightened tension between them see UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da108, letter from Champion to Selby Msimang, dated 17 August 1950; and UWL, HLP, AWG Champion Papers, A922, Da109, letter from Selby Msimang to Champion, 14 September 1950.

CHAPTER THREE

Harry Gwala and the politicisation of football in Pietermaritzburg, 1920s-1950s

Introduction

This chapter examines the complex interplay between football and Harry Gwala's politics of connectedness. Increasing urbanisation and the state's anxiety about the potential influence of the radical politics of the 1920s compelled the Pietermaritzburg Council (PMBC) to rethink its position on the provision of facilities and funds for football among Africans. Under Gwala's influence, football became a tool of mobilisation, contestation and connectedness, as well as an arena where political struggles were fought. Ciraj Rassool and Virgil Slade have argued that football could be 'a lens to through which to understand complicated issues like race and identity formation, political principles and strategies, and resistance to apartheid.'¹ This chapter examines Gwala's role in football administration, his journey to the leadership of a football association during the late 1940s, and his acrimonious relationship with the PMBC. Furthermore, it demonstrates how football became an arena of modes of expression about citizenship and group identities within the urban landscape.

The first part of the chapter explores the politics of local government and its provision of recreational facilities for the use by Africans in Pietermaritzburg from the 1920s until 1942. While Gwala was not involved in football administration at this time, foundations were laid through which football became a vehicle for the creation of class and political identities.

Football provided a mechanism for urban Africans to redefine, and re-imagine themselves

¹ C. Rassool and V. Slade, 'Fields of Play': the District Six Museum and the history of football in Cape Town', *Soccer and Society*, Vol. 13, issue 2, 188-206. This article was republished in S. Baller, G. Miescher and C. Rassool (eds.), *Global Perspectives on Football in Africa: Visualising the Game* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013); District Six Museum, *Fields of Play: Football Memories and Forced Removals in Cape Town: a District Six Museum Exhibition Catalogue* (Cape Town: District Six Museum, 2010).

within an atmosphere of narrowing social spaces and hardening racial stratification. This section also examines the involvement of the local state in the provision and regulation of African leisure time between the 1920s to 1950s. At this time African recreation was seen as ‘a potential saving on police’ and a way of trying to dampen emerging political consciousness among Africans. It further examines how the provision of facilities and funds for African football was influenced by white paternalism and the anxieties of liberal reformers about the security of capital and their own livelihoods. African recreation developed its own character in Pietermaritzburg as the PMBC sought to use football to ameliorate conditions for the middle class and control the spare time of Africans. However, through Gwala’s politics of connectedness, football also became contested terrain, a space of mass mobilisation amidst the deepening complexities of class, racial formation and political mobilisation.

The second part of this chapter examines Gwala’s engagement with the PMBC and critically analyses how football-based identities were not necessarily people’s only identities. People could be described as having generated multiple identities simultaneously, seasonally or consecutively. It seeks to build on the theme of connectedness and disconnectedness by demonstrating how Gwala’s ascension to the leadership of a football association gave him a platform to communicate to a wider spectrum of people. The PMBC felt threatened by Gwala’s activities and took a political decision to deprive him and his association of access to the Council’s sport grounds and annual club grant. Gwala’s involvement in football should be understood through Jeremy MacClancy’s argument that sport cannot be divorced from social and political relations of power.² The question of who controls sport, such as football, how it was organised and played, and by whom it was played, seems to have driven Gwala’s interest in the administration of football in Pietermaritzburg.

² J. MacClancy (ed.), *Sport, Identity and Ethnicity* (Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1996), 29.

Gwala was mindful of the extent to which the PMBC had used sport to ameliorate living conditions for the urban working classes, since the 1920s, while at the same time it also displayed sport as a tool of dominance as part of a long-term strategy of social control. Christopher Merrett argues that, as was the case in Durban, in Pietermaritzburg the council became ‘increasingly involved in controlling the leisure time for Africans in the hope of diverting the spare time of workers and encouraging the middle class’ to become assimilated.³ Before Gwala joined political and football structures in Pietermaritzburg, leaders such as Chief Albert Luthuli had been involved in the administration of football. The potential for using sport as a tool of mass mobilisation to oppose the state machinery had already been established.⁴ For Gwala football was a terrain of political interaction, mobilisation and resistance.

Football identities and the politics of connectedness

In 1999, the Msunduzi Local Municipality announced that the city’s Jan Smuts Stadium was to be renamed after Harry Gwala. Soon after the announcement the local newspaper, *The Witness*, was inundated with a mixture of vitriolic letters of complaint and those that supported the proposal as part of transforming the city’s landscape. John Mitchell, a former headmaster of King’s School in Nottingham Road and a historical commentator asked:

How many in 200 years will remember Harry Gwala or what he meant to Pietermaritzburg? They will probably imagine that he played soccer! I can’t resist a smile at the thought that our arch-communist is to be located between Princess Elizabeth and Princess Margaret drives. I hope he would have enjoyed this joke.⁵

³ C. Merrett, ‘Social Control and Communal Resistance: African Football in Pietermaritzburg’, *Natalia*, 39, 2009, 49.

⁴ P. Alegi, *Laduma!: Soccer, Politics, and Society in South Africa, From its Origins to 2010* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2010), 30.

⁵ John Mitchell, ‘Would Gwala have approved’, *The Witness*, 13 April 1999. The King’s School was a privately owned and during the 1960s it provided space for Pietermaritzburg liberals such as Peter Brown and Colin Gardner to address learners and parents. During the height of violence, it also provided shelter to displaced struggle activists. One such person was Pietermaritzburg ANC activist Makhosi Khoza, who became a member of the National Assembly during the 5th Parliament, 2014 to 2019. For a detailed history of the King’s School, see R. Denham, ‘Doctors, Scholars and Liberals: 120 Years on the King’s School Grounds’, *Natalia*, 41, 2011, 61-70.

Mitchell's letter insinuated that it was inappropriate for the stadium to carry Gwala's name, thus completely disconnecting Gwala from football history in Pietermaritzburg. He offered an 'alternative idea' of erecting Gwala's statue in the 'Freedom Square' in the centre of Pietermaritzburg as this would be 'close to the seat of municipal and provincial power which he fought for.'⁶ Mitchell's letter illustrated how Gwala's complex historical identities had been obfuscated and simplified.

Although the re-imagining of Gwala's history has dislocated him from his involvement in sport in Pietermaritzburg, Lindiwe Gwala, his daughter, has reinforced her father's close passion for football:

My father loved football. It was in football that he found space to reconnect with the people he associated himself with, the working class. However, many people do not know that it was football that enabled him the space to intercept social and class consciousness which became the embodiment of his life.⁷

Perhaps Gwala's political stature eclipsed his involvement in and association with football administration in Pietermaritzburg and in Natal more widely. His involvement in football administration has generally been overlooked in oral interviews conducted with Gwala between 1989 and 1995. It is possible that because of the political violence that engulfed Natal and KwaZulu between the mid-1980s and 1990s, Gwala involvement in football administration was considered by those researchers to be peripheral. With the exception of the work of Christopher Merrett, Gwala's involvement in football administration has not received much scholarly attention.⁸

⁶ John Mitchell, 'Would Gwala have approved', *The Witness*, 13 April 1999.

⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

⁸ For a detailed discussion on the politics of sport in Pietermaritzburg see C. Merrett, *Sport, Space and Segregation: Politics and Society in Pietermaritzburg* (Pietermaritzburg: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2009); Merrett, 'Social Control and Communal Resistance'.

The period between the 1920s and 1950s was marked by the emergence of two organised African football associations, the Maritzburg and District Native Football Association (MDNFA) and the Maritzburg and District African Football Association (MDAFA). These two associations represented social groups and political views that had different modalities of engaging with the PMBC. While the MDNFA was a moderate body and became an ally of the PMBC, with C. E. Young as its patron from 1926 and Chief D. J. Sioka as vice president in the 1930s, the MDAFA chose to become independent and radical, a position that often led to confrontation with the PMBC.

Although scanty, existing archival evidence suggests that the PMBC did not consider the provision of football infrastructure for Africans to be a high priority. From the 1920s, the relationship between the PMBC and Africans was characterised by paternalism and marked by contradiction. While the PMBC used football as an ameliorative tool and a form of social control, Africans used it as a tool of political activism and often contested the social objectives of white authorities.⁹ By contrast, the managers of the PMBC's Native Affairs Department (NAD) reported that 'natives cooperated with authorities.'¹⁰ However, this changed drastically from the early 1940s as the newly established MDAFA repudiated the PMBC's authority and openly aligned itself with the radical political rhetoric of the trade

⁹ For a detailed discussion on how sport has been used as a tool of dominance and resistance see, C. Badenhorst, 'Mines, Missionaries and the Municipality' in A. G. Cobley (ed.), *The Rules of the Game: Struggles in Black Recreation and Social Welfare Policy in South Africa*, (London: Greenwood Press, 1997); C. Badenhorst and C. Mather, 'Tribal Recreation and Recreating Tribalism: Culture, Leisure and Social Control on South Africa's Gold Mines, 1940-1950', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 3, 1997, 473-489; P. Alegi, 'Amathe Nolimi' (It is Saliva and the Tongue): Contracts of Joy in South African Football c. 1940-1976', *The International Journal of History of Sport*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2000, 1-20; P. Alegi, 'Playing to the Gallery? Sport, Cultural Performance, and Social Identity in South Africa, 1920s-1945', *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, 17-38 (Special Issue: Leisure in African History); P. Alegi, 'Umdlalo Wabantu: A Social History of Soccer in Urban, Black South African Communities, 1886-1956', MA thesis, Yale University, 1995; A. G. Cobley, 'A Political History of Playing Fields: The Provision of Sporting Facilities for Africans in the Johannesburg Area to 1948', *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 11, 2, 1994; G. Vahed, 'Control of African Leisure Time in Durban in the 1930s', *Journal of Natal and Zulu History*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1998, 67-123; P. Maylam, 'Shackled by Contradictions: The Municipal Response to African Urbanisation in Durban, 1920-1950', *African Urban Studies*, Vol. 14, 1982, 1-25; P. Alegi, 'Katanga vs Johannesburg: A History of the First Sub-Saharan African Football Championship, 1949-50', *African Historical Review*, Vol. 31, No. 1, 1999, 55-74; Alegi, *Laduma!*; P. Alegi, *African Soccerscapes: How a Continent Changed the World's Game* (Athens OH: Ohio University Press, 2010); P. Alegi, 'South Africa and the Global Game: Introduction', *Soccer & Society*, Vol. 11, No. 2, 2010, 1-11.

¹⁰ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbooks*, 1927, 1928, 1937.

unions and the Communist Party.¹¹ As Gwala became central in the leadership of African football in Pietermaritzburg, the MDFAFA became increasingly vociferous and the PMBC ignored its requests for the provision and improvement of football grounds for Africans. The radicalisation of football occurred during an era of enormous social change that was brought about by increasing urbanisation and industrial expansion and, as we have seen, the ferment of trade unionism, as well as the rejuvenation of the Natal Congress Youth League.

Gwala's involvement in football went beyond the duties of administration and he also associated himself closely with ordinary football spectators. Gwala's football work was also a conspicuous display of connectedness. Perhaps his involvement in football was a repose to the elitist posture and politics of the African petty bourgeoisie that led the Natal CYL from 1944 to 1947. His engagements transformed football administration from being 'arenas of entertainment and sociability' in the 1930s to centres of political consciousness and contestation, and connected with working class struggles in the late 1940s.¹² Notable African political leaders in Natal, such as O. E. Msimang and Chief Albert Luthuli, had already been involved in football administration from as early as the 1920s. Msimang had been treasurer and president of the MDNFA and the South African Native Football Association (SANFA) respectively during the 1920s and the 1930s, while Luthuli was the first secretary of the South African Football Association (SAFA). Luthuli described himself as a 'compulsive football fan' who was always 'carried away helplessly by the excitement of a soccer match.'¹³ As Peter Alegi has argued, Luthuli's involvement in the struggle against racism and apartheid demonstrates how football 'stretched its influence beyond the boundaries of playing

¹¹ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbooks*, 1927, 1928, 1937, 1940; this point was also emphasised in D. N. Bang's letter to the town clerk, PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, letter from D. N. Bang to the Town Clerk, 15 May 1950.

¹² Alegi, 'Playing to the Gallery?', 22.

¹³ Luthuli, *Let My People Go*, 23.

fields and created connections and alliances between people in South Africa's industrial society.¹⁴ It was these connections that Gwala sought to reinforce.

Between 1947 and 1951, Gwala's politics transformed the management of urban space and football from being an elitist preoccupation into a form of popular resistance in Pietermaritzburg. During the 1940s, while the PMBC was determined to increase the provision of sporting facilities in order to reduce the likelihood of Africans participating in emerging radical politics, Gwala used football as a means of reaching out to the masses and the working class. During this period, Gwala and Selby Mazibuko led an outspoken faction within the MDAFA, which often led to disputes with NAD manager R. E. Stevens and later his successor, D. N. Bang. However, with the promulgation of the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, Gwala decided to relinquish his involvement in the affairs of the MDAFA as he was preparing to operate underground. The complex relationship between the PMBC and MDAFA that manifested itself during the 1940s was a product of the historical circumstances of increased urbanisation and intensification of social and racial complexities.

The state and control of African leisure time

The decades between the 1920s and the 1950s represented a period of tremendous change for Africans in Pietermaritzburg and Natal more broadly. The deteriorating conditions in the Natal rural hinterland coupled with steady industrial growth in cities such as Durban and Pietermaritzburg resulted in rapid urban settlement. Many Africans sought ways of improving their economic fortunes as their homestead livelihoods had deteriorated to the point that families were struggling to survive.¹⁵ The urban African population presented a political conundrum for white capital. White conservatives viewed African urban settlement as

¹⁴ Alegi, 'Playing to the Gallery?', 17.

¹⁵ For a detailed discussion on the conditions of Africans and the relationship with the state see J. Lambert, *Betrayed Trust: African and the State in Colonial Natal* (Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press, 1995).

important as long as it served the interests of white capital and firmly rejected any prospects of a permanently urbanised African population. On the other hand, liberal reformers proposed that a class of urbanised Africans was necessary to sustain the needs of capital.¹⁶ As Saul Dubow has correctly argued, liberal reformists' anxieties were concerned with the 'moral degeneration of Africans in the foreign environment of the cities.' Yet they also worried about the potential threat of uncontrolled Africans in cities.¹⁷ As a result, urban social welfare became an important area of liberal concern as a way to defuse social and industrial conflict and the supposed socially dislocating effects of the city.

Initially the PMBC rejected the concept of providing recreational facilities to Africans. Instead, until 1922 the PMBC was convinced that 'native education' was more vital than recreation.¹⁸ The PMBC opted to provide a grant for 'native night schools' in the face of increasing demands from an organised sport association requesting the improvement of football grounds and a nominal grant.¹⁹ Even though the PMBC was aware of increasing urbanisation, mainly by Africans and Indians, it considered the provision of sport and leisure as a lesser priority than housing, which it admitted 'it was generally very unsatisfactory.'²⁰

Since the early 1920s, the MDNFA had represented African soccer teams in Pietermaritzburg. The MDNFA persistently submitted requests to use the City's football grounds. The PMBC provided access after it had firstly established whether the Maritzburg District Football Association (MDFA), an association that represented white footballers, was

¹⁶ T. A. Nuttall, 'Collaboration and Conflicting: Interests in a Black Community-Responses to the Introduction of Urban Local Government in Edendale, Natal, 1941-1944', BA Hons essay, University of Oxford, 1984, 5-20.

¹⁷ S. Dubow, 'Race, Civilisation and Culture: The Elaboration of Segregationist Discourse in the Inter-war Years', in S. Marks and S. Trapido (eds.), *The Politics of Race, Class and Nationalism in Twentieth Century South Africa* (London: Longman, 1987), 76.

¹⁸ *Pietermaritzburg Cooperation Yearbook*, 1923, 28.

¹⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 275A/1924, letter from E. O. Msimang to the Town Treasurer, 23 February 1922; *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1922, 18.

²⁰ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1921, 60.

planning to use those grounds.²¹ It was not until 1923 that the PMBC gave the MDNFA an ad-hoc grant to cover administration costs.²² However, this support was inconsistent and short-lived as the PMBC still had no interest in African football. During the 1924 football season, the PMBC turned down a request by the MDNFA to use football grounds as it suspected that ‘they were pursuing other interests that were not favoured by the City Council.’²³

The MDNFA operated in a complex political environment and struggled to manage the cohesion of its football teams as well as the involvement of its leadership in broader political movements that were hostile to the state. It was often granted access to football grounds that were far from where many Africans resided, or which were poorly maintained, or both. It was also unable to manage spontaneous conflicts between its rank and file members. E. O. Msimang, for example, had cordial relations with the state, yet had been part of African nationalist politics in Natal. Willie Sakela, an executive member of the MDNFA, seems to have operated outside the political framework of protest politics and was less antagonistic to the state. Despite the MDNFA having good relations with the state, the PMBC remained ‘suspicious of their involvement in politics’ as they feared that ‘they might use the opportunity provided by football to influence the natives.’²⁴ Also, the MDNFA’s inability to build a cohesive organisation compromised its potential to confront the PMBC’s attitude towards African football.

²¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 275A/1924, correspondence between the Town Treasurer and W. M. Anderson, honorary secretary and treasurer of the MDFA, 25 February 1922 and 29 March 1922. PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 275B/1924, correspondence between A. J. Sililo, the Town Clerk and W. M. Anderson, 14 March 1921, 18 March 1921, 21 March 1921, 20 April 1921, 23 April 1921 and 25 April 1921.

²² PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 275C/1924, correspondence between Philemon J. Dube and the Town Treasurer, 9 March 1923, 15 March 1923, 11 April 1923, 1 May 1923, 23 May 1923 and 25 May 1923; PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 311/1923, minutes of the Finance Committee, 11 April 1923.

²³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 274/1924, minutes of the Finance Committee, 24 April 1924.

²⁴ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1925, 59.

An event that occurred on 5 September 1922 became a pretext for the PMBC to withdraw access to football facilities and grant funding. The Unities Football Club was dissatisfied about a goal awarded to the Come Agains Football Club. When the matter was referred to an Appeal Committee, the association was 'satisfied that the referee acted well in accordance with the rules of the competition.'²⁵ When a suggestion from Willie Sakela and his club that the matter be referred to arbitration by Messrs Griffin and Young of the English Football Association was rebuffed by the MDNFA, the club requested the Town Treasurer's intervention. The club threatened to obtain a court order forcing the matter to be taken to arbitration and to interdict the association from running the 1923 football season.²⁶ Although there is no archival evidence that Willie Sakela approached any court, the animosities resulted in a public spat which weakened the leadership of the MDNFA until 1925. The inability of the MDNFA to resolve this matter amicably caused considerable damage to its reputation and contributed to its inability to influence the PMBC in its favour. In 1925, the PMBC capitalised on the tension and refused to provide permission for the MDNFA to use any football grounds and turned down its application for an annual grant. In 1926 Willie Sakela withdrew from the MDNFA to form the Maritzburg Bantu Football Association (MBFA). Although the MBFA was moderate, it failed to draw support from the PMBC, and split weakened it and led to its decline.

The political transformation in Natal during the mid and late 1920s forced the PMBC to adopt new approaches towards the 'urban native question.'²⁷ The activities of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICU) showed signs of leading to the radicalisation of protest politics, and the PMBC was afraid of the emergence of assertive articulations of

²⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 275A/1924, correspondence between Willie Sakela and E. O. Msimang, 11 September 1922.

²⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 275A/1924, letter from Willie Sakela to the Secretary of the MDNFA, 23 September 1922.

²⁷ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1926, 24-25.

worker grievances and the growing participation of workers in urban struggles.²⁸ Despite the on-going differences on the 'urban native question', both liberal reformists and conservatives believed that sport was an effective means of social control of Africans in Pietermaritzburg. Similarly, Johannesburg and Durban ratepayers raised their concerns about the number of unsupervised 'natives who were seen loitering around the city.'²⁹ For them, organised sport provided a solution for this problem and the PMBC had to find 'proper recreational facilities that would keep them occupied, especially on Sunday afternoon.'³⁰

In October 1925, the PMBC established the NAD which was responsible for the control of the 'native togt and registration office, the native men's and women's hostel, and the establishment of the native village.'³¹ Previously, native affairs had been managed under the Brewer and Native Affairs Department. In the period 1925 to 1950, the NAD was led by three different managers: Graham Ballenden, and his successors R. E. Stevens and D. N. Bang. Ballenden was appointed as the first superintendent and was also required to 'advise Council generally on Native administration.'³² In 1926 Ballenden admitted:

Natives are badly neglected in the matter of facilities for healthy recreation. I find that there is only one ground set aside for them by the Council, and that is on the Edendale Road near Mason's Mill, about 3 miles from the Town Hall. Apart from any other reason the City cannot afford to allow this state of affairs to continue. Some opportunity must be provided for the native population to indulge in healthy games, but, as the average domestic servant gets very little time off, any grounds set aside for their use should be as convenient to the centre of the City as possible. It must be further realised that because of the very meagre wages natives are paid they are in greater need of assistance than any other section of the community.³³

²⁸ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1927, 64.

²⁹ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1927, 64.

³⁰ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1927, 64

³¹ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1926, 55; also see H. Peel, 'Sobantu Village: An Administrative History of a Pietermaritzburg Township, 1924-1959', BA Hons essay, University of Natal, 1987; J. Laband, and R. Haswell (eds.), *Pietermaritzburg 1838-1988: A New Portrait of an African City* (Pietermaritzburg: Shuter and Shooter, 1988).

³² *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1926, 24.

³³ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1926, 56.

Ballenden's submission seems to have persuaded the PMBC to pay more attention to the provision of recreational and sport facilities to Africans and to consider an ad-hoc grant to the association. However, there is no archival evidence that suggests that Ballenden's views influenced the PMBC to give more attention to Africans' recreational needs. Ballenden resigned in April 1927 to take up a similar position with the Johannesburg Municipality, having laid a foundation for the organisation of African football in Pietermaritzburg.³⁴ Under the leadership of his successor, R. E. Stevens, especially from the mid-1930s, the PMBC gave more attention to the provision of recreational facilities for Africans. In addition, Stevens increased opportunities of accessing football grounds and funding in the succeeding years. Increasing control of African leisure time was a reaction to other political developments in Natal and to increasing complaints from the white community about 'natives that were loitering in town.'³⁵

The PMBC was shocked by the outbreak of the 1929 riots in Durban which culminated in an eighteen-month boycott of its beerhall. The PMBC took seriously the recommendations of the De Waal Commission of 1929-30 that investigated the causes of the 1929 Durban riots, having already established the post of Native Welfare Officer as early as 1927.³⁶ As Goolam Vahed has argued, although it did not blame the state, the Commission called for an improvement in the social conditions of Africans, and the channelling of funds into African recreation and welfare to defuse unrest.³⁷ While the De Waal Commission was an investigation into disturbances in Durban, its recommendations became the blueprint for the provision of recreation services to Africans in most South African cities.

³⁴ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1927, 26.

³⁵ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1931, 52.

³⁶ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1927, 27.

³⁷ Vahed, 'Control of African Leisure Time', 70.

The 1931 Native Economic Commission provided more impetus for the PMBC to adopt a different approach towards the provision of recreation facilities for Africans. J. B. E. Farrer, who had been a magistrate in Natal for over 40 years, testified that ‘the huge native proletariat in towns would be a very dangerous thing, yet white capital cannot do anything without them.’³⁸ Farrer’s evidence epitomised the political dilemma that confronted the PMBC. Perhaps Farrer’s opinions influenced the PMBC since once again it began to view African recreation more positively despite occasional hostility. As Merrett has argued, the PMBC had been unable to meet the demands for housing, sanitation and recreational facilities, and also ignored the acute social problems of Africans living on the margins of urban life.³⁹

During the opening of the Tatham Memorial Pavilion, Sir Patrick Duncan, the Governor-General of South Africa commented:

For too long had the Europeans forgotten the needs of the native who had come to town to work for them; too long had the natives’ amusement been overlooked. The grounds would enable the natives to live like a human being and would provide for him the sport that the Europeans required themselves.⁴⁰

Duncan’s comments were indicative of the shift in the PMBC’s approach towards the provision of recreational facilities for Africans during the 1930s. The PMBC had succumbed to pressure from some local residents to control African leisure time. In addition, similarly to Johannesburg’s Non-European Affairs Department (NEAD), the PMBC had begun attempts to retribalise ‘natives’ through the promotion of sporting codes such as *ngoma* dance, *amalaita*, and stick fighting.⁴¹ However, the retribalisation project did not have much appeal

³⁸ Report of the Native Economic Commission, 1930-1932, evidence of Mr J. B. E. Farrer, 8 April 1931, Pietermaritzburg, 6568.

³⁹ Merrett, ‘Social Control and Communal Resistance’, 48.

⁴⁰ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1937, 9.

⁴¹ Merrett, *Sport, Space and Segregation*, 108; for a detailed discussion of African sports in Johannesburg, see C. Badenhorst, ‘Mines, Missionaries and the Municipality: Organised African Sport and Recreation in Johannesburg, c1920-1950’, PhD dissertation, Queen’s University, 1992.

as football had already become popular among rank and file urban Africans. In addition, as Charles Ambler has argued in the case of Northern Rhodesia, whites also feared an African popular culture that would ‘thrive beyond the discipline of the workplace’ and suggested that more emphasis should be put on football.⁴² Peter Alegi has argued that ‘football was a shared cultural medium through which people involved in formal and informal social groups connected across racial, economic, ethno-linguistic, and political lines.’⁴³ Football also emerged as the most popular sporting code among Africans, mainly in Natal and on the Witwatersrand, and it provided an opportunity to ‘cope with the dislocation of urbanisation and build vital alternative networks.’⁴⁴ The PMBC viewed the management of African leisure time as a matter of considerable importance with the expansion of the city’s industrial base and increasing urbanisation, and also given that the white neighbourhoods had raised their complaints about ‘blacks congregating at the market square on Sundays.’⁴⁵

Complaints from the white population about Africans in the Central Business District (CBD) made the PMBC extremely worried that if Africans’ leisure time was unregulated they might be exposed to political influences, mainly by the Communist Party.⁴⁶ R. E. Stevens succeeded in convincing both the PMBC and the Native Commissioner to increase the number of recreational grounds and to regulate Africans’ use of the Market Square.⁴⁷

The control of access by Africans to the CBD was further necessitated by the discontent of the white community about their supposed conduct. Reverend Heerden, a minister of the Dutch Reformed Church complained to the PMBC of the ‘noise’ caused by Africans on the

⁴² C. Ambler, ‘Alcohol, Racial Segregation and Popular Politics in Northern Rhodesia’, *Journal of African History*, 31, 1990, 298.

⁴³ Alegi, *Laduma!*, 87.

⁴⁴ Alegi, *Laduma!*, 19.

⁴⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/257, file 79/4, letter from Mrs M. J. Houston to City Corporation, 17 January 1940.

⁴⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2133, file 250/1938, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 6 October 1937.

⁴⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2133, file 250/1938, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Native Commissioner, 7 June 1938.

Market Square on Sunday afternoon and requested that ‘steps be taken to abate the nuisance.’⁴⁸ In addition, a certain Rub Meyer of Greytown complained that ‘there are just as many Natives and Indians as white people, and unless our wives and daughters are to be trampled underfoot, they have to make way for these Natives and Indians.’⁴⁹ Meyer went to the extent of threatening the Town Clerk that if the City Council was unable ‘to defend the rights of the white man’ they were prepared to do so themselves and they had the support of the entire white population.⁵⁰ A similar sentiment was shared by a certain M. J. Houston of Boshoff Street who urged the city council to ‘do something about natives who congregate at the corner of Loop and Boshoff Streets who were disturbing’ white residents.⁵¹

In response to these demands, the PMBC adopted a new approach towards the provision of recreational facilities to Africans. The new approach created favourable conditions for the re-emergence of the MDNFA. In 1932 Stevens acknowledged that there had been repeated MDNFA applications for the use of football grounds. Stevens approached the PMBC to lease a site which was owned by SA Railways and Harbours to be utilised as a football ground for Africans.⁵² The PMBC approved the recommendation and the sporting grounds were leased to the MDNFA for a period of a year, to be renewed annually. By June 1933, although Stevens requested that the Native Administration Committee consider fencing the grounds so that the association would be able to ‘take a gate and acquire funds’, he remained reluctant to recommend serious improvements to the football grounds as the NAD had no security of tenure.⁵³ It was against this background that he recommended to the Town Clerk that the PMBC should consider acquiring these sports grounds from the SA Railways and Harbours

⁴⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2133, file 250/1938, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Native Commissioner, 7 June 1938.

⁴⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/257, file 79/4, letter from Rud Meyer to Town Clerk, 26 March 1940; PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2133, file 250/1938, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Native Commissioner, 7 June 1938.

⁵⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/257, file 79/4, letter from Rud Meyer to Town Clerk, 26 March 1940.

⁵¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/257, file 79/4, letter from Mrs M. J. Houston to City Corporation, 17 January 1940.

⁵² PAR 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 1443/1932, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 4 November 1932.

⁵³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 1443/1932, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 2 June 1933.

Department. Stevens emphatically argued that the ‘native recreational grounds will always be required in connection with the Department and as years go by will doubtless be more difficult to obtain.’⁵⁴ The PMBC gave Stevens and the Town Clerk permission to negotiate the purchase of the sport grounds by the Municipality, which they both prioritised. However, the SA Railways and Harbours Department turned down the proposal from the PMBC, indicating that it intended to ‘carry out the housing of non-Europeans’ for its employees.⁵⁵ Despite this setback, the ongoing correspondence between Stevens and SA Railways and Harbours demonstrates that he had committed himself to the development and provision of sport fields for Africans.⁵⁶ By the end of the 1930s the PMBC had allocated the Berg Street and Fitzsimons Road Native Sports grounds for the exclusive utilisation by Africans and also allocated an annual grant.⁵⁷

The control of African football in Pietermaritzburg

The 1940s marked a turning point in the administration of African football in Pietermaritzburg. The relationship between the MDAFA and the PMBC soured over its radical stance and the involvement of Gwala and Selby Mazibuko. The fact that relations between the PMBC and MDAFA became acrimonious was attributed to Gwala’s political affiliation as he was known to be a member of the Communist Party and a trade unionist. In addition, the PMBC was already suspicious of African football associations and groups as they had already mushroomed in Durban, Johannesburg and Cape Town as radical alternatives to the conservative and collaborating ‘Bantu’ associations.⁵⁸ This was

⁵⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 1443/1932, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 12 April 1938.

⁵⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 1443/1932, letter from District Engineer of the SA Railways and Harbours to the Town Clerk, 3 November 1938.

⁵⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/307, file 1443/1932, correspondence between R. E. Stevens and the SA Railways and Harbours Department, 30 May 1938, 24 June 1938, 5 July 1938, 3 August 1938, 12 August 1938, 3 November 1938, 10 August 1939, 19 August 1939.

⁵⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/322, file 1047/1938, letter from A. J. McGibbon and Brokensha to the Town Clerk, 8 December 1939; PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/322, file 1047/1938, unsigned agreement of lease between PCC and MDBFA, undated.

⁵⁸ Alegi, ‘Playing to the Gallery?’, 22.

exacerbated by the involvement of the 'African' associations in Johannesburg in the glittering Moroka-Baloyi Cup in the early 1940s. Dr A. B. Xuma, then president-general of the ANC, had suggested to Dr James Moroka, ANC executive member and president-general between 1949 and 1952, and Richard Baloyi, South Africa African Football Association's (SAAFA) treasurer-general and an Alexandra businessman, that the Cup be established.⁵⁹ By 1944 the Cup had grown to the extent that Baloyi was able to use it to organise a historic match to raise funds for the ANC.⁶⁰ Against this background, the PMBC was suspicious of the MDAFA's radical and often combative stance and was reluctant to lease grounds to the association or provide it with an annual grant similar to one that went to the MDNFA.

Moreover, as was evident in the memorandum to the Minister of Justice, by the mid-1940s the state had already begun to use its intelligence agents to construct a criminal identity of Gwala that was to become 'prima facia (sic) evidence to prosecute him and anticipated his possible removal from society.'⁶¹ Furthermore, as Robert Archer and Antoine Bouillon have argued, after the victory of the National Party in 1948, the relationship between sport and social control became more sinister as the state overtly politicised sport by prohibiting interracial games while promoting sport codes that sought to 'retribalise' urban Africans.⁶²

The PMBC was upset about the confrontational approach the MDAFA had adopted. It was always at loggerheads with the PMBC due to its independent and Africanist stance.⁶³ The MDAFA accused the PMBC of manipulating African football and using its power to maintain an official monopoly over all African sports in the city. This issue had already been

⁵⁹ J. Nauright, *Sport, Cultures and Identities in South Africa* (London: Leicester University Press, 1997), 121-122.

⁶⁰ Sports Reporter, 'National Congress Sport's Day', *Bantu World*, 29 August 1944.

⁶¹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified top secret memorandum of the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, letter from the Natal Police Superintendent to Pietermaritzburg police commander.

⁶² R. Archer and A. Bouillon, *The South African Game: Sport and Racism* (London: Zed Press, 1982), 112-140.

⁶³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/3/322, file 1047/1938, letter from secretary of the MDAFA to the Native Administration Department, 4 February 1944; Merrett, 'Sport, Space and Segregation', 166. The independent Africanist football association experienced a similar scenario in Johannesburg, see Badenhorst, 'Organised African Sport and Recreation in Johannesburg', 289-90.

raised by the breakaway group in Johannesburg in the early 1930s.⁶⁴ Bang, the manager of the NAD, later commented:

This association, led by T. H. Gwala and S. Mazibuko, has caused this Department so much trouble including frivolous legal actions and so much time has been spent in clearing up and writing about petty disputes brought up through obstructionist tactics, that this opportunity of making it 'toe' the line should not be lost.⁶⁵

The PMBC responded to the radical stance of the MDFAFA by favouring the MDNFA.

During the 1944 soccer season, the MDFAFA was allocated only one day of access to the soccer grounds while the MDNFA had a year-long lease. The radical stance that the MDFAFA adopted was to some extent a response to the level of provocation by the administration under Stevens, and its biased and patronising decisions. Until 1946, the MDFAFA attempted to shape itself to fit in with the PMBC's requirements. In 1946, for example, it opted not to contest the use of football grounds in Fitzsimons because it wanted to avoid conflict with the PMBC and was hoping to use the football ground in Sobantu.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, the PMBC was unwilling to change its attitude to the MDFAFA.

While there is a dearth of historical records that linked Gwala to soccer before 1947, Truman Magubane remembered that Gwala 'had a passion for football and he knew its rules very well.'⁶⁷ Magubane said that Gwala did not play football due to his busy schedule as a trade union organiser and office bearer of about ten trade unions, but attended football matches regularly. Gwala identified weekend soccer matches as a platform for grassroots mobilisation and the arena of political consciousness. It is for this reason that even when Gwala was

⁶⁴ Badenhorst, 'Organised African Sport and Recreation in Johannesburg', 294.

⁶⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from D. N. Bang to the Town Clerk, 12 August 1952.

⁶⁶ Merrett, *Sport, Space and Segregation*, 197.

⁶⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane.

moved to organise workers in Durban during the late 1940s, he spent his weekends in Pietermaritzburg.

On 9 August and 13 September 1947 the MDAFA held special meetings to ‘consider certain allegations against the executive.’⁶⁸ Gwala emphasised that these meetings were characterised by robust debates, intimidation, and major confrontation.⁶⁹ The MDAFA meeting of 13 September 1947 was concluded with a resolution to expel T. A. Nene and H. A. Mkize. Gwala and Selby Mazibuko were elected to the executive as secretary and president respectively.⁷⁰ Nene had been elected president of the MDAFA at its annual general meeting in February 1947. Nene and Mkize appealed to the Natal African Football Association (NAFA) which rescinded the resolution to expel them and ordered that they be reinstated immediately. But the Gwala-Mazibuko faction appealed against the decision of the NAFA to the SAAFA.

The simmering tension between the two factions of the MDAFA reached boiling point in November 1947 when they were unable to reach consensus on which team was to play in the semi-finals of the Governor General Shield Competition (GGSC). The GGSC had been established in 1935 when ‘King George V and the Governor General of South Africa, [Sir Patrick Duncan], proposed to donate a Shield on which would appear the King’s head in silver bas-relief, to the native of the location of Cape Town as a challenge shield for native association football clubs.’⁷¹ The Mayor of Pietermaritzburg ‘kindly accepted’ the offer and

⁶⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/343, file 199/14, affidavit of Theodore Nene, 18 November 1947.

⁶⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Town Clerk, 14 April 1948; and affidavits of T. H. Gwala, 29 November 1947.

⁷⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, affidavit of Selby Mazibuko, 14 November 1947, affidavit of T. H. Gwala, 14 November 1947, affidavit of P. Kumalo, 14 November 1948.

⁷¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from ‘HYDE’ Comptroller of the Governor-General to the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, 12 March 1935.

extended it to all 'natives' of the Province of Natal and the trophy was posted by a passenger train on 29 April 1935.⁷²

During the mid-1930s, there were two organisations controlling 'native' football in Natal, the Natal Bantu Football Association and the Natal African Football Association. Stevens suggested that a committee should be established to be responsible for drawing up fixtures and rules governing the competition comprised of representatives from both organisations and 'one European.'⁷³ After the committee was established it arranged that the competition be played in Durban, Ladysmith and Pietermaritzburg. However, as no playing grounds were available in Durban while Ladysmith could not provide an enclosed ground to allow the committee to take a gate [collect gate entrance fees], Pietermaritzburg had, 'with the greatest difficulty, to bear the brunt of financing teams from Ladysmith and Durban to keep up their fixtures in the semi-finals and finals which had to be played in Maritzburg.'⁷⁴

The reluctance by Durban and Ladysmith to host the competition required that Stevens had to request the PMBC to make funds available for the competition to take place. By 30 November 1936 the PMBC provided the last funding. It was the last year the competition was played, even though the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg had authorised that the competition be open to Pietermaritzburg and District teams only.⁷⁵ Despite their short duration, these efforts demonstrated a concerted effort by the PMBC to control African leisure time.⁷⁶ Moreover, through the GGSC, the local state had attempted to amalgamate the 'natives' football associations.' However, this was rejected by the Durban and District African Football

⁷² PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg to the Comptroller of the Governor-General, 5 April 1935; letter from the Governor-General to the Mayor of Pietermaritzburg, 29 April 1935; letter from the Secretary Board of Control, GGS Competition to the Manager, NAD, 17 May 1937.

⁷³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 13 May 1935.

⁷⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from the Secretary Board of Control, GGS Competition to the Manager, NAD, 17 May 1937.

⁷⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, minutes of the Pietermaritzburg Native Administration Committee, 30 June 1937.

⁷⁶ Merrett, 'Social Control and Communal Resistance', 49.

Association, which represented a stronger section of the NAFA, and which believed that the MDNFA's constitution was 'modelled upon Europeans' ones.'⁷⁷ There is no archival evidence about whether the committee was able to develop rules for the GGSC. It seems that it was the lack of rules that resulted in the 1947 controversy.

As the PMBC's interests in African leisure time grew at the beginning of the 1940s, the Maritzburg Bantu Football Association, which had withdrawn from the MDNFA in 1926, wrote to Stevens expressing its loss of confidence in the board of the GGSC and requested his office to take 'full control of the competition.'⁷⁸ In response to this plea, the Mayor gave 'authority to Stevens to appoint a certain Mr S. W. Pape to act as a neutral chairman of a meeting comprising of both the Bantu Football Association and the African Football Association.'⁷⁹ Although various meetings were held under Pape's chairmanship, these were in vain. It was not until March 1945 when W. M. Anderson, the Deputy Mayor, suggested that the office of the NAD 'should take control of the competition' that the competition was resuscitated under the direct control of the PMBC.⁸⁰ In 1946, both associations were requested to put forward two teams to compete, and the competition was staged successfully.

While the PMBC had 'celebrated' the souring tensions within the MDAFA, it failed to take into account the impact on the staging of its prestigious GGSC. When the PMBC invited two teams from 'the Bantu Football Association and from the African Football Association' for the 1947 GGSC season, it received a letter from Gwala identifying the two teams eligible for the semi-finals, and from J. A. Mkize who wrote in the capacity of acting secretary and

⁷⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from the General Secretary of the Durban and District African Football Association to the Honorary Secretary of the Governor General's Shield Committee, 26 August 1936.

⁷⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from John Zulu, President of Maritzburg Bantu Football Association to the Manager, NAD, 16 April 1942.

⁷⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, memorandum regarding Governor-General's Shield, undated, 1.

⁸⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, memorandum regarding Governor-General's Shield, undated, 1; minutes of the Native Administration Committee, 12 March 1945.

treasurer of the MDAFA.⁸¹ The PMBC found itself having to choose between two officials who were purporting to speak on behalf of the MDAFA. Gwala's faction favoured the 'Stars of Hope' while Nene's faction favoured the Standards. The semi-finals had been set for 15 November 1947 with the finals on 29 November 1947. Stevens wrote to Gwala that:

I have to advise you that in view of all the information at the disposal of this department, at present it is proposed to recognise Mr. T. A. Nene as being the Honorary President of the association and Mr. J. A. Mkize acting Secretary and Treasurer. In the latter capacity Mr Mkize has sent forward the names of the two teams which are to take part on the above competition.⁸²

On 12 November 1947 Gwala's faction of the MDAFA held its special general meeting which authorised Selby Mazibuko, P. Kumalo and T. H. Gwala 'to take [legal] action to restrain the Council [PMBC] from recognising the recommendation put forward by T. A. Nene and J. Mkize in respect of the rights of the Standard Club and the Assegai Club.'⁸³ Gwala's faction applied for a court order against the PMBC's recognition of the 'the Standard Club' and to restrain T.A. Nene and one J. A. Mkize from acting as office bearers of the MDAFA.⁸⁴ The Court granted an interim interdict as Mazibuko had argued that if played, the semi-finals would cause 'irreparable injury' to his association.⁸⁵

On the morning of the semi-finals, 15 November, Stevens claimed he had not received court papers as he had attended the official opening of the nursery school at Edendale. At about 12:45 p.m. he claimed to have been handed a 'file of papers containing typewritten sheets and in one of which [he] read that [he] was summoned to appear on the 21st [November] to show cause why [the PMBC] should not be interdicted from playing in the competition in the

⁸¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, memorandum regarding Governor-General's Shield, undated, 2.

⁸² PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from Mr R. E. Stevens to Mr. T. H. Gwala, 4 November 1947.

⁸³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, affidavit of Selby Mazibuko, 14 November 1947.

⁸⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, court order, case no. 2366/1947.

⁸⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, affidavit of Selby Mazibuko, 14 November 1947.

manner decided upon.⁸⁶ Stevens claimed to have discussed this matter with the Town Clerk and they both agreed that ‘in the circumstances no steps should be taken to prevent the matches taking place, which [had] already been arranged that afternoon and were due to commence in an hour or so time.’⁸⁷ While Stevens regrettably claimed to have overlooked the last line of the memo which read that this was an interim interdict, it is difficult to believe that both senior officials of the city were unaware of the court application. When the semi-finals were about to start, Gwala and his supporters ‘turned up at the ground and threatened violence if the teams who were there attempted to play, so no match took place.’⁸⁸ When the matter was heard, the court found that Stevens had been incorrectly cited as an administrator of the GGSC instead of the Mayor. The application of Gwala’s faction was therefore dismissed on technical grounds, with costs, and the new date for the competition was set for 29 November 1947.⁸⁹ In a desperate act of vindictiveness, less than a month after the court dismissed the Gwala faction’s application, Stevens had already advised the Town Clerk that ‘should there be any difficulty in collecting these costs it might be possible to have a writ issued in respect of the properties’ of Gwala and Samson Hadebe at Ockert’s Kraal and Msimangville respectively.⁹⁰ There is no evidence that the writ was ever issued and the costs were never paid.

Determined to ensure that the GGSC not take place, Samson Hadebe, Manager of the Stars of Hope and an executive of the MDFAFA, secured an interim interdict on 29 November 1947 against the administrator of the GGSC to prevent Standard Club from participating in the tournament. Again, the semi-final had to be postponed pending a court judgment. This led to another legal dispute about the election of office bearers of both factions and contention

⁸⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, memorandum regarding Governor-General’s Shield, undated, 3.

⁸⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, memorandum regarding Governor-General’s Shield, undated, 4.

⁸⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, memorandum regarding Governor-General’s Shield, undated, 4.

⁸⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, F. B. Burchell, ‘Litigation re football matches GG’s Shield’, 30 July 1948.

⁹⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 8 December 1947.

about which team was on the top of the MDFAFA log.⁹¹ Technically speaking, the dispute about the team at the top of the log was a result of the GGSC committee failing to develop clear rules to govern the competition since 1935. However, the dispute was about far broader issues than the absence of clear competition rules. Through these two legal actions, Gwala took the liberation struggle and working class resistance onto the football field. Football administration and the game itself became a field of struggle in which resistance politics was expressed.

The PMBC's attorney F. B. Burchell filed opposing affidavits from A. E. Hirst, R. E. Stevens, W. M. Anderson, Theodore Nene and G. Tshezi on 3 December 1947.⁹² In his affidavit George Tshezi stated:

S. Mazibuko, P. Kumalo and T. H. Gwala are leading a portion of the members of the Association against the lawful authority of Nene the lawful President and the attitude of these men in preventing the completion of the Governor-General's Shield Competition is causing annoyance and unrest among the Bantu Native population of Maritzburg.⁹³

The Mayor sought to discredit Gwala's faction of the MDFAFA as follows:

The Maritzburg and District African Football Association has not made itself a party to this application as second application in that any meeting held by a section of the members... has no locus standi to pass such resolution and there is no proof whatsoever before the Court that Mazibuko, Kumalo and Gwala have been properly appointed to the offices alleged to be held by them or that the meeting itself was lawfully competent to pass and put into effect such resolution.⁹⁴

The court found in favour of the PMBC and Gwala's faction was again ordered to pay costs.

The semi-final match was eventually played at the Edendale Sports Ground on 13 December 1947. As Stevens said, 'in order to ensure that the semi-final match did not result in a breach

⁹¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, affidavits Simon Hadebe, P. Kumalo and S. Mazibuko, T. H. Gwala, 29 November 1947, and affidavits George Tshezi and Theodore Nene, 3 December 1947.

⁹² PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, respondent's attorney's notice of the intention to oppose the interdict, 3 December 1947.

⁹³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/3/342, file 199/14, affidavit of George Tshezi, 3 December 1947.

⁹⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/3/342, file 199/14, affidavit of A. E. Hirst, 3 December 1947.

of the peace it was necessary to secure the assistance of the District Commandant of the Police who supplied about twenty members of the police and a pick up.⁹⁵ This show of force intimidated Gwala's supporters. Stevens reported that when the opposition Natives [Gwala's faction] saw this show of force they disappeared from the ground and the match was played without any further incident.⁹⁶ The finals were held at the Fitzsimons Road Stadium Grounds on 20 December 1947. The dispute between the two factions of the MDFA had become so heated that Gwala described it as a situation 'that threatens bloodshed.'⁹⁷

While these internal legal processes were taking place, Nene and Mkize mobilised their faction of the MDFA to hold a special annual general meeting. The Nene-Mkize faction refused to recognise the Gwala and Mazibuko faction as it claimed that they were 'never lawfully or constitutionally elected.'⁹⁸ During the proceedings of its meeting on 27 January 1948, the Nene-Mkize faction, which claimed to be a constitutional body of the MDFA, resolved to 'suspend' Gwala and Mazibuko from the executive.⁹⁹ The Gwala-Mazibuko faction anticipated being suspended and disregarded this resolution. The constitution of the MDFA required the members to elect the executive at its annual general meeting. Both factions held their own annual general meetings on 8 February 1948. The Nene-Mkize faction held its meeting at the City Hall and elected T. A. Nene as president, while Gwala's faction met at Berg Street Hall and re-elected Gwala as its honorary secretary.¹⁰⁰ The Nene-Mkize faction's holding of its annual general meeting at the City Hall displayed its close relationship with the PMBC and its middle class orientation. By contrast, the meeting at the Berg Street

⁹⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/3/342, file 199/14, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 9 January 1948.

⁹⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 9 January 1948.

⁹⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. H. Gwala to Town Clerk, 14 April 1948.

⁹⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, affidavit of George Tshezi, 3 December 1947.

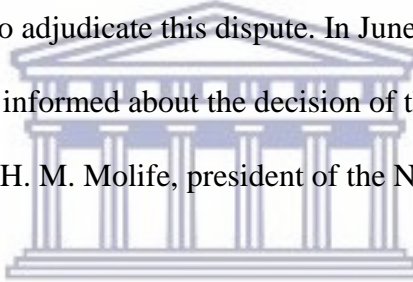
⁹⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. A. Nene to the Manager NAD, 16 April 1948.

¹⁰⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Town Clerk, 14 April 1948, letter from T. A. Nene to the Manager NAD, 16 April 1948.

Hall represented the subaltern cultural and working class orientation which was in line with Gwala's political consciousness.

Gwala claimed to have been legitimately elected by a 'required quorum after due and timely notice of such meeting had been given to all members of the association.'¹⁰¹ He claimed his faction's annual general meeting was the legitimate one since he had sent notices in due time to all members and accused 'the opposing faction for failure to attend and electing Mr Raymond Kuzwayo as their secretary at a separate meeting, whereof they were given no notification.'¹⁰² Nene claimed 'all clubs including Gwala's had been duly invited to attend a meeting' which elected him and said that Gwala and Mazibuko were absent.¹⁰³

The SAAFA took six months to adjudicate this dispute. In June 1948, it ruled against Nene-Mkize faction.¹⁰⁴ Having been informed about the decision of the SAAFA to uphold the expulsion of Nene and Mkize, H. M. Molife, president of the NAFA wrote to the NAD as follows:



I wish to inform you that my Association is not prepared to accept any decision by South Africa African Football Association upholding the appeal on behalf of the MDFAFA, as represented by the suspended members. My association still recognises the MDFAFA under the Presidency of Mr. Nene and I hope that you will not be influenced by any letter sent to you directly or otherwise unless it has been communicated direct to you by us through the MDFAFA which is affiliated to the Natal African Football Association and whose President is Mr. T. A. Nene, and Secretary is Mr. R. Kuzwayo, both of Maritzburg. The Association under Messrs. Mazibuko and T. Gwala is not recognised by my Association and is considered a rebel association.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Town Clerk, 14 April 1948.

¹⁰² PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Town Clerk, 14 April 1948.

¹⁰³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. A. Nene to the Manager NAD, 16 April 1948.

¹⁰⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Town Clerk, 1 July 1948; letter from D. R. Twala, Honorary Secretary of the SAAFA, to H. T. Gwala, 30 June 1948.

¹⁰⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342, file 199/14, letter from H. M. Molife to the Manager: Native Administration Department, 6 July 1948.

Molife's defiant letter was an attempt to influence the NAD not to recognise Gwala and Mazibuko's faction even though SAAFA, a national body to which NAFA was affiliated, had already made a ruling. This indicated a conspicuous display of the hatred intended to disconnect Gwala. Because the PMBC was aware of Gwala's politics, it sided with the Nene-Mkize faction, even though the MDFAFA was not its favourite football organisation.¹⁰⁶ Until the end of 1949, the NAFA failed to recognise the Gwala-Mazibuko MDFAFA faction even though the SAAFA had made a ruling on the matter.¹⁰⁷ In the meantime, teams of the MDNFA played the GGSC finals without MDFAFA participation.

The beginning of the 1950s heralded a shift in Gwala's politics of connectedness and the state's attempts to disconnect him. The NAFA changed its position towards the MDFAFA. It recognised Gwala's faction while the PMBC questioned his authority to be involved in Pietermaritzburg's football fraternity since it claimed he was domiciled in Durban. By March 1950, both factions of the MDFAFA submitted their requests to be granted permission to use soccer grounds during the season and for an annual grant to maintain the fields. Faced with pressure from the Gwala-Mazibuko faction, the PMBC attempted to reconcile the two groups, but the Gwala faction recused itself from the process. Gwala and Mazibuko insisted that they could not trust the adjudicator to be impartial as he had unilaterally been appointed by the PMBC.¹⁰⁸ The PMBC, however, attributed the deadlock to Gwala and Mazibuko's political identities as they were 'officials of an organisation whose avowed object is the winning of national freedom for the African people and the inauguration of a people's free society where racial oppression and persecution will be outlawed and the African freed from white

¹⁰⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from the NAD Manager to the Town Clerk, 16 March 1950.

¹⁰⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/342 letter from H. M. Molife to Manager NAD, 6 July 1948.

¹⁰⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Town Clerk, 20 March 1950.

domination.¹⁰⁹ The PMBC refused to provide an annual grant to the MDAFA; instead it opted to take over the maintenance of soccer grounds itself.

The NAFA had planned to hold its annual general meeting on 18 April 1950, excluding Gwala and Mazibuko as delegates representing the MDAFA. Gwala obtained an interim interdict restraining the NAFA from holding its AGM without him and Mazibuko being present.¹¹⁰ In compliance with the court order, the NAFA held its AGM on 22 April 1950 with Gwala and Mazibuko in attendance. Gwala managed to convince the majority of the delegates that his faction stood for the interests of Africans in Pietermaritzburg. After some intense deliberations, the majority of the delegates resolved that they would recognise Gwala's faction of the MDAFA as an official body and further recognised Gwala and Mazibuko as 'duly appointed representatives on the Council of the Maritzburg and District African Football Association.'¹¹¹ The NAFA Council requested the MDAFA to 'let bygones be bygones and take all steps to bring about friendship and harmony among all Africans who support Football in Maritzburg and District.'¹¹² The NAFA's recognition meant that the Gwala and Mazibuko faction was in legitimate control of the MDAFA and it committed itself to end the stalemate that had crippled the operations of the MDAFA since 1947.

Despite this recognition, the PMBC denied the MDAFA access to soccer grounds because R. E. Stevens emphatically urged the Council not to recognise MDAFA as it was a front for the Communist Party.¹¹³ In spite of NAFA officially informing the PMBC about its decision to recognise Gwala and Mazibuko's MDAFA, and considerable pressure from the NAFA and

¹⁰⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from D. N. Bang to the Town Clerk, 16 March 1950.

¹¹⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, Order of the Supreme Court of South Africa, Natal Provincial Division, 6 April 1950.

¹¹¹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, Resolution of the NAFA Council meeting, 22 April 1950.

¹¹² PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 16 March 1950.

¹¹³ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Secretary, NAFA, 11 May 1950; PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from R. E. Stevens to the Town Clerk, 16 March 1950.

lawyers representing the MDFAFA, the PMBC maintained that it had ‘never recognised the T. H. Gwala section of the African Football Association since they broke away from the T. A. Nene section.’¹¹⁴ D. N. Bang, who had succeeded R. E. Stevens as NAD manager, continued with efforts to challenge Gwala by contesting his authority in Pietermaritzburg affairs on the grounds that Gwala was ‘domiciled in Durban’ and ‘had no authority to be in [Pietermaritzburg] city.’¹¹⁵ Bang seems to have taken a more extremely antagonistic position than his predecessor tinged with personal hatred of Gwala. He described him as a ‘jealous native’ who was not exempted from pass laws, even though Gwala had been exempted in 1945.¹¹⁶ Bang recommended that the PMBC should never provide access to soccer grounds for the MDFAFA as long as Gwala was on its executive. Gwala described his relationship with Bang as ‘intimidating.’¹¹⁷ These efforts by officials of the local state represented attempts at discrediting Gwala from football and society.

In June 1951 O. A. Nkwanyana, the assistant secretary of NAFA, appealed to the PMBC to recognise the new office bearers of the MDFAFA and to provide soccer grounds ‘in view of the pressing nature and congestion on the fixture.’¹¹⁸ Nkwanyana pointed out that the NAFA was keen to unite the two factions of the MDFAFA and had ‘called the sections concerned and attempted or endeavoured to have elections of office bearers in the presence of all Pietermaritzburg football lovers, but unfortunately one section failed to co-operate and this was the Nene section.’ He emphatically indicated that the NAFA did not want to allow few individuals to ‘impede the whole progress of sport.’¹¹⁹ Despite Nkwanyana’s commitment to

¹¹⁴ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from H. M. Molife to the Town Clerk, 13 May 1950; PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from D. N. Bang to the Town Clerk, 15 May 1950.

¹¹⁵ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from D. N. Bang to the Town Clerk, 15 May 1950.

¹¹⁶ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from D. N. Bang to the Town Clerk, 15 June 1950; NAR, SAB, 2234/01/1367, exemption certificate of Harry Gwala, 3 May 1945.

¹¹⁷ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Secretary, Natal African Football Association, 11 June 1950.

¹¹⁸ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from O. A. Nkwanyana to the Town Clerk, 8 June 1950.

¹¹⁹ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from O. A. Nkwanyana to the Town Clerk, 8 June 1950.

building unity within the MDAFA and indications that the two sections had started to work together, the PMBC was adamant in its refusal to give Gwala and Mazibuko's faction of MDAFA access to soccer grounds in the city and an ad-hoc grant.¹²⁰

Apart from PMBC records of decisions about funding and access to soccer grounds, surviving archival records do not provide a vivid picture of the MBFA at this time. It is not clear whether it had elections and who the office bearers were, especially during the 1950s. This observation can also be made about Nene's faction of the MDAFA, but the Gwala faction's activities were adequately documented. In February 1951 the Gwala faction held its elections with Mazibuko as president and Gwala as secretary.¹²¹

At the same time Gwala was also elected to the executive committee of the NAFA and seconded to represent NAFA at the executive of the South Africa African Football Association.¹²² After the election Gwala informed delegates that the MDAFA was on a better footing and, to try to ensure that such problems did not arise in the future, its constitution had to be overhauled. During 1951, the MDAFA hosted the Port Elizabeth Touring Soccer Team. As part of Gwala's non-racial stance, the trip involved playing with an Indian soccer team. When the Port Elizabeth team was in Pietermaritzburg, Gwala organised that it should be taken on a tour of 'Maritzburg sub-economic housing scheme in Sobantu.'¹²³ This visit had more to do with the politics of native urban housing than soccer. Gwala admitted that the visit to Sobantu would show its similarities with New Brighton.

¹²⁰ PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, minutes of the Native Administration Committee, 15 May 1950, 30 May 1950.

¹²¹ Other officer bearers were, P. P. Mbuli (assistant secretary), S. T. Kumalo (treasurer), M. Gule (first additional member), P. H. Kumalo (second additional member), W. Ciliza (organiser), see, PAR, 3/PMB, 4/4/2/140, file 242/3, G95/BJC, letter from T. H. Gwala to the Manager, Native Affairs Department, 12 February 1951

¹²² Staff reporter, 'Maritzburg District African Football Association', *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 31 March 1951; Staff reporter, 'Natal African Football Association Ukhetho, 1951', *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 28 April 1951.

¹²³ Staff reporter, 'Maritzburg and District News', *Ilanga Lase Natal*, 20 June 1951.

By the end of 1951, the PMBC indicated that it would not provide permission to use football grounds or an ad-hoc grant to the MDFAFA because of outstanding audited financial statements. While the MDFAFA had already predicted the PMBC's stance and decided to host its football matches in Sobantu sport grounds, lack of financial support from the PMBC crippled its operations. In addition, after the promulgation of the Suppression of Communism Act, Gwala began to fight with the state for his name not to be included in the list of people associated with the now-disbanded Communist Party. Due to these political complexities, Gwala did not make himself available to be elected to the executive of 1952 and, as stated in the previous chapter, he was subsequently listed and banned in April 1952. This led to the collapse of his faction of the MDFAFA as Mazibuko also disappeared from the political fraternity.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that Gwala politics of connectedness began to germinate during the 1940s. As with other political leaders such as Luthuli and O. E. Msimang, Gwala did not confine his politics to party politics; instead he used football as an arena for promoting political consciousness. But Gwala defined himself differently because his politics intertwined both class and liberation struggles, since he was an active member of both the Communist Party and the ANC. This chapter has situated Gwala's role in the administration of football in Pietermaritzburg and Natal within the broader political and class struggles of the 1940s. His involvement in football shows the extent to which football transcended class boundaries and made connections with the broader politics of mass mobilisation. Gwala's acrimonious relations with the PMBC were an expression of the broader political concerns that characterised protest politics in Pietermaritzburg during the 1940s and 1950s. The cause of conflict between Gwala and the PMBC was not because of his alleged politicisation of

football, rather because the PMBC intended to control sport and use it as its political tool, something that Gwala's association strongly resisted. Throughout the 1940s, the PMBC insisted in its reports that 'sport amongst natives was encouraged' and repeatedly downplayed antagonism with MDFAFA by empathically stressing that 'as usual the behaviour of the natives in Pietermaritzburg [had] been exemplary.'¹²⁴ The PMBC's support of one faction of the MDFAFA which was opposed to Gwala was part of a broader state strategy of 'divide and rule.'

The chapter has demonstrated how the PMBC's paternalistic interest in the provision and concerns of African leisure time was often challenged and this provided a forum the emergence of political consciousness. Despite the PMBC's efforts to use football to defuse political mobilisation, Gwala continued to attract wide support and following across the spectrum of football teams and administrators.

The MDNFA's relations with the PMBC were strongly affected by the Council's ability to control space and resources. This weakened its influence and its relationship with the PMBC remained collegial, thus making it a proxy for white paternalism. This chapter has also demonstrated how football enabled African migrants to Pietermaritzburg were able to forge collective identities and class consciousness that provided the platform from which grassroots political activism was born. Furthermore, it has demonstrated how football became a major sport among urban dwellers and how it became inextricably connected to the wider social and political transformation that characterised the evolution of Gwala's politics of connectedness.

¹²⁴ *Pietermaritzburg Corporation Yearbook*, 1950, 79.

CHAPTER FOUR

The radicalisation of Harry Gwala and politics of disconnectedness, 1960-1977

Introduction

At its national conference in December 1960, the underground Communist Party reviewed the significance of the events of the State of Emergency earlier that year as well as how the emergency was experienced. Conference delegates remarked that the government had passed from the stage where it was attempting to control and combat the peoples' movement by parliamentary-style rule whenever the government felt itself powerfully challenged.¹ The Party concluded that in the light of such blatant repression, the people's movement could no longer hope to continue along the road of exclusively non-violent forms of political struggle. It decided that the Central Committee should 'take steps to initiate the training and equipping of selected personnel in new methods of struggle.' These steps would thus prepare the nucleus of an adequate apparatus to lead struggles of a more forcible and violent character.² This shift towards the ethos of violence was vital to the germination of Harry Gwala's political militancy.

This chapter examines how the shift in the state's application of physical and psychological violence was applied against Harry Gwala. It further shows how South African courts became a tool to isolate Gwala from the political movement.³ It argues that proceedings before the

¹ UWL, HLP, Kasrils Papers, A3345, A6.1.4.1, memorandum, undated. I am grateful to Professor Tom Lodge for sharing this document with me.

² UWL, HLP, Kasrils Papers, A3345, A6.1.4.1, memorandum, undated; for an in-depth discussion on role of the Communist Part in the South Africa's armed struggle see, T. Karis, 'Revolution in the Making: Black Politics in South Africa', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 62, No. 2, 1983; S. Ellis and T. Sechaba, *Comrades Against Apartheid: The ANC and South African Communist Party in Exile* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 95-102; H. Barrell, 'Turn to the masses: The African National Congress' strategic review of 1978-79', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol.18, No.1 (Special Issue: Social History of Resistance in South Africa), 1992, 64-92.

³ M. Lobban, *White Man's Justice: South African Political Trials in the Black Consciousness Era* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 174.

South African courts became acts of revenge by the state while political activists such as Gwala used them as theatres of struggle. It demonstrates how the state's continuous attempts to disconnect Gwala from his political base were a way of inflicting perpetual pain against him.⁴ The chapter further points to the extent to which South African courts became forms through which the state attempted to define Gwala as a criminal. In addition, I show how Gwala used the same courts as sites of resistance.

This chapter locates Gwala's shift towards militancy as a direct response to excessive violence and provocation by the state, having endured a period of systematic disconnection through being banned. Gwala's actions must be understood in the wider political context of the state's approach to the liberation movements from 1960. Furthermore, this chapter examines how Gwala strategically used the court's objectification and construction of criminality to reconfigure the identity of the freedom fighter. This chapter focuses on Gwala's three trials between 1960 and 1977, and places them within the paradigm of a legal heritage of political trials in South Africa. It also seeks a new understanding of political trials as both tools of political exclusion and as theatres of struggle.⁵

Political militancy and the shift to armed struggle

Harry Gwala's life, politics and political trials he endured during the period 1960-1977 require us to appreciate the context that necessitated this shift to violence. This period was marked by a broader shift within both the ANC and Communist Party from non-violent, peaceful, mass-based politics to armed struggle. There were various reasons behind this shift.

⁴ For a discussion of how the silences in history see D. W. Cohen, *Combining of History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 54.

⁵ P. Lalu, 'Sara's Suicide: History and the representational limit', *Kronos*, No. 26, 2000, 89. Mamdani discusses the question of the perpetuation of subjectivity and domination, see M. Mamdani, *Define and Rule: Native as a Political Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012); M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996).

The state had already demonstrated its willingness to mobilise the law against its opponents with the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950 and other oppressive laws. Raymond Suttner traced the roots of the formal launch of Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) on 16 December 1960 back to as early as 1953 when the ANC agreed secretly that a ‘plan be drawn up to enable the movement to operate underground in the likely event that it would be banned.’⁶ Stephen Ellis also argued that the ‘viciousness that led to the dissolution of the Communist Party caused many activists of other persuasions to fear that similar draconian measures would soon be used against them.’⁷

Meanwhile, when Walter Sisulu was provided with funds from the World Federation of Democratic Youth, a Soviet organisation, to embark on a trip to Romania, Poland, Russia and China in 1953, Nelson Mandela asked him to ‘discuss the possibility of armed struggle with [the] Chinese.’⁸ Sisulu duly raised the matter with the Chinese who cautioned that the armed struggle should only be undertaken when the conditions were right. Govan Mbeki observed that by the end of the 1950s ‘the rank and file membership of the ANC, especially the youth, were increasingly insisting that the policy of non-violence had had its day and was no longer practicable in the face of the harsh measures which the government was meting out to peaceful African protests.’⁹

⁶ Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa*, 18.

⁷ S. Ellis, ‘The Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle in South Africa, 1948-1961’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 4, 2011, 659.

⁸ Sisulu, *Walter and Albertina Sisulu*, 164. For a detailed discussion of the armed struggle see, Magubane, ‘Introduction: The political context’; B. Magubane, P. Bonner, J. Sithole, P. Delius, J. Cherry, P. Gibbs and T. April, ‘Turn to the Armed Struggle’, in *SADET, The Road to Democracy in South Africa: Volume 1 (1960-70)*, (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004); S. Ellis, ‘The Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle’; R. Suttner, ‘African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia’, *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 49, 2003; V. Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2008); N. Mandela, *The Struggle is My Life* (London: International Defence Aid Fund, 1986), B. Turok, *Nothing but the Truth: Behind the ANC’s Struggle Politics* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2003); T. Lodge, *Mandela: A Critical Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).

⁹ G. Mbeki, *The Struggle for Liberation in South Africa: A Short History* (Cape Town: David Philip and Mayibuye Centre, 1992), 90; Mosiuoa Lekota also discusses the complexities of initiating an armed struggle see M. P. Lekota, *Prison Letters to a Daughter* (Johannesburg: Taurus Publishers, 1991), 130.

Similarly, Harry Gwala remarked that by the end of the 1950s it was clear that the state was ‘not willing to accommodate peaceful means that were put forward by liberation movements and this required that new methods of communicating views of the oppressed classes had to be devised.’¹⁰ Gwala said that the state’s violent reaction to peaceful demonstrations in Sharpeville and Langa on 21 March 1960 was an indication that the ANC had to change the way in which it engaged the apartheid government. The aftermath of the Sharpeville and Langa massacres led to the declaration of the State of Emergency and the subsequent banning of the ANC and Pan-Africanist Congress (PAC).

Gwala’s work in the underground political operations of the ANC, Communist Party and MK enables us to understand his militancy and the state’s continuous attempts to disconnect him from society and mainstream politics. As demonstrated in the previous chapters, from the mid-1940s, as Gwala became a ‘nuisance to the authority of government’, the state began to mobilise its powers to isolate him through public humiliation, exclusion and a banning order in 1952. However, from 1960, the state changed its approach towards Gwala as it began to mobilise its coercive powers and the courts as apparatuses of exclusion. Gwala’s views underwent evolutionary modification as he shifted from being a radical to a militant in his political approach and relationship with the state.¹¹

As I have shown, Gwala had been aware of the resuscitation of the Communist Party as early as 1954 but he felt excluded as he had not been given further information other than to start Marxist discussion groups and a cell in Pietermaritzburg.¹² Gwala was offended by being excluded from the Communist Party and this resulted in the growth of ‘dissatisfaction among

¹⁰ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

¹¹ Kgalema Motlanthe, address at the inaugural Harry Gwala Memorial Lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013 (unpublished). I thank Kgalema Motlanthe for sharing the transcript with me.

¹² Members of the Pietermaritzburg cell were: Selby Mazibuko, Bobby Pillay, Moses Mabhida and Golam Rasool, see Sylvia Neame interview with Harry Gwala.

other rank-and-file members' as there had been a clear indication that the Communist Party had been resuscitated.¹³ As a result, Gwala speculated about the influence and the role of Bruno Mtolo and Solomon Mbanjwa who had been recruited to the Communist Party in the 1950s. Gwala questioned their legitimacy as he argued that they had no institutional memory or in-depth political knowledge, and he remained very suspicious of them.¹⁴ It was not until 1962 that Gwala re-joined the Communist Party, having only been active in the underground operations of the ANC and trade unions after it was dissolved in 1950. As Brian Bunting has argued, the outlawing of the ANC brought about closer cooperation between the Communist Party and the ANC than had ever previously existed.¹⁵ It was through this renewed cooperation that Gwala was able to play a vital role in the underground operations of MK.

The South African state's coercive and punitive capacity emerged as greater than that in any African society, even those under colonialism.¹⁶ This situation was worsened by the promulgation of apartheid laws during the 1950s and 1960s that provided a greater range of tools to suppress political opposition and criminalise the state's opponents. The court was one of these tools of repression and the assertion of apartheid power. The state's trials against Gwala in 1961, 1964 and 1976 provide an opportunity to understand the extent to which the courts tried to isolate and criminalise Gwala. Nonetheless, these also reveal how Gwala refused to be the victims of the court system and apartheid.¹⁷

¹³ Everatt, *The Origins of Non-racialism*, 81; Magubane, et al., 'Turn to the Armed Struggle', 69; B. Bunting, *Moses Kotane, South African Revolutionary: A Political Biography* (Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, 1998), 272.

¹⁴ Sylvia Neame interview with Harry Gwala; Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Truman Magubane. Mtolo and Mbanjwa later became the key state witnesses during the Rivonia trial, the State's sabotage trial against Gwala in 1964, and the Pietermaritzburg treason trial in 1977. In order to ensure that Gwala's views on Bruno Mtolo during the 1989 interview were not influenced by the fact that Mtolo became the key state witness during the Rivonia trial, I interviewed Truman Magubane who was Gwala's contemporary from the 1960s. Magubane confirmed Gwala's suspicions of Mtolo during the 1960s prior to the Rivonia trial. See Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane.

¹⁵ Bunting, *Moses Kotane*, 257.

¹⁶ M. Chanock, *The Making of South African Legal Culture, 1902-1936: Fear, Favour and Prejudice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 41; F. Rueedi, 'Narratives on Trial: Ideology'.

¹⁷ R. L. Abel, *Politics by Other Means: Law in the Struggle against Apartheid, 1980-1994* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 10; P. E. Alexander, *Alan Paton: A Biography* (Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1995), 330-331.

The historiography of political trials in South Africa has focused largely on the 1956 Treason Trial, the 1963 Rivonia trial, the 1985 Delmas trial and the 1986 state trial of Andrew Zondo.¹⁸ A closer examination of Gwala's trials enables us to understand the complex history of MK operatives in Natal and how the state made collaborators become tools to punish its opponents. The state's political trials against Gwala yield new ways of approaching South African history and enable us to deepen our understanding of connectedness and disconnectedness and the use of the law as sites of repression and struggle.¹⁹

The state's trials against Gwala fit the argument put forward by Rueedi and Lane that treason trials are a space in which the state legitimised repression while delegitimising extra-parliamentary opposition by defining it as militant and violent.²⁰ While the use of court proceedings evidentiary records for historic reconstruction has been the subject of a robust debate among academics, these remain important sources, despite their shortcomings. While witnesses were either 'deliberately incriminating the people against whom they testified, or if they were the accused, saving themselves from possible prosecution', they nevertheless are 'invaluable narratives of the time.'²¹ Gwala's use of the trials as an arena of communicating his political and class identities to a much wider audience provides an opportunity to understanding the challenges he faced and elements of his political thought.

¹⁸ For a detailed discussion on political trials, see P. Lulu and B. Harris, 'Journeys from the Horizons of History: Text, Trial and Tales in the Construction of Narratives of Pain', *Current Writings*, Vol. 8, No. 2, 1996; C. H. Albertyn, 'A Critical Analysis of Political Trials in South Africa, 1948-1988', PhD dissertation, University of Cambridge, 1991; P. Lane, 'Heroes as Ordinary People: A Social and Cultural History of Political Imprisonment in South Africa, 1960-92', PhD thesis, University of Essex, 2009; Rueedi, 'Narratives on Trial'. For a discussion on the legal proceedings, evidence and history see C. Ginzburg, 'Checking the Evidence: The Judge and the Historian', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1999; W. Anderson, 'The Past on Trial: Birmingham, the Bombing, and Restorative Justice', *California Law Review*, Vol. 96, No. 2, 2008; P. Harris, *In a Different Time: The Inside Story of the Delmas Four* (Cape Town: Umuzi Publishers, 2008); J. Dlamini, *Askari: A Story of Collaboration and Betrayal in the Anti-Apartheid Struggle* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2014); F. Meer, *The Mis/Trial of Andrew Zondo* (Durban: Institute for Black Research, 1998).

¹⁹ K. Mann and R. Roberts, 'Introduction', in K. Mann and R. Roberts (eds.), *Law in Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1991), 35.

²⁰ Rueedi, 'Narratives on Trial'; Lane, 'Heroes as Ordinary People'.

²¹ J. Sithole, 'The ANC Underground, Armed Actions and Popular Resistance in Pietermaritzburg and the Surrounding Natal Midlands Townships', in *SADET, The Road to Democracy*, Vol. 4, 225; B. Bozzoli, *Theatres of Struggle and the End of Apartheid* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2004), 18. For a detailed discussion on the use of court records as historical sources see, R. Ross, *Beyond the Pale: Essays on the History of Colonial South Africa* (Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press, 1994).

Gwala, political trials and repression

The ‘ferocious security clampdown’ that followed the Sharpeville and Langa massacres on 21 March 1960, and the subsequent banning of both the ANC and PAC on 8 April of the same year, meant that the era of extra-parliamentary non-violent protests had ended because many leaders were detained.²² By the end of April 1961 the *African National Congress Voice*, a bulletin of the ANC, released a statement calling for the release of ‘South African men and women’ who were detained in various prisons in South Africa.²³ Gwala’s name was among those listed as having been detained in Pietermaritzburg.²⁴ As Merrett has argued, the state used detention as a ‘tool of political control’ and intimidation.²⁵ Gwala had been politically active after the expiry of his banning order in 1958. He had been involved in re-establishing trade union structures, especially the Howick Rubber Workers’ Union and as Secretary of the local Pietermaritzburg committee of SACTU from 1959 until 1962.²⁶ In addition, he had been assisting to mobilise support for the ‘£1 a Day campaign’ and working closely with the Pietermaritzburg’s ANC Women’s League. Given his political history, Sarmcol management prohibited Gwala from entering its premises to conduct trade union activities of the Howick Rubber Workers’ Union (HRWU). The HRWU had been launched on 8 March 1960 and elected Gwala as its secretary.²⁷

As the Special Branch was monitoring Gwala’s movements, Constable Bernard Zuma was aware of the establishment of the HRWU and the subsequent election of Gwala as its

²² M. Gunther, ‘The National Committee of Liberation (NCL)/African Resistance Movement (ARM)’, in *SADET, The Road to Democracy*, Vol.1, 193; Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala, 20 June 1994, Pietermaritzburg, Robben Island Interview Collection, UWC-Robben Island Mayibuye Archives.

²³ Document 61: “Congress Fights On...Release the Detainees!!!” Statement in the *African National Congress Voice: An Occasional Bulletin*, No.1, April 1960, in T. G. Karis and G. M. Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge: A Documentary History of African Politics in South Africa, 1882-1990: Challenge and Violence, 1953-1964*, Vol.3 (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 531-535.

²⁴ Other names included: Mr. P. Brown, Dr Chetty, Dr Motala, Mr Meidner, Mr D. March and Dr Omar.

²⁵ C. Merrett, ‘Detention Without Trial in South Africa: The Abuse of Human Rights as State Strategy in the Late 1980s’, *Africa Today*, Vol. 31, No. 2, 1990, 60.

²⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

²⁷ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Bernard Zuma.

secretary. Prior to the declaration of the State of Emergency and the banning of the ANC and PAC, the state had already adopted a violent approach to dealing with liberation movements. This resulted in the arrest of Gwala on 18 March 1960 after the Minister of Justice had issued permission. Gwala was kept in detention until July.²⁸ He was charged for wrongfully and unlawfully failing to comply with requirements by being a member of the Howick Rubber Workers' and Industrial Union and taking part in their activities.²⁹

It was during Gwala's detention in Pietermaritzburg that he and other detainees began to discuss seriously the option of the armed struggle before the announcement of the formation of MK as the 'feeling was that there was no way forward without it.'³⁰ Gwala took advantage of the state's punitive systems that were meant to restrict him and used them as arenas in which to wage a struggle. The charges were eventually dropped at the end of July 1960 as the state had not gathered sufficient evidence to prosecute. Nevertheless, detention provided Gwala with a platform to discuss the armed struggle with other detainees and to define the political path he was to follow after the establishment of MK in December 1961.³¹

The reinstatement of the charges against Gwala in 1961 meant the beginning of the state's use of the courts to disconnect him. Between 1960 and 1977, Gwala faced three trials including the 1976 trial for alleged treason which carried the possibility of being sentenced to death. These trials should be examined within the historical fabric of South African society and be placed alongside other trials that were perceived as political trials. They became a tool to seclude Gwala from his political base and to force behaviour on Gwala that would conform

²⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Justice to the Commissioner of the South African Police, 31 August 1960.

²⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, indictment by the Attorney-General of Natal.

³⁰ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

³¹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum from the Commissioner of Police to the Minister of Justice, 11 December 1961.

with state regulations and the reproduction of domination in South Africa.³² In other words, these trials became a direct means of political control and focused mainly on power exercised by the state on its subjects, rather than a legal sphere of rights and protection.

Gwala, isolation and the 1961 trial

On the morning of 28 December 1960, Gwala was arrested while at an 'African restaurant' in Otto Street in Pietermaritzburg as the state had decided to reinstate earlier charges.³³ By this time, the state intelligence agencies had gathered enough evidence through its informers and Special Branch to prosecute Gwala. He appeared at Howick Magistrate Court on the same day and was released on a bail of £25 with conditions, among them having to report to the Pietermaritzburg Central Police Station in Loop Street every day between 9am and 10am.³⁴

Surviving trial documents reveal that both the state and the defence appeared in the Howick Magistrate's Court on 11 January 1961 to state their cases. The state argued that although Gwala was instructed to resign from being an office bearer of the Howick Rubber Workers' Industrial Union (HRWIU) as part of the conditions of his banning order, he had contravened this condition by participating in the activities of the HRWIU.

The evidence presented by the state was to the effect that Gwala had addressed various meetings with the workers at Howick, with the 8 March and 15 September 1960 meetings highlighted as critical ones.³⁵ During the trial, the state's witnesses, many of whom had been part of the Union's executive along with Gwala, had been induced into testifying as a result of intimidation and torture, gave evidence that purported to incriminate Gwala, suggesting

³² For a detailed discussion, see Albertyn, 'A Critical Analysis of Political Trials', 49.

³³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Frederick Wilhelm Jansen van Rensburg.

³⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, report of L. Nel (Magistrate of Howick) on conditions of Gwala's bail, 28 December 1960.

³⁵ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret report of L. C. Hofmeyr, Counsel for the State, to the Secretary of Justice, 30 August 1961.

that he had been central in organising the emergence of the HRWIU at BTR Sarmcol.³⁶ The state's key witness, Clemence Gumede, had worked at Sarmcol for 26 years and had been a member of the executive of the 1952 Union.³⁷ His testimony attempted to reinforce the impression that the 1960 Union was a continuation of the 1952 one since the 'the purpose and ideals of the Howick Rubber Workers Union [were] the same as those of the former Union.'³⁸ Through Gumede's evidence, the state argued that the HRWU and HRWIU were in fact one union, and that Gwala had therefore breached the condition of his banning order that required him to resign as an office-bearer, officer and member of the HRWIU.

Another key state witness was Frans Ross. Ross had been employed at Sarmcol for 15 years and was an executive member of the 1952 and 1960 unions.³⁹ In his evidence, Ross referred to Gwala's prohibition from Sarmcol premises and said that the HRWU's meetings were held under the tree outside the factory. Ross said that Gwala had 'addressed meetings of the Union and told workers how to become members of the Union and that if the employer were to be approached everybody must come together and speak as one voice.'⁴⁰ The evidence presented by Ross and Gumede highlighted the links between the unions and the broader politics of liberation. It emphasised that Union meetings were sometimes attended and addressed by Jacob Zuma in his capacity as an ANC activist in Natal.⁴¹

During the trial the state sought to prove that Gwala was linked to the HRWU as he had been responsible for the issuing of membership cards and the collection of monthly

³⁶ Dlamini, *Askari*, 171.

³⁷ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Clemence Gumede; D. Bonnin, 'Two Generations of Worker Leadership: The Histories and Traditions of the Sarmcol Workers', unpublished paper presented to the History Workshop Conference, University of the Witwatersrand, 1987.

³⁸ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Clemence Gumede.

³⁹ Other members of the executive in the 'new' Union were Clemence Gumede, Felix Ngcobo, Joseph Nduli and Gwala. All had been members of the previous Union. PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Frans Ross.

⁴⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Frans Ross.

⁴¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Clemence Gumede.

subscriptions.⁴² Furthermore, the state witnesses linked Gwala with all the Union meetings that had taken place under the tree. As Bernard Zuma, a ‘Bantu’ Detective Constable, explained:

On the 8th March 1960, it was after 6 p.m. There are trees there but there is one particular big tree. The meeting was held just below the big tree. I know where the entrance to the Rubber factory is. The main entrance to the factory is out of sight from the tree. I say accused [Gwala] addressed a meeting.⁴³

Constable Zuma further testified:

It was the 15th September 1960. This meeting was after 5 p.m. This meeting was held near the Railway Station, Howick, below the big tree. In relation to the meeting held in March this one (Sept. meeting) was held at the same place. I remember the names of some other people who attended the meeting. They were: the accused [Gwala], Clemence Gumede, Ross, Felix and Shabalala. Accused said people must unite and go to their employers and ask for money £1 a day.⁴⁴

Constable Zuma’s testimony illustrated the extent to which the Special Branch had been meticulously following Gwala. Moreover, this evidence was the culmination of the process of criminalising Gwala and imposing a constructed identity upon him as one who failed to abide by the law.

Gwala and his lawyer M.D. Naidoo had developed a strategy of ‘frustrating the judiciary processes.’⁴⁵ Towards the conclusion of the trial, Naidoo applied for the ‘discharge of the accused as the state had no case.’⁴⁶ Gwala’s application was refused by the court, and thus he ‘elected to be tried by a Judge’ while the state’s evidence became a preparatory examination for the Supreme Court case.⁴⁷ After extensive consultation between Naidoo and the

⁴² PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Mr. Naidoo.

⁴³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Bernard Zuma.

⁴⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, evidence of Bernard Zuma.

⁴⁵ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁴⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, report of L. Nel (Magistrate of Howick) on conditions of Gwala’s bail, 22 February 1961.

⁴⁷ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, report of L. Nel (Magistrate of Howick) on conditions of Gwala’s bail, 22 February 1961.

prosecution, Gwala's bail was extended with the condition that he was not permitted to interfere with witnesses.

The trial, in the Supreme Court, resumed on 7 August 1961. The state submitted that Gwala had taken part in the activities of the Howick Rubber Workers' Industrial Union. In view of the fact that the 'new' Union did not have the word 'industrial' in its name, Gwala's representative argued that he had not committed any crime since the Howick Rubber Workers' Union was only established in 1960, and he had not been instructed to resign from, or participate in its activities under his 1952 banning order. The court held that the state had not established beyond reasonable doubt that the 'new' Union was the same one to which the 1952 banning order referred. Gwala was found not guilty and acquitted.⁴⁸

Harry Gwala's acquittal embarrassed the state which was determined to disrupt him and stifle his influence on Natal politics. Correspondence between senior officials of the Departments of Police and of Justice suggested that Gwala's acquittal was a cause of serious concern as the circumstances under which he was exonerated applied to banned individuals in general.⁴⁹ It was against this background that the acting Secretary of Justice recommended that 'when a person is banned from becoming an office bearer, an official or member of any kind of organisation, the nature of this body must not be specified in the notice.'⁵⁰

The Department of Justice's view was that the problem that had arisen in the court judgement on Gwala could have been avoided if such a general ban were to be imposed. While this view was supported by the Commissioner of the South African Police, the Minister of Justice,

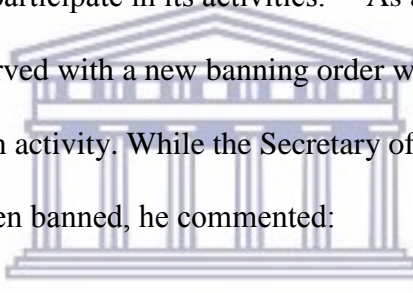
⁴⁸ PAR, RSC, 1/1/384, CC 134/1961, the State vs Themba Harry Gwala, case no. 904/61, report of L. Nel (Magistrate of Howick) on conditions of Gwala's bail, 22 February 1961; NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, report of L. C. Hofmeyr, Counsel for the State, to the Secretary of Justice, 30 August 1961.

⁴⁹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence between the Acting Secretary of Justice, JPJ Coetzee, and the Commissioner of the South African Police, indistinct date.

⁵⁰ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence between the Acting Secretary of Justice, JPJ Coetzee, and the Commissioner of the South African Police, indistinct date.

Johannes (John) Vorster, was adamant that no changes to the earlier system of banning should be implemented.⁵¹ However, after seeking a legal opinion, Vorster was convinced that a general ban was the only option to avoid the embarrassment similar to the state's trial on Gwala.⁵²

Meanwhile, the Minister of Justice was determined to ban Gwala from participating in the trade union activities, and so he sought the support of the Minister of Labour as required by the Suppression of Communism Act.⁵³ After securing the support of the Minister of Labour, Vorster approved the condition of Gwala's banning order which emphasised that he should be prohibited from becoming an 'office bearer, official or member of a trade union whether registered or not', and 'not to participate in its activities.'⁵⁴ As a consequence, on 18 December 1961 Gwala was served with a new banning order which prohibited him from participating in any trade union activity. While the Secretary of Justice noted Gwala's 'acquiescence' after he had been banned, he commented:



Since the restriction that is currently in place in respect of Gwala came into effect, it seems he is behaving quietly. He was very active. He has not requested the removal of his name from the list. In our view, this says a lot and this should probably be interpreted as meaning that his sympathy continues to lie with communists and that he will return to his old ways as soon as he is no longer subject to his restriction.⁵⁵

The Minister of Justice, with support from the Commissioner of Police, gave his approval for Gwala's restrictions to be 'replaced with a more severe type of a ban and that an area of

⁵¹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Minister of Justice to the Secretary of Justice, 10 October 1961.

⁵² NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Minister of Justice to the Commissioner of Police, 28 October 1961.

⁵³ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Justice to the Secretary of Labour, 20 November 1961.

⁵⁴ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Labour to the Secretary of Justice, 30 November 1961, declassified secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice, 2 December 1961, declassified secret memorandum signed by the Secretary of Justice, Private Secretary of the Minister of Justice and the Minister of Justice, 6 December 1961.

⁵⁵ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 18 March 1963.

restriction with associated bans should be imposed.’ These would prohibit him from attending any gathering for a period of five years.⁵⁶ Gwala’s movements were now restricted to the magisterial area of Pietermaritzburg, and these restrictions set the scenes for tighter measures to isolate Gwala.

Rethinking political militancy

The question of whether it was the Communist Party or the ANC that took the decision to engage in an armed struggle has been a subject of debate among academics. It is not the intention of this section to engage in this debate. However, the shift to the armed struggle and the formation of MK had a tremendous influence in Gwala’s politics of connectedness.⁵⁷ The state’s use of violence, the banning of the ANC on 8 April 1961 and increasing restrictions of his political mobility provoked Gwala to think that ‘there was no way out except meeting force with force.’⁵⁸ This shift in the political tactics he adopted marked a more radical and militant attitude towards the state.

After the state had imposed more severe restrictions on Gwala, it was satisfied about his ‘acquiescence.’ Unknown to the state, Gwala was actively involved in the recruitment of cadres in Pietermaritzburg for training by Bruno Mtolo on how to use explosives and subsequently to receive military training outside the country.⁵⁹ While I am mindful that Mtolo’s narrative can hardly be regarded as a reputable source of scholarly, his evidence

⁵⁶ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum to the Minister of Justice, 11 December 1961; NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, Temba Harry Gwala’s banning order, 8 December 1961; NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified top secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 18 March 1963.

⁵⁷ For a detailed discussion on the ANC’s shift to the armed struggle, see Magubane, ‘Introduction: The Political Context’; Magubane et al., ‘Turn to the Armed Struggle’; Suttner, ‘African National Congress (ANC) Underground: From the M-Plan to Rivonia’; Suttner, *The ANC Underground in South Africa to 1976*; Ellis, ‘The Genesis of the ANC’s Armed Struggle in South Africa’.

⁵⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁵⁹ B. Mtolo, *Umkonto we Sizwe: The Road to the Left* (Durban: Drakensburg Press, 1966), pp. 114-117. Mtolo had been recruited to the ANC in 1957 while working as a generalist and later a chairman of the Hospital Workers’ Union at McCord Hospital in Durban. He served on MK’s Natal Regional Command with Eric Mtshali, Billy Nair, Curnick Ndlovu, Solomon Mbanjwa, Ronnie Kasrils and Ebrahim Ismail.

enables us to understand the intricacies that underpinned the underground operations in Natal. Mtolo claimed that Gwala was very fond of him during the early 1960s and ‘whenever [he] went to Pietermaritzburg [he] slept at his place or called [Gwala] to get few points which he would like to put across to the workers at SACTU meetings.’⁶⁰ Anton Xaba confirmed that between 1962 and 1963 Gwala was responsible for the identification and recruitment of cadres in Pietermaritzburg to attend Mtolo’s training sessions on the use of explosives and to be sent outside the country to receive military training for MK activities.⁶¹ Eric Mtshali recounts that he and other trade unionists, including Gwala, were well placed to recruit ‘the best out of the working class’ to MK, and ‘therefore people who went out [of the country] for military training during that period of the 1960s were mostly workers.’⁶²

While the impact of the police raids on the underground headquarters of MK at Liliesleaf farm on 11 July 1963 has been described as catastrophic to the underground operations at a national level, it was the arrest of Mtolo in Kloof, near Pinetown, on 3 August that enabled the state to crack down on MK operatives in Natal. After some brief interrogation, Mtolo became an informer and disclosed the underground network of MK in Natal. Gwala was among those who were arrested after Mtolo had become a state collaborator. After serving a lengthy period in solitary confinement which was marked by torture, Gwala was charged for contravening the Suppression of Communism Act and the Unlawful Organisations Act for ‘aid[ing] the undergoing of training outside the Republic or obtaining information from a source outside the Republic which could be used in furthering the achievement of any of the objects of the African National Congress also known as Mkhonto We Sizwe.’⁶³ Although Gwala had been a key figure in building underground MK military structures in

⁶⁰ Mtolo, ‘Umkhonto we Sizwe’, 116.

⁶¹ Ruth Lundie interview with Anton Xaba.

⁶² *Dawn: Journal of Umkhonto weSizwe*, Souvenir Issue, 25th Anniversary of MK, 1986, 21.

⁶³ RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, The State vs Harry Gwala, criminal case number 76/64, state’s indictment of Harry Gwala, 18 April 1964.

Pietermaritzburg and recruiting cadres for MK, he denied involvement in MK activities and pleaded not guilty.

Meanwhile, the state was determined to clamp down on anyone involved in MK. It argued that because there was a danger that Gwala would ‘interfere [with] or intimidate witnesses’ he should be tried summarily without a preparatory examination.⁶⁴ During the trial, which lasted for three months, Gwala was represented by a certain Mr Wilson. It has not been established who was responsible for paying for Gwala’s defence lawyers. The state’s argument was based on the evidence of Mtolo and Solomon Mbanjwa. Mbanjwa had been arrested and also turned state witness. He testified that William Msimang, William Kanyile, Bernard Mhlongo, Anton Xaba and Samson Nene, who had been arrested in Northern Rhodesia, now Zambia, and handed over to the South African authorities, were people who had been recruited by Gwala.⁶⁵ Msimang, Kanyile, Mhlongo, Xaba and Nene had been part of the second group of MK recruits that left the country through Bechuanaland, now Botswana, and were due to travel through Northern Rhodesia on their way to Tanzania. However, travel in Northern Rhodesia was not safe, and the group was arrested by the British colonial authorities and deported to South Africa. There they stood trial and were subsequently imprisoned in Leeuwkop Prison, north of Johannesburg.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, on 11 June 1964, on the strength of evidence from Mtolo and Mbanjwa, Judge Kennedy found Gwala guilty and sentenced him to eight years’ imprisonment on Robben Island.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, The State vs Harry Gwala, criminal case number 76/74, application by the acting Attorney-General: Natal to the Registrar of the Supreme Court, Pietermaritzburg, 16 April 1964.

⁶⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, affidavit of William Msimang, William Kanyile, Bernard Mhlongo, Anthony Xaba and Samson Nene, 10 August 1964; PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, Supreme Court of South Africa (Natal Provincial Division), judgment on Gwala’s application for leave to appeal to the Appellate Division, 17 August 1964; Alan Paton Centre (APC), 95 APB, Ruth Lundie, interview with Anton Xaba.

⁶⁶ Shubin, *ANC: A View from Moscow*, 19-20.

⁶⁷ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

In an act that showed his resilience and his determination to resist prison isolation, Gwala applied for leave to appeal.⁶⁸ It appears that Gwala did not have legal representation for his court appearance as he appeared in person in court on 24 June 1964 to apply for leave to appeal. He requested that the matter be adjourned so that he could find satisfactory evidence and legal counsel to represent him in order to present evidence more effectively. In the meantime, his wife Elda had already made contact with A. J. McGibbon and Brokensha attorneys to represent him in this matter.⁶⁹

Gwala's appeal was based on a denial that he had been involved in the recruitment of the five imprisoned cadres. In the meantime, Msimang, Kanyile, Mhlongo, Xaba and Nene had been transferred to Pietermaritzburg gaol where they reconnected with Gwala. It appears that they orchestrated a plan to deny that they were recruited by Gwala for the purposes of military training outside South Africa.⁷⁰ Their affidavits formed the major part of Gwala's application. They claimed under oath that they 'were pointed out to the police by one Solomon Mbanjwa as being persons recruited by Harry Gwala.'⁷¹ Gwala argued that 'evidence contained in the said affidavits [was] material and adversely [affected] the credibility of both Solomon Mbanjwa and Bruno Mtolo, whilst substantiating [his] own evidence.' He requested that an appeal application be granted as 'another court having such evidence before it might take a different view and so arrive at a different verdict.'⁷² Gwala's denial exposed the dangers of relying on court documents as sources of evidence because these may comprise manufactured

⁶⁸ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, Supreme Court of South Africa (Natal Provincial Division), judgment on Gwala's application for leave to appeal to the Appellate Division, 17 August 1964; PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, letters from T. H. Gwala to the Supreme Court of South Africa-Natal Provincial Division, 15 June 1964.

⁶⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, letter from T. H. Gwala to A. J. McGibbon & Brokensha Attorneys, 6 July 1964.

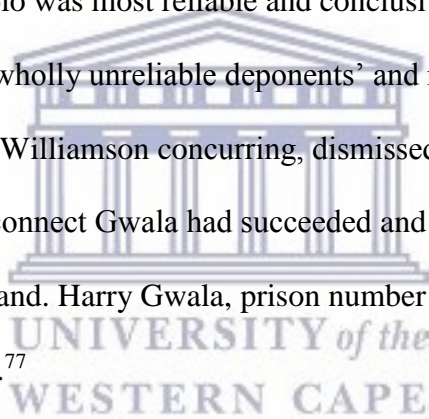
⁷⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, affidavit of William Msimang, William Kanyile, Bernard Mhlongo, Anthony Xaba and Samson Nene, 10 August 1964.

⁷¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, affidavit of William Msimang, William Kanyile, Bernard Mhlongo, Anthony Xaba and Samson Nene, 10 August 1964; PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, Supreme Court of South Africa (Natal Provincial Division), judgment on Gwala's application for leave to appeal to the Appellate Division, 17 August 1964.

⁷² PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, affidavit of T. H. Gwala, 10 August 1964.

and rehearsed statements that were devoid of truth. Anton Xaba later admitted that he had in fact been recruited by Gwala in January 1963 and Truman Magubane also admitted that Gwala was actively involved in MK recruitment during the early 1960s.⁷³

The judgment of Judge Kennedy on 17 August 1964 to grant Gwala leave to appeal provided Gwala with temporary false relief as the state could not move him to Robben Island as it intended to do.⁷⁴ Subsequently, he applied to be granted ‘bail pending the hearing of his application’, to which the state objected.⁷⁵ The court denied bail and he remained in Pietermaritzburg gaol while his attorneys prepared the appeal. The appeal was heard on 10 November 1964 and the judgment delivered on 24 November. Judge J. A. Beyers found the evidence of Mbanjwa and Mtolo was most reliable and conclusive and described Kanyile, Mhlongo, Xaba and Nene as ‘wholly unreliable deponents’ and not credible.⁷⁶ Judge Beyers, with Judge Rumpff and Judge Williamson concurring, dismissed Gwala’s appeal. This meant that the state’s attempts to disconnect Gwala had succeeded and soon it started the process of transferring him to Robben Island. Harry Gwala, prison number 238/65, was admitted to Robben Island on 7 June 1965.⁷⁷



Connectedness and Gwala’s release from Robben Island

The ‘smashing of the early underground’ activities of the MK and the subsequent arrest of some ANC leaders and the escape by others into exile resulted in a lull in activities.⁷⁸ After the Rivonia trial, the leadership of the ANC was either in exile or in prison. While on Robben

⁷³ Ruth Lundie interview with Anton Xaba; Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Truman Magubane; Sithole, ‘The ANC Underground’, 225.

⁷⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, Order of the Supreme Court of South Africa (Natal Provincial Division), 17 August 1964; PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, correspondence from the Registrar of the Supreme Court to the Registrar of the Supreme of Appeal, 19 August 1964.

⁷⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, application for bail by T. H Gwala, 17 August 1964.

⁷⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/471, Vol. 14, CC 76/64, The State vs Harry Gwala, judgment of the Supreme Court of South Africa (Appellate Division), 24 November 1964.

⁷⁷ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Robben Island prison register, 807/64-118/66.

⁷⁸ R. Suttner, *Recovering Democracy in South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2015), 195.

Island, Gwala was able to circumvent harsh conditions in prison and established links with the Rivonia trialists who had assumed leadership of the ANC in prison. Oral sources suggest that although prison conditions were appallingly oppressive, Harry Gwala was able to establish linkages with other political prisoners from various political organisations.⁷⁹

Upon the release of an ANC political prisoner, the leadership of the ANC on Robben Island would instruct this member either to leave country or to wait for further instruction. When Gwala was released from Robben Island, the leadership gave him instructions to remain inside the country and to resuscitate the underground cells in Natal.⁸⁰ However, Gwala found the political and security conditions ‘extremely precarious’ to undertake any political operations. He remarked:

When I was released in [June] 1972 I found that people were scared. There was a lull. SACTU/ANC/SACP leadership has either been jailed or exiled. There were no political structures that existed at a local level.⁸¹

Correspondence between the Department of Bantu Administration and Development (DBAD) and the Commissioner of the South African Police indicated that preparations for Gwala’s further disconnection started before his release from prison.⁸² The DBAD proposed that while ‘strong restrictions be ordered after Gwala’s release from prison’, it was prepared to ‘arrange employment possibilities locally.’⁸³ When Gwala was released from prison, he was served with a five-year banning order which carried more severe restrictions than previous orders. This time Gwala was ordered not to participate in any manner in the preparation, compilation, printing, publication and transmission of any publication.

⁷⁹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Monde Mkhunqwana.

⁸⁰ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

⁸¹ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala.

⁸² NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development to the Commissioner of the South African Police, 6 October 1971.

⁸³ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Bantu Administration and Development to the Commissioner of the South African Police, 6 October 1971.

In an attempt to frustrate Gwala, mindful that he had trained as a teacher, the state prohibited him from ‘giving any educational instruction in any manner or form to any person other than a person of whom [he was] a parent.’⁸⁴ Furthermore, he was not allowed to have any visitors other than a medical practitioner, his mother and mother-in-law, Margaret Nettie. Acting on the recommendation of the Commissioner of Police, the Secretary of Justice proposed to the Minister of Justice that Gwala be properly constrained, that restrictions be implemented, and that the Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg be authorised to approve exceptions.⁸⁵ In addition, he was ‘banned from leaving his home at any time except between 6 am and 6 pm, [from] entering any Bantu area except Edendale, and [from] entering any factory.’⁸⁶

Gwala viewed the state’s tightening of restrictions and offers of employment by the state as a strategy to pacify him and make him a collaborator.⁸⁷ By 1973 the Secretary of Justice was disappointed that Gwala refused to work for the KwaZulu Government because he claimed that state employment would be against his principles.⁸⁸ In the meantime, Gwala applied for the relaxation of his restrictions in order to enable him to be away from home until 7 pm, to enter Sobantu, Imbali, Ashdown and Slangspruit, and to enter the premises of Leon’s Dry Cleaners in Pietermaritzburg. The Commissioner of Police recommended to the Minister of Justice that Gwala’s application be declined as it would ‘put him in a position to continue his incitement among the Bantu, with which he has been engaged in for years.’⁸⁹

⁸⁴ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret notice of T. H. Gwala’s banning order, 23 May 1972.

⁸⁵ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 23 May 1972; NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg, 30 May 1972; NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Commissioner of the South African Police, 30 May 1972.

⁸⁶ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Secretary of Justice to the Commissioner of the South African Police, 28 May 1973; NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 19 July 1973.

⁸⁷ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala.

⁸⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 19 July 1973.

⁸⁹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.2/50/53, declassified secret memorandum from the Secretary of Justice to the Minister of Justice, 19 July 1973.

Although the Minister of Justice did not support the relaxation of Gwala's restrictions, the Chief Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg granted him permission to enter the premises of Leon's Dry Cleaners and African townships on conditions that it would be within the timeframes set out in the banning order. The Chief Magistrate did not consider that Gwala would use this time for his political activities. He operated his 'business' using a van which the South African Council of Churches (SACC) Pietermaritzburg had bought for him in January 1973.⁹⁰ While Gwala involved himself in numerous activities that were against the conditions of his banning order, in some instances he made the state believe that he was abiding by the conditions of his banning order. He wanted the state to believe that its control mechanisms were effective and he was abiding by them.⁹¹ Despite being closely monitored by the Special Branch, Yunus Mohammed observed that Gwala became increasingly involved in the underground structures of MK.⁹² Nevertheless, it was not until early 1974 that Gwala's underground operations began to yield positive results.

Connectedness and the resuscitation of the underground activities in Natal

Kgalema Motlanthe has characterised the resuscitation of the ANC underground structures in Natal during the early 1970s as 'a very crucial moment in the history of the armed struggle.'⁹³ After the SACTU, ANC, and SACP underground structures inside the country had effectively been wiped out during the 1960s, there were new opportunities in the 1970s as the first group

⁹⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala; PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 76/74, State vs Harry Gwala and others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

⁹¹ On 21 August 1974 Gwala applied to the Chief Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg to attend his late mother's ritual ceremony which was to be held at Swayimane, in the district of New Hanover. The event was to be held on Saturday, 31 August 1974. He requested to attend the ceremony from Friday, 30 August since the beast was to be slaughtered on that day as per custom. Permission was granted on condition that on his arrival he reported his departure to the Station Commander at Pietermaritzburg Police Station and that on his arrival in the New Hanover district he also reported to the Station Commander. Furthermore, he was instructed not to carry any passenger other than his family and he abide by the conditions of his banning order, see NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, correspondence between Themba Harry Gwala and the Chief Magistrate of Pietermaritzburg, 21 and 29 August 1974.

⁹² M. Ntsodi interview with Yunus Mohammed.

⁹³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe, 13 February 2013, Highstead (the Deputy President's official residence in Cape Town). Motlanthe served as State President of the Republic of South Africa from September 2008 to May 2009 and later served as Deputy President between 2009 and 2014.

of ANC activists who had been imprisoned at Robben Island were released. This group, including Gwala, had an ‘impact on thinking and culture of youth activists’ in Natal.⁹⁴ It established the Natal-Swaziland network which became an exit route for those who were leaving South Africa to join MK in exile.⁹⁵

Jabulani Sithole, Sifiso Ndlovu, Martin Legassick and Derby Bonnin concur that Gwala’s release from prison had a significant impact on workers’ political consciousness in the Natal Midlands, especially at Sarmcol, as it reminded them of the old days of struggle and of the necessity of worker organisation and unity.⁹⁶ Nevertheless, at a broader political level, Gwala remarked that ‘political apathy and consciousness’ made it difficult to re-establish proper underground networks because many people were despondent and scared of the Security Branch.⁹⁷ A number of factors led to the improvement in political morale in Natal during the early 1970s. This included the growth of student militancy which was driven by the South African Students’ Organisation (SASO), and the subsequent students’ strike at the University College of Durban-Westville in January 1972, the emergence of the Black Consciousness Movement (BCM), especially the launch of the Black People’s Convention (BPC) in mid-1972 at Edendale, and the 1973 Durban strikes.⁹⁸ In addition, the release of Jacob Zuma on

⁹⁴ Suttner, ‘The Character and Formation of Intellectuals’, 138.

⁹⁵ Sithole, ‘The ANC Underground’, 279-311; H. Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963-1994* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), 111.

⁹⁶ J. Sithole and S. Ndlovu, ‘The Revival of the Workers’ Movement, 1970-1980’, in *SADET, Road to Democracy in South Africa, Volume 2* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004), 187-241; M. Legassick, ‘Debating the Revival of the Workers’ Movement in the 1970s: The South African Democracy Education Trust and Post-Apartheid Patriotic History’, *Kronos*, No. 34, Making Histories, 2008, 240-266; Bonnin, ‘We Went to Arm Ourselves at the Field of Suffering’, 34-69; H. Gwala, ‘The Life and Struggles of Harry Gwala’, *New Era*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1989, 33; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Omar Badsha, 8 October 2015, Cape Town.

⁹⁷ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala; Brian Bunting interview with Joe Slovo.

⁹⁸ Thomas Karis and Gail Gerhart have described the broader relations between the BCM, ANC and PAC as being of a ‘troublesome proportion’ that remained unresolved. The question of Gwala’s ‘attraction’ to the militancy of the BCM is a subject of debate as Gwala rebuffed any relationship with the BCM and downplayed being ‘attracted’ to it. Nevertheless, just before his arrest, Gwala had indirect communication with Steve Biko through Malusi Mpumlwana and Mapetla Mohapi and plans to hold a secret unity meeting on Christmas Eve had to be abandoned due to the arrest of Gwala and other Natal underground activists in November 1975. See X. Mangcu, *Biko: A Biography* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 2012), 244; for a detailed analysis of the 1973 Durban riots, see N. T. Sambureni, ‘The Apartheid City and its Labouring Class: African Workers and the Independent Trade Union Movement in Durban, 1959-1985’, PhD dissertation, University of South Africa, 1997; A. Sitas, ‘African Worker Response on the East Rand and Changes in the Metal Industry, 1960-1980’, PhD dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand, 1984; S. Marks, ‘Towards a People’s History of South Africa: Recent Developments in the Historiography of South Africa’, in Samuel, R (ed.), *People’s History and Socialist Theory* (London:

29 December 1973 had a significant impact on the re-establishment of the ANC underground structures in Natal between 1974 and 1975.⁹⁹ As Karis and Gerhart have suggested, despite the lull of the mid-1960s, the early 1970s were characterised by the intensification of political conscientisation, and the ‘banned liberation movements with their commitment to armed struggle gained rapidly in appeal.’¹⁰⁰

By 1972, SASO leaders had scoured their social surroundings for usable forms of organisational support.¹⁰¹ The Association for the Educational and Cultural Advancement of the African (ASSECA), headed by M. T. Moerane, also editor of *The World*, a widely read township newspaper, became one of the organisations that SASO targeted. Although Moerane did not allow ASSECA to be reoriented by SASO, he remained supportive of political cooperation with other like-minded organisations.¹⁰² As discussed previously, Moerane and Gwala had worked together to establish the Natal CYL during the 1940s. In mid-August 1971, Moerane and William Nkomo had been elected to be part of the team that organised the Edendale consultative meeting to discuss the establishment of the BPC, which comprised over 26 African organisations that were operating outside government-initiated bodies. This position gave him influence over various organisations in Natal.¹⁰³ The BPC was

Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981); Karis and Gerhart, ‘From Protest to Challenge’, 123-158; S. M. Ndlovu, ‘Black Youth and Students in Exile: The Revival of the Liberation Movement(s) in the 1970s’, paper presented to the National Research Foundation Programme in Local Histories and Present Realities seminar, 17 February 2016, University of the Witwatersrand; D. Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2009); Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala.

⁹⁹ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala; Howard Barrell interview with Jacob Zuma; Sisulu, ‘Walter and Albertina Sisulu’, 361. For a discussion on the political impact of Jacob Zuma’s release on the resurgence of underground structures in Natal, see Sithole ‘The ANC Underground’, 225-229; T. Waetjen and G. Maré, ‘Tradition’s Desire: The Politics of Culture in the Rape Trial of Jacob Zuma’, *Theoria: A Journal of Social and Political Theory*, Vol. 56, No. 118 (Democracy, Morality and Punishment), 2009, 63-81; <http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/jacob-gedleyihlekisa-zuma>, accessed 16 March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 5, 122; M. Mzamane, B. Maaba and N. Biko, ‘The Black Consciousness Movement’, *SADET, The Road to Democracy in South Africa, Vol. 2 [1970-1980]* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2006); M. Plaut and J. Seekings, ‘Reflections on the South African Revolution: A Discussion between Martin Plaut and Jeremy Seekings’, *History Workshop Journal*, No. 54, 2002, 209-220.

¹⁰¹ G. M. Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa: The Evolution of an Ideology* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1978), 288-289.

¹⁰² Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol.5, 132.

¹⁰³ K. Mokoape, T. Mtintso and W. Nhlapo, ‘Towards the Armed Struggle’, in B. N. Pityana et al. (eds.), *Bounds of Possibility: The Legacy of Steve Biko and Black Consciousness* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1991), 138-139.

formally launched at Edendale in July 1972, a month after Gwala's release from prison, with Reverend Mashwabanda Mayutula as an interim secretary general. Although Gwala did not attend the launch, he was 'properly briefed by Moerane' and welcomed the BPC as an integral role-player in raising the levels of political consciousness.¹⁰⁴

As Thomas Karis and Gail Gerhart have argued, the BCM, with its appeal for an independent and assertive African culture, aroused enthusiastic support from many people. In Natal, the Theatre Council of Natal (TECON), a politically committed Indian drama group which had tried to cultivate white donors and audiences, decided in 1972 to devote itself exclusively to performing for blacks. Cultural expression became a major political tool for the Black Consciousness Movement to popularise itself and cultivate Africanness.¹⁰⁵ Furthermore, artistic performances that emerged during 1972 and 1973 conveyed a political message, veiled or explicit. For example, *Shanti*, a play by Mthuli Shezi performed in Natal and Transvaal townships in 1973, told an improbable story of an Indian woman whose African lover fled South Africa to join the guerrilla army of the Mozambique Liberation Front, FRELIMO.¹⁰⁶

These developments created an unprecedented level of political consciousness that presented fertile ground for Gwala to start an internal operation to recruit young people to leave the country for military training with MK.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the independence in 1974 of Angola

¹⁰⁴ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁰⁵ Karis and Gerhart, 'From Protest to Challenge', Vol. 5, 136; Julie Fredrikse interview with Saths Cooper.

¹⁰⁶ Karis and Gerhart, 'From Protest to Challenge', Vol. 5, 136.

¹⁰⁷ www.sahistory.org.za/people/jacob-gedleyihlekisa-zuma, accessed, 31 December 2015; Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Kgalema Motlanthe. Other key individuals in the unit were Jacob Zuma, Joseph Nduli, affectionately known as Mpisi, and Joseph Mdluli. Nduli played a vital role in establishing links with the Swaziland network of the exiled ANC. He was one of the first generation of MK recruits and was part of the Luthuli Detachment. He was trained in the Soviet Union and lived in Tanzania. Nduli participated in the Wankie operation and was the only one who succeeded in crossing into South Africa, going as far as Natal, thereafter operating underground between Swaziland and South Africa. Joseph Mdluli was together with Gwala, responsible for recruitment mainly from the townships of Umlazi, KwaMashu, Sobantu and Edendale, and organising transportation of recruits to the border between Natal and Swaziland. In many cases Mdluli was personally involved in transporting recruits from Durban and Pietermaritzburg's townships, see Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years*, 111-126.

and Mozambique was a major psychological boost for African political conscientisation and removed ‘major portions of the geographical buffer zone that had separated South Africa’ from the independent African countries.¹⁰⁸ By mid-1974, Gwala had made contact with Albert Dlomo who was at that time based in Swaziland and working closely with Moses Mabhida.¹⁰⁹ It was Dlomo who introduced Gwala to Sylvia and Peter Gamedze, Swazi nationals whose business was used as a front for delivering ANC messages between Natal and Swaziland. Between 1974 and 1975, Sylvia Gamedze was a conduit of communication from the Natal ANC underground and the Swaziland-based ANC. Sylvia, born in Pietermaritzburg, was married to Peter Gamedze. Peter had farms in Swaziland, and Sylvia managed her business between Pietermaritzburg and Manzini.¹¹⁰

It was through Sylvia Gamedze that Mabhida and Dlomo were able to advise ‘Gwala and Jacob Zuma network to establish units in line with the M-Plan, Mandela Plan.’¹¹¹ Furthermore, Sylvia Gamedze also smuggled money from Dlomo and Mabhida to Gwala, which was used to cover the expenses of transporting recruits to the border between Natal and Swaziland.¹¹² Gwala admitted receiving money from Sylvia Gamedze, but disputed that it was to further the political ends of the ANC. He emphasised that it was ‘used for organising SACTU and also sent to those who were taught trade union work to cover their wages and other activities.’ This concealed the fact that the money covered costs that were associated

¹⁰⁸ Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol.5, 144; Howard Barrell interview with Jacob Zuma.

¹⁰⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala. Dlomo, sometimes spelt Dhlomo, had been an active member of the ANC in Chesterville before it was banned in 1960. He then went underground and embarked on a recruitment drive to the movement. In 1963 Dlomo was arrested and detained under the 90-day detention law. He was later charged with furthering the aims of the ANC but acquitted. Shortly after his release he was re-detained and charged with providing assistance to people leaving the country for military training under MK, see, www.sahistory.org.za/people/albert-dlomo, accessed, 31 December 2015.

¹¹⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/993, Vol. 21, Record 4 & 5, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and others, evidence of Sylvia Gamedze.

¹¹¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/993, Vol. 18, Record 7, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Herald Bhekisisa Nxasana. The M-Plan had been conceptualised in the Eastern Cape and was approved secretly by the 1953 ANC conference. For a detailed discussion about the M-Plan, see Suttner, *ANC Underground in South Africa*, 18-25.

¹¹² PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

with the recruitment of MK cadres and their transportation to the Natal-Swaziland border.¹¹³ By October 1974, after having divided Natal into 12 units, Gwala, Anton Xaba, Truman Magubane, Joseph Mdluli and Azaria Ndebele facilitated the transportation of the first group of recruits through Peter and Sylvia Gamedze.¹¹⁴ This group consisted of 12 cadres who travelled in two groups of six. The groups were to be received by Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Melayibone Ndhlovu on the Swaziland side of the border after which they would be taken to their next destination.¹¹⁵

Gwala's network of recruits came mainly from his trade union activities of the 1960s, especially those he had worked closely with at Howick. Among these were Moses Bhengu and Sipho Kubheka. Gwala and Bhengu had been activists of the Rubber Workers' Union in 1960 and, when Gwala was banned, Bhengu became the secretary.¹¹⁶ In 1974 Gwala and Bhengu reconnected through Truman Magubane. Bhengu became active in recruiting youth to join MK in Sobantu. He occasionally received money from Gwala to cover travelling expenses.¹¹⁷ Truman Magubane had introduced Kubheka to Gwala when they both worked closely in the Pietermaritzburg local office of SACTU in 1961.¹¹⁸ Gwala reconnected with Kubheka after his release from prison. By that time Kubheka was working at Edendale Hospital. As discussions about the recruitment for MK intensified Gwala used his laundry business as a front to visit Kubheka more often at the hospital.¹¹⁹ Gwala remarked that

¹¹³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala. Karis and Gerhart do not refute the argument that efforts were made to train worker activists outside the country who could return to revive SACTU, see Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 5, 53-54.

¹¹⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol.32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

¹¹⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe; PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 21, Record 4 & 5, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and others, evidence of Sylvia Gamedze.

¹¹⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

¹¹⁷ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

¹¹⁸ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

¹¹⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

discussions between him, Truman Magubane and Kubheka extended to the broader politics of the 1970s in Natal and KwaZulu. The topics they discussed included the ‘unveiling of a memorial or a tombstone to the late Chief Albert Luthuli at Groutville’, the establishment of KwaZulu, and the role of Chief Gatsha Buthelezi. While Truman Magubane and Kubheka were against Buthelezi accepting the establishment of the KwaZulu Bantustan, Gwala ‘defended him.’¹²⁰

By the end of October 1975, the network of Gwala and Jacob Zuma had played a vital role in facilitating the exit of over fifty recruits from Natal while Sylvia Gamedze ensured that there was an active communication line between Gwala, Dlomo, Mabhida and Joseph Mdluli.¹²¹ In addition, it was this network that organised a student trip to Swaziland in 1975 during which several key SASO activists from Natal University’s medical school were recruited to the ANC. Among these were Diliza Mji, Norman Dubazane, Faith Matlaopane and Nkosazana Dlamini. These recruits later became prominent in the leadership of student organisations and clandestine operations of both the ANC and MK in Natal. The recruitment of these student leaders indicated a new strategy, meaning and direction: the steering of the student movement towards identification with the aims, ideology, and leadership of the ANC.¹²²

Meanwhile, the Security Branch infiltrated the network and converted Samson Lukele into a collaborator. Lukele was the one who was responsible for driving recruits from Natal to the boarder of Swaziland. The interrogation of Lukele and Joseph Nduli uncovered the network of Gwala and Jacob Zuma.¹²³ In addition, while under interrogation, Joseph Nduli divulged

¹²⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 11, CC 108/76, State vs Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Harry Themba Gwala.

¹²¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe; Howard Barrell interview with Jacob Zuma.

¹²² Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 5, 144; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Sihle Mbongwa, 22 March 2007.

¹²³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 10 July 1976. The correct spelling of ‘Ntuliswe’ is ‘Ntulizwe’.

the names of Kgalema Motlanthe and Stanley Nkosi as those responsible for recruiting in Johannesburg.¹²⁴ Subsequently, Motlanthe and Nkosi were interrogated in Johannesburg, arrested in 1976, and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment on Robben Island.

Disconnectedness and Gwala's 1976 trial

On the morning of 30 November 1975 members of the Special Branch arrested Gwala at his house together with his wife, Elda, for 'participating in terrorist activities in contravention of the Terrorism Act of 1967 as amended.'¹²⁵ They were taken to the Special Branch section on the second floor of Loop Street Police Station. They were separated, severely tortured, and kept in solitary confinement. Gwala remembered that:

From December 12 to December 14 1975, I was subjected to a continuous questioning without sleep by various members of the Security force. From the type of questioning it became clear to me that the police were only interested in a particular type of answers. On the last day I was threatened that this type of treatment would be imposed again unless I supplied these certain answers.¹²⁶

Gwala was subsequently moved to the Town Hill Police Station which was mainly for 'cooperative' detainees. However, after it became clear that he was 'not willing to cooperate' with his interrogators, he was sent back to Loop Street. Gwala remarked that:

When I arrived there I had continuous hay fever and tight chest together with wheezing at night. The blankets supplied were not fit for human beings...on January 12, 1976, I acquired a better blanket but it was so infested with lice that in one night I destroyed fifty.¹²⁷

There is no evidence that Gwala divulged any information that related to his underground activities. As a result of his lack of cooperation, his elder daughter, Lulu Gwala, who Gwala

¹²⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

¹²⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1001, Vol. 29, Record 1, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Indictment, 14 May 1976; NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, Harry Gwala's statement to the Chief Magistrate, undated.

¹²⁶ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, Harry Gwala's statement to the Chief Magistrate, undated.

¹²⁷ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, Harry Gwala's statement to the Chief Magistrate, undated; Colonel Dreyer, who had been the Commander (Inland) Division of the Special Branch since 7 October 1963, admitted to the Court during the trial that Gwala complained to him during his visit on 30 November 1975 about the condition of the cell and that the blankets. With reference to the lice, he also admitted he said 'well, Harry, bite them back', see PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 30, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Judgment.

defined as ‘an acute asthmatic’, was also detained on 7 January 1976 for six months.¹²⁸

Gwala further believed that:

The reason for my daughter’s detention is that (a) in 1974 she sold goods for one Mrs Peter Gamedze of Swaziland (b) In May 1975, I sent her together with one Thuthukile Mabhida to deliver letters to the said Mrs Gamedze at Machibise (c) In June 1975, while she went to Mrs Gamedze’s mother’s home to give Mrs Gamedze money for the goods she had sold in 1974 I gave her a letter to hand over to Mrs Gamedze (d) That Mrs Gamedze in her statement to police alleges that in November 1975 I sent my daughter either to collect from her a letter or deliver a card with a list of names.¹²⁹

By the end of January 1976, Gwala had been tortured to the extent that he applied to have his ‘will drawn up as he feared’ for his own health and his life as well as those of his family.¹³⁰

The Special Branch inflicted increased levels of torture that attempted to force Gwala and others suspects to cooperate.¹³¹ Anton Xaba, also arrested on 30 November 1975, told the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) that police surrounded his house, rounded up all six members of his family and took them to Loop Street Police Station. Xaba said he was taken upstairs where he was systematically assaulted, tortured and interrogated for two days. He bled heavily and lost consciousness a number of times. His torture included being dangled out of the window by his feet while the policemen swung him backwards and forwards and banged his head against the wall. His arm was broken in the process. At one point during the torture, he said he could hear the screams of his wife in the adjoining room. On his second day of torture, Xaba’s hands were cuffed behind his back and he was suspended from the ceiling like ‘meat in the butchery.’¹³²

¹²⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, Harry Gwala’s statement to the Chief Magistrate, undated.

¹²⁹ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, Harry Gwala’s statement to the Chief Magistrate, undated.

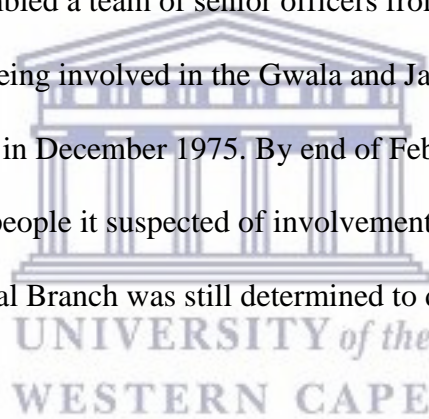
¹³⁰ NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, Harry Gwala’s statement to the Chief Magistrate, undated.

¹³¹ W. Woodward, P. Hayes and G. Minkley, ‘Introduction’, in *Deep HiStories: Gender and Colonialism in Southern Africa* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), xxvi.

¹³² www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/03lv02167/04lv02264/05lv02335/06lv02357/07lv02380/08lv02383, accessed, 11 January 2016.

From 30 November to 19 December 1975, over 20 people were arrested and placed in solitary confinement in connection with their involvement in the Gwala and Jacob Zuma network.¹³³ Among the detained were Willian Fano Khanyile, Anton Ndoda Xaba, John Vusimuzi Nene, Vusimuzi Truman Magubane, Matthews Makholeka Mayewa, Azaria Ndebele, and Zakhele Elphas Mdlalose and they were charged together with Gwala. Also in the net were Herold Bekisisa Nxasana, Abion Alfred Duma, Sylvia Ntombikayise Gamedze, Peter Bhekimpi Gamedze, Moses Bhengu, and Sipho Kubheka, all of whom turned state witness.¹³⁴ As the raids continued, the Security Branch detained Joseph Mdluli on 18 March 1976 and proceeded to ‘torture him to death within 24 hours.’¹³⁵

The Special Branch had assembled a team of senior officers from Natal and Johannesburg to detain all those suspected of being involved in the Gwala and Jacob Zuma network. Zuma managed to escape the county in December 1975. By end of February 1976, the Security Branch had detained over 50 people it suspected of involvement. Even though Jacob Zuma had left the country, the Special Branch was still determined to detain Joseph Nduli and



¹³³ The following people were detained: Zakhele Mdlalose, Matthews Meyiwa, Harry Gwala, David Mkhize, Truman Magubane, Harold Nxasana, Russel Maphanga, Leonard Mdingi, Ephraim Mthalane, Hohn Nene, Anton Xaba, Lawrence Ngubane, Hamilton Kubheka, Moses Bhengu, Riot Mkhwanazi, Mentz Kubheka, William Khanyile, Pius Makhoba, Judson Khuzwayo, Alson Nzama, Mazwi Msimang, Gerald Mdlalose, Miss S Mabhida and Azaria Ndebele, see APC, PC16/14/1/2/8, list of the detainees compiled by the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches. The following were reported to be detained in Pietermaritzburg during and after the trial: Mike Mzileni, Joas Mtakeleng Mogale, Benjamin Ntoele, Joseph Thloloe, Deborah Matshoba, Thamsanqa Mavumengwana, Mzwandile Wotshela, Kenneth Ngoqo, David Makgobu, Ronnie Matabata, David Mamametsi, Kleinboo Maletshe and Nomalizo Judith Kraai, see APC, PC15/14/1/2/41, correspondence from Mr Rayan Moodley to Peter Kerchhoff, 13 October 1977.

¹³⁴ Others arrested were: Allison Mdubane Nzama, Stanely Msibi, Frans Mdelwa Kunene, Bhi Michael Gumede, Alfred Thulani Ndawonde, Ascar Sipho Mathonsi, Phillemon Mokwena, Lawrence Mfana Ngubane, Diza Judson Kuzwayo, Leonard Magashu Mdingi, Sazi Ngcobo, Bekizwe Russel Mapanga, Pius Jabulani Makhoba, Mfanyana Bernard Nkozi, Alfred Maphango Duma, Joshua Thembinkosi Zulu, Mdingi David Mkize, Siphwe Arthur Majola, Gerald Msebenzi Mdlalose, Llewellyn Msimango, Buhle Ephraim Mthalane, Catherine Mkize and Simo Johnson Sishi, see NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, secret correspondence from the Security Branch to the Secretary of Justice, 19 December 1975.

¹³⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntulisiwe Nduli, 10 July 1976; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

Cleopas Ndhlovu, even though they were residents of Swaziland, having been given political asylum.¹³⁶

On 18 March 1976, Jacob Zuma had given R1000 to Samson Lukele which he was supposed to give to Joseph Mdluli.¹³⁷ Jacob Zuma was not aware that Lukele had become a state collaborator. Once Joseph Mdluli had been murdered, Lukele made a scam arrangement to give back the money to Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu on 25 March 1976, and hand over another group of recruits from Natal. Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu went to the spot at the border fence where they had agreed to meet. However, because of ‘marshy terrain’, they could ‘not bring the motor vehicle closer to the border fence.’¹³⁸ As they walked closer they ‘noticed that a stationary motor vehicle on the Piet Retief-Pongola road was flashing its parking lights on and off.’ Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu ‘flashed twice with the torch’ and the motor vehicle moved closer to the fence.¹³⁹ At a closer distance Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu called out “Mbuzi-Mbuzi”, the agreed signal, and a voice answered “Ja”.¹⁴⁰ After a brief discussion, Lukele indicated that they were recruits who had to cross the border. To the astonishment of Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu, ‘people started to emerge from the vehicle’, climbed through onto the Swaziland side of the fence, and apprehended them.¹⁴¹

¹³⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Philip Lobengula Nsibande, 23 June 1976. Nsibande was an Acting Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of the Deputy Prime Minister of Swaziland.

¹³⁷ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 10 July 1976; Howard Barrell interview with Jacob Zuma.

¹³⁸ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 10 July 1976.

¹³⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 10 July 1976.

¹⁴⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 10 July 1976.

¹⁴¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 10 July 1976.

After the arrest of Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu, the state consolidated its charged sheet and issued an indictment with Gwala as accused number one.¹⁴²

All ten accused were held incommunicado for the duration of their detention until they were brought before the court on 14 May 1976.¹⁴³ By refusing to grant bail, and detaining the accused in various police cells and in police stations far removed from their families, the state was trying to mitigate the risk of the accused presenting a unified, well considered legal defence.¹⁴⁴ In addition, since the ‘accused had extremely shortened visits from their families, it became difficult for their families to reach consensus’ on who was going to be their attorney.¹⁴⁵

The state’s trial against Gwala in 1976 must be seen in the context of the political developments that had unfolded between 1975 and 1976. In August 1975, three months before Gwala’s arrest, the state had brought a major political trial against Sathasivan (Saths) Cooper and eight others, also referred to as ‘the SASO Nine.’ The trial became the most publicised legal confrontation since the Rivonia trial whose proceedings had lasted for 16 months.¹⁴⁶ Cooper was found guilty and sentenced to ten years in prison. While the state was preparing for the trial, the student uprising began in Soweto in June 1976 and culminated in countrywide protest and resistance. As these ‘events caught the government off guard’ it was determined to respond in a harsh manner in order to send a strong warning to those

¹⁴² PAR, RSC, 1/1/1001, Vol. 29, Record 1, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, memorandum from AJ Krog, Attorney-General for the Province of Natal, 14 May 1976.

¹⁴³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Navanethem Pillay, 12 July 1976.

¹⁴⁴ The accused were kept in the following police stations: Harry Gwala (Townhill Police Station), John Nene (Loop Street Police Station), Anton Xaba (Loop Street Police Station), Truman Magubane (Howick Police Station), William Khanyile (Umbilo Police Station), Azaria Ndebele (Loop Street Police Station), Mathews Meyiwa (Wartburg Police Station), Joseph Nduli (Alexandra Street Police Station), Zakhele Mdlalose (Greytown Police Station), Cleopas Ndhlovu (Alexandra Street Police Station), see, NAR, DOJ papers, file no. 2/1/53, declassified secret correspondence from the Security Branch to the Secretary of Justice, 19 December 1975.

¹⁴⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Navanethem Pillay, 12 July 1976.

¹⁴⁶ Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 5, 148; for detailed coverage of the trial, see RIM.HP/2007/2/5/1-112, CC 5373/76, State vs Sathasivan Cooper and 8 Others, folders 5 & 6.

disregarding its authority.¹⁴⁷ In addition to the use of violence to suppress the uprising, the state was mindful that the old methods of political control could no longer ensure political stability, so it used the trial of Gwala to reaffirm its authority.¹⁴⁸

The 1976 trial was important in the state's attempts to curb political resistance, to reassure its white constituencies of its 'capacity to maintain law and order and to gain the favour of public opinion.'¹⁴⁹ Paradoxically, Truman Magubane asserts that the '1976 trial presented the liberation movement with an opportunity to expose the cruelty of the apartheid system and to defend their human rights and dignity as legitimate citizens of South Africa.'¹⁵⁰

In order to understand the trial, it is vital that circumstances that predated the modalities of imprisonment and political interrogation and the subjectification of Gwala and nine other co-accused be examined closely. As a trial of such nature required a strong defence, the ANC in exile and families of the accused made arrangements with two legal firms – Navanethem Pillay & Company and A. J. Gumede & Phyllis Naidoo Attorneys – to represent Gwala and his nine co-accused and act as instructing attorneys for the trial.¹⁵¹ This resulted in a feud between the two firms which were competing for recognition, resources and political prominence.¹⁵² Gwala was concerned that 'Phyllis Naidoo had no experience to handle political trials as she had just emerged from house arrest and she impeded [them] from taking a line of defence that [kept] the integrity of the organisation intact.'¹⁵³ To resolve the feud, the ANC office in London issued an instruction that Navanethem Pillay & Company be the

¹⁴⁷ C. van der Westhuizen, *White Power and the Rise and Fall of the National Party* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2007), 109-142.

¹⁴⁸ Albertyn, 'A Critical Analysis of Political Trials', 459.

¹⁴⁹ Ruedi, 'Narratives on Trial', 338.

¹⁵⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane.

¹⁵¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interviews with Truman Magubane, Kgalema Motlanthe and Omar Badsha.

¹⁵² UWC- RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, correspondence between Navanethem Pillay & Co and Chocklingum and David (incorporating Phyllis Naidoo and Gumede), 15 August 1977, 29 August 1977, 30 August 1977; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Omar Badsha.

¹⁵³ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, statement by Harry Gwala to the ANC in London, undated.

instructing attorney while Phyllis Naidoo of A. J. Gumede and Phyllis Naidoo Attorneys was assigned to be in charge of administering the welfare arrangements for the detainees and their families.¹⁵⁴ Relations between Navanethem Pillay and Phyllis Naidoo were acrimonious as they continued to disagree how welfare funds were to be handled.¹⁵⁵

Due to the nature of the trial, it attracted wide publicity in local and international media as trialists were facing the possibility of a death sentence if found guilty. The trial's complexity, the charges against the accused, and the fact that it was expected to go on for a long time convinced the ANC it was necessary to raise an adequate amount of dedicated funding for the trial. The ANC approached the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) for financial support.¹⁵⁶ IDAF committed itself to cover the legal costs of the defence and to provide for the welfare of the detainees and their families.¹⁵⁷ It appointed Carruthers and Company, a London based legal firm, to administer the funding for the Gwala and Others trial and to

¹⁵⁴ Correspondence between Peter Brown and Angela Pringle suggests that not all the families of the detainees received support from the welfare funds that were administered by Phyllis Naidoo. As a result, wives of two other detainees approached Brown for assistance. Brown raised this matter with Pringle, Director of the Dependants Conference of the South African Council of Churches, who raised a concern about 'rival systems' that were being set up in Pietermaritzburg as the SACC had already given payment to Phyllis Naidoo, see APC, PC16/14/1/2/9-10, correspondence between Peter Brown and Angela Pringle, 29 January 1976, 6 February 1976, 15 February 1976; Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Omar Badsha.

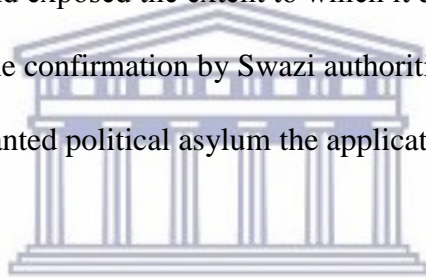
¹⁵⁵ At one stage Navanethem Pillay and Phyllis Naidoo accused each other of being thieves and lodged accusations and counter accusations of misappropriating IDAF funds that were meant to benefit the accused and their families. After an exchange of correspondence with a legal firm, Phyllis Naidoo was forced to issue a public apology and Navanethem Pillay sued her for an amount of R20 000 for damages suffered as a result of wrongful and unlawful defamation. Gwala and other accused also raised their concerns about the amount that Phyllis Naidoo claimed from IDAF. They said she had not attended them and when William Khanyile went to see her at her office he was informed that she was at the hospital. They contested the amount she had claimed in respect of newspapers (R122.75), milk, tea, etc. (R310.36) clothing, shoes and repairs thereto (R399.09), stationary, games, bags, etc. (R205.16) chemist and medical (R485.90) as not justifiable. William Khanyile apologised to Carruthers and Co. for the maladministration of funds. Gwala suggested that William Khanyile should verify the statement that was submitted by Phyllis Naidoo, see UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, correspondence between Chocklingum and David (incorporating Phyllis Naidoo and Gumede) and Navanethem Pillay and Co., 15 August 1977, 30 August 1977, 1 September 1977, 7 September 1977, statements by Harry Gwala and 9 other accused, 11 July 1977, 14 July 1977, 25 July 1977, correspondence from William Khanyile to Carruthers & Co., 1 August 1977.

¹⁵⁶ IDAF was established by Canon L John Collins of St. Paul's Cathedral in 1956. Its mission was to work towards a peaceful solution to the problems of apartheid through raising and distributing funding to victims of apartheid laws, especially political prisoners and their families. It was in the trials of anti-apartheid activists that the fund's most significant contribution was made. IDAF paid for the legal defence of people accused of trying to bring down apartheid and also supported families even after some of them were imprisoned, see G. L. Frieslaar, '(Re)Collections in the Archive: Making and Remaking the International Defence and Aid Fund (IDAF) Archival Collection', PhD dissertation, University of the Western Cape, 2016; Speech by Oliver Tambo at the final conference of the International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa, London, 24 May 1991, www.sahistory.org.za/archives/speech-oliver-tambo-final-conference-international-defence-and-aid-fund-southern-africa-0, accessed, 9 January 2016.

¹⁵⁷ UWC- RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, correspondence from William Khanyile to Carruthers & Co, 1 August 1977.

liaise with the defence team in South Africa. By the end of the trial IDAF had spent R205 899.44 on welfare and R229 294.40 on legal costs.¹⁵⁸

The defence counsel was led by advocates G. B. Muller, senior counsel, and C. R. Nicholson, junior counsel. In addition, Mxenge Attorneys, R. I. Arenstein and N. C. Abrahams also assisted the defence team.¹⁵⁹ The defence applied for the postponement of the trial as it notified the court that it intended to initiate a 'trial within a trial.'¹⁶⁰ At the centre of the defence's argument was whether the court had jurisdiction to try Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu, accused number 9 and 10 respectively, as it contended that these accused had been 'illegally kidnapped from Swaziland and arrested unlawfully.'¹⁶¹ The defence attempted to delegitimise the state's case and exposed the extent to which it disrespected the human rights of freedom fighters. Despite the confirmation by Swazi authorities that both Joseph Nduli and Cleopas Ndhlovu had been granted political asylum the application was dismissed by the court.¹⁶²



After several postponements due to the reluctance of the Special Branch to provide statements of the accused to the defence team, the trial started in August 1976. Advocate

¹⁵⁸ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, The State and T. H. Gwala and others: Trial costs, 13 June 1978 and 21 June 1978. The following were the breakdown of legal costs: Advocate Muller (R78 000.00), Advocate Nicholson (R36 000.00), N. Pillay and Company (R36 300.00), Mr R. I. Arenstein (R31 500.00), A. J. Gumede and Phyllis Naidoo (R18 300.00), and N. C. Abrahams (R2 000.00).

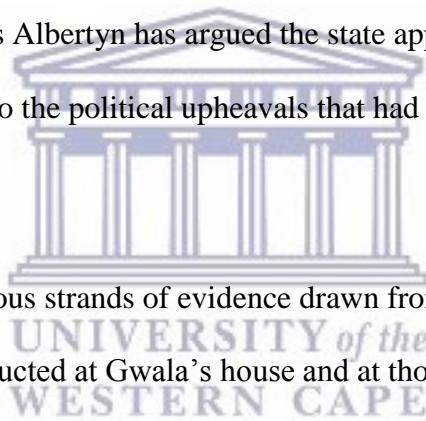
¹⁵⁹ UWC-RIM Museum Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, correspondence between IDAF and N Pillay & Company, and letter from William Khanyile to Carruthers & Co, 1 August 1977; PAR, RSC, 1/1/1003, Vol. 31 Record 10, CC 108/76, statement by Griffith Mlungisi Mxenge, 19 October 1976. Mxenge had been subpoenaed by the state to testify as its witness but he refused on the grounds that the accused had been his clients, had thus developed a relationship prior to the trial, and this relationship was confidential. After his presentation, the judge ruled that Mxenge should be taken off the witness list.

¹⁶⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane.

¹⁶¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Navanethem Pillay, 12 July 1976; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

¹⁶² PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Philip Lobengula Nsiband, 23 June 1976; 'Judge refuses terror detainees', *The Natal Witness*, 10 July 1976. During the TRC former Special Branch member Colonel ARC Taylor stated that Ndhlovu and Nduli were abducted by members of the Security Branch and Riot Unit at the Swaziland border and taken to a base at Island Rock. He confirmed that Ndhlovu and Nduli were assaulted with open hands and fists and one of them was kicked. They were also deprived of sleep, see <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/index.php/site/q/031v02167/041v02264/051v02335/061v02357/071v02380/081v02383.htm>, accessed, 11 January 2016.

Rossouw, the Deputy Attorney-General of Natal who was highly trusted by A. J. Krog, Natal's Attorney-General, led the prosecution.¹⁶³ The state alleged that the accused had 'participated in terroristic activities in contravention of the Terrorism Act of 1967 as amended.'¹⁶⁴ The prosecutor argued that during the period 1 November 1973 to 25 March 1976, Harry Gwala and other accused had been members or active supporters of the ANC. Through their involvement they had 'sent or received messages to or from representatives of the ANC in Swaziland.'¹⁶⁵ Furthermore, the state argued that they had received 'subversive literature from members of the ANC in Swaziland' and they distributed and studied its content.¹⁶⁶ The state's narrative was centred on the allegation that Gwala and other accused conspired to overthrow the government by 'procuring people to undergo training outside the borders of the Republic.'¹⁶⁷ As Albertyn has argued the state approached the trial as a punitive measure in response to the political upheavals that had culminated in the 1976 uprising.¹⁶⁸



The state knitted together various strands of evidence drawn from documents that were obtained during the raids conducted at Gwala's house and at those of the other accused. The state presented a list of over 80 witnesses it intended calling to testify. The coercive and punitive capacity of the state became evident as its list of state witnesses comprised collaborators, askaris and persons who had been detained in solitary confinement for over three months, and who had been severely tortured, and turned into state witnesses.¹⁶⁹ Among

¹⁶³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane; PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, correspondence from Radcliffe Caluza, 30 August 1976.

¹⁶⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1001, Vol. 29, Record 1, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Indictment, 14 May 1976.

¹⁶⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1001, Vol. 29, Record 1, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Indictment, 14 May 1976.

¹⁶⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1001, Vol. 29, Record 1, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Indictment, 14 May 1976.

¹⁶⁷ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1001, Vol. 29, Record 1, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Indictment, 14 May 1976.

¹⁶⁸ Albertyn, 'A Critical Analysis of Political Trials', 458.

¹⁶⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Frans Kunene, 8 February 1977; for a detailed discussion on the use of punishment in the South African legal system in the late 1980s, see Merrett, 'Detention without Trial in South Africa', 53-66; J. Alexander and G. Kynoch, 'Introduction: Histories and Legacies of Punishment in Southern Africa', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 3 (2011); R Roberts and K Mann (eds.), *Law on Colonial Africa* (Portsmouth NH: Heinemann, 1991).

these were Leonard Nkosi, Bruno Mtolo, Kubheka and Frans Kunene.¹⁷⁰ Kubheka had been close to Gwala. During the TRC, Kubheka told the Commission that he was detained and tortured on a number of occasions by the Pietermaritzburg Special Branch during 1975 and 1976. He said he was subjected to severe mental torture and a month in solitary confinement, was stripped naked and assaulted. While being tortured he was told that he had to turn against the ANC and be a state witness in the pending Gwala treason trial. If he refused to cooperate, he would be thrown off a moving train.¹⁷¹

In an affidavit after the trial, Kunene confessed how, in addition to having been tortured in various police solitary confinement cells in Camperdown, Plessislaer and Hammarsdale Police Stations, the conversion to become a state witness was applied to him:

After about two months at Hammarsdale I was taken to the Howick Police Station. There I was kept in a single cell for solitary confinement. When I first got to Howick I was not given water with which to wash for about a month. The food, although unpleasant, was adequate and I have no real complaints about it. After about five months in prison at Howick, I with four other persons (whom I subsequently discovered were also being held in connection with the Pietermaritzburg Terrorist Trial), was taken to Thornville Police Station. There we met about 25 other Black people. I discovered there that these other people were also being held in connection with the same trial. The others had apparently come from different prisons within the vicinity. At Thornville that night we, the detainees, were treated to a film show by the Police. We saw a film about chimpanzees dressed up in human clothing and performing various antics. After the film show was over we were all given alcohol to drink. There was Zulu beer and Cane Spirits. I had plenty of liquor and became quite intoxicated. All, or most, of other detainees also got drunk. We were each given a pocket of twenty cigarettes of a brand of our choice. After this event which ended at approximately 11 p.m. I together with the other detainees who had been held in Howick was taken back there.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ Leonard Nkosi left South Africa in 1963 to undergo military and political training with MK. He was a leader and allegedly a renowned sniper in the Wankie Campaign. He was captured by the Security Branch in 1967 and it is believed that he worked as an askari and later joined the Security Branch. In his application for amnesty, Jan Daniel Potgieter [AM5418/97], a member of the Security Branch intelligence unit, revealed that Nkosi had been compelled to turn state witness against his former colleagues, On 9 September 1977, shortly after testifying against Gwala and nine others, Nkosi was assassinated, see Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (regional profiles: Natal and KwaZulu), volume 3, 177.

¹⁷¹ Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (regional profiles: Natal and KwaZulu), Vol. 3, 169.

¹⁷² PAR, RSC, 1/1/991, Vol. 19, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, affidavit of Frans Kunene, 8 February 1977.

Kubheka and Kunene's experiences suggest that state witnesses were harassed, intimidated and coerced to implicate the accused, and the majority of them were detained by the Special Branch and kept in solitary confinement.¹⁷³ Some of the state witnesses had been involved in the underground operations and had participated in Gwala's underground operations. While the motive for collaboration has been unclear for certain other witnesses and later askaris, state witnesses during the Gwala trial 'testified in fear of their own lives.'¹⁷⁴

The state brought experienced and trained witnesses to court in order to ensure that it was able to link Gwala and the other accused persons with the military activities of the ANC and MK and with the activities of others who were already serving lengthy prison sentences. One such witness was Bruno Mtolo. During the Rivonia trial (1963-64), the state trial of Billy Nair, Curnick Ndlovu and 17 others (1964), and the state trial of Gwala (1964) the courts found Mtolo to be a skilled and reliable witness.¹⁷⁵ By bringing a skilled and trained witness, the state wanted to strengthen its case that the accused had been involved in subversive operations. Despite these measures by the state, witness testimonies contained biases, contradictions, and, at times, blatant lies.¹⁷⁶

The defence presented a list of over 100 witnesses. The defence team adopted the 'narratives of redemption' argument which focused on two aspects.¹⁷⁷ Firstly, it sought to divorce Gwala and other accused from involvement in recruitment for MK, thus projecting the most legally benign view possible of the ANC while at the same time making 'maximum use of the

¹⁷³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1000, Vol. 28, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, defence's address on application for the recall of B. H. Nxasana, 3 May 1977. Bhekiziswe Herald Nxasana was a trade unionist and actively involved in the resuscitation of SACTU in Natal during the 1970s. He was arrested in January 1977 and compelled to testify against Gwala and others. During solitary confinement, Nxasana was assaulted and severely tortured even though he denied it in court for fear of being victimised. His wife Clothilde Nxasana, however, told the defence lawyers that Nxasana had visible signs of torture on his body.

¹⁷⁴ Dlamini, *Askari*, 98.

¹⁷⁵ Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (regional profiles: Natal and KwaZulu), Vol. 3, 170.

¹⁷⁶ For further discussion on lies and subjectivity, see Ginzburg, 'Checking the Evidence'; Anderson, 'The Past on Trial'.

¹⁷⁷ Anderson, 'The Past on Trial', 486.

courtroom as a political platform.¹⁷⁸ The defence countered the state's argument by attempting to affirm that Gwala and the accused had been involved in the resuscitation of trade unions, especially SACTU.¹⁷⁹ Thus, Gwala asserted that letters between him and Mabhida were mainly centred on trade unions since both had worked together in SACTU in Natal during the 1950s and 1960s. Gwala testified that:

This letter stated that he [Mabhida] had for long time made an effort to contact me but that he had received no reply from me and that Dhloomo had come and told him about the efforts to revive SACTU and.... That he would be glad if there were efforts made to revive SACTU because there was great need for it to be revived.¹⁸⁰

During the trial, Gwala further argued that his political activities were 'provoked by the injustices that were imposed on African workers and the state had made it difficult for them to be protected.'¹⁸¹ Thus, Gwala claimed he had been a victim of an unjust political environment that was created by the apartheid minority government.¹⁸² The defence did not reject the state's allegation that Gwala had facilitated the transportation of people to cross the border to Swaziland. However, the defence's constructed narrative was that people who crossed the border were to receive training in trade unionism and attended trade union conferences. It denounced the allegation of their involvement in the political activities of MK. Towards the end of its argument, the defence subpoenaed Selby Msimang, a veteran politician who had been a founder member of the ANC in 1912 but who joined the Liberal Party and then Inkatha Ye Nkululeko YeSizwe, 'to justify the ANC's commitment to nonracialism and better South Africa.' Msimang's testimony focused mainly on the extent to

¹⁷⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane; Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 5, 148.

¹⁷⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 23, Record 11-12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Themba Harry Gwala.

¹⁸⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 23, Record 11-12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Themba Harry Gwala.

¹⁸¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 23, Record 11-12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Themba Harry Gwala.

¹⁸² Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

which the ANC had strived for peaceful means of attaining liberation for Africans, and on the illegitimacy of the apartheid system.¹⁸³

The trial judge admitted that Gwala's evidence showed that while he communicated with the people he was alleged to have recruited, he claimed to have 'pursued a noble course and he gave evidence in a bold, often aggressive manner, trying to score points off the prosecutor when the opportunity presented itself.'¹⁸⁴ Furthermore, the judge stated that:

However, apart from the simulation to which we have already referred, his [Gwala's] demeanour was not such as to indicate that he was an untruthful witness. That does not mean, of course, that he made a favourable impression upon us – he did not.¹⁸⁵

Secondly, the defence's strategy was to cast doubt on the legitimacy of the methods the state had used to solicit statements from the accused.¹⁸⁶ The defence argued that the witnesses upon whose evidence the state relied had been forced to testify because their interrogators had applied high levels of torture and intimidation. As Lobban has argued, nearly half of the court's hearing time was taken up with police torture 'as witness after witness told of the torture they had suffered at the hands of the police.'¹⁸⁷ Furthermore, the defence argued that the accused had been forced to write 'a particular version' of information in their statements as they had been threatened and feared for their own lives.¹⁸⁸ The defence said the accused had been severely tortured while in solitary confinement, and referred to the death of Mdluli in police custody.

¹⁸³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 32, Record 12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Selby Msimang.

¹⁸⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 30, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Judgment.

¹⁸⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 30, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Judgment.

¹⁸⁶ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1004, Vol. 23, Record 11-12, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, statement of Adv. Muller.

¹⁸⁷ Lobban, *White Man's Justice*, 174.

¹⁸⁸ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, affidavit of Harry Gwala, 3 June 1977; PAR, RSC, 1/1/997, Vol. 21 & 22, Record 10, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, evidence of Judson Khuzwayo.

The 532-page judgment was eventually delivered on 14 and 15 July 1977. As with Shahid Amin's argument in relation to the Chauri Chaura incident in India, the judge provided a harmonious narrative for the discordant accounts by the accused. These became tools of building both political and legal precedent.¹⁸⁹ Despite the defence's argument that Gwala and other accused had not participated in the recruitment of people to undergo military training outside the country, the judge found that 'it had been proven beyond reasonable doubt that Gwala and other accused received subversive literature and letters which referred to the recruitment of youth for training in Mozambique.'¹⁹⁰ Furthermore, the judge found that Gwala had 'committed a conspiracy when he procured Mandla Sikosana, Edgar Zondi, Mtu Khumalo, R. M. Hadebe, Vicky Khumalo, Caiphos Nene and George Mkhize to undergo military training abroad.'¹⁹¹ With the exception of William Khanyile, who was acquitted of all the charges, all the other accused were found guilty. Through the trial and the judgment, Gwala was disconnected and criminalised. With the exception of Siphosane Kubheka, Philemon Mokoena and Harold Nxasana, the judge discharged all accomplices from liability for the offences mentioned in the indictment.

All the accused appeared briefly on the morning of 25 July 1977 to plead in mitigation of sentence, and the judge handed down the sentences on the same afternoon. The judge argued that when 'deciding upon the sentences to be passed on each accused' he had been guided by the legal precedent that 'punishment should fit the criminal as well as the crime, be fair to society.'¹⁹² The judge said that he had taken into account personal circumstances of each of the accused as well as their family circumstances. At 57, Gwala was the oldest of the accused. It is not clear to what extent the judge took into account his age or the fact that his

¹⁸⁹ S. Amin, *Event, Metaphor, Memory: Chauri Chaura, 1922-1992* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1995), 94.

¹⁹⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Judgment.

¹⁹¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Judgment.

¹⁹² PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Sentencing.

family depended on him. The judge emphasised that Gwala had ‘admitted previous convictions for offences involving subversive activities’, thus implying that he was a serial offender.¹⁹³ According to the judge, ‘in view of the nature of their crimes, they must be sentenced to long terms of imprisonment, but in their cases the punishment must be designed to reform as well as to prevent and deter.’¹⁹⁴ The judge said that he ‘had given careful consideration to all that Mr Muller had said on their behalf [the accused], but [thought] that [he] would be failing in [his] duty if [he] was to pass the lenient sentences that he [Muller] suggested.’¹⁹⁵ Gwala was sentenced to life imprisonment.¹⁹⁶

Soon after the sentences were handed down, Gwala and the other accused instructed their attorney to apply for leave to appeal against their convictions and sentences.¹⁹⁷ Advocate Nicholson handled the application as Advocate Muller would not attend to the case because there was a dispute concerning unpaid legal fees for May and July 1977. The matter was referred to the Society of Advocates of Natal which resolved that Advocate Muller was entitled to the full fee due for May, and half his fee for the month of July.¹⁹⁸ The state opposed the application. After hearing the grounds for appeal on 28 July 1977, the judge found that ‘this case rests upon finding of fact and credibility’ of witnesses.¹⁹⁹ The judge was convinced that the accused showed no remorse for their actions and was not persuaded that

¹⁹³ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Sentencing.

¹⁹⁴ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Sentencing.

¹⁹⁵ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Sentencing.

¹⁹⁶ The other accused were sentenced as follows: Anton Ndoda Xaba, life imprisonment; John Vusumuzi Nene, life imprisonment; Vusumuzi Truman Magubane, 15 years’ imprisonment; Matthews Makholeka Meyiwa, life imprisonment; Azaria Ndebele, seven years’ imprisonment; Zakhele Elphas Mdlalose, life imprisonment; Joseph Ntuliswe Nduli, 15 years’ imprisonment; and Cleopas Melayibone Ndhlovu, ten years’ imprisonment, see PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Sentencing; *Sechaba: Official Organ of the ANC South Africa*, Vol. 11, First Quarter (1977), ‘Pietermaritzburg Ten on Trial for ANC Activism’, 17-20.

¹⁹⁷ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 4202, aid to victims file, correspondence from William Khanyile to Carruthers and Co., 22 September 1977; PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, Application for leave to appeal.

¹⁹⁸ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and others file, correspondence from G. H. Penzhorn (Honorary Secretary of the Society of Advocates in Natal) to Messrs Navanethem Pillay and Company, 22 November 1978.

¹⁹⁹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, Application for leave to appeal.

there had been misdirection in the case. The judge did not accept the defence submission that the sentences were ‘disturbingly inappropriate or severe as to induce a sense of shock.’²⁰⁰

While he agreed that the sentences indeed severe, he was convinced that the severity was justifiable as they were ‘not imposed in a spirit of anger but only after the most anxious consideration.’²⁰¹ The judge dismissed the application for leave to appeal because he did not believe that there was a reasonable prospect of the court of appeal holding that he had ‘exercised [his] discretion unjudicially or improperly in imposing the sentences.’²⁰²

The state had learned from earlier political trials that high-profile trials had a tendency to draw unwelcome media attention. Gwala and some other accused were well aware of this since they had been on trial before. By the conclusion of the trial in July 1977, Gwala and the other accused had managed to attract considerable publicity. Through their behaviour in court they conveyed a potent message of defiance towards white authority.²⁰³ Mindful of the gallery visitors, at times, they emerged from the cells beneath the courtroom robustly singing struggle songs and making the clenched fist salute. On entering the dock, they occasionally bellowed *Amandla!* (power) in unison at the startled spectators in the gallery.²⁰⁴

After the appeal was dismissed, the state fast-tracked arrangements to move Gwala and eight others to Robben Island. Gwala and the other accused decided to petition the Chief Justice.²⁰⁵ Gwala soon instructed Navanethem Pillay and Company to inform the ANC and IDAF about this intention and the consequent need for further funding for legal fees.²⁰⁶ The petition was

²⁰⁰ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, Application for leave to appeal.

²⁰¹ PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, Application for leave to appeal.

²⁰² PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, Application for leave to appeal.

²⁰³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane.

²⁰⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Truman Magubane; PAR, RSC, 1/1/1011, Vol. 39, Record 32, CC 108/76, State v Harry Gwala and 9 others, The Sentencing.

²⁰⁵ Harry Gwala private papers, unsigned and undated affidavit by Harry Gwala. I am grateful to Lindiwe Gwala (Gwala’s daughter) for showing me certain papers that belonged to Harry Gwala.

²⁰⁶ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and others file, correspondence from Harry Gwala to Navanethem Pillay & Co., undated, correspondence from Navanethem Pillay & Co. to Carruthers and Company, 1 August 1979.

based on the ‘severity of the offences and the sentences imposed.’²⁰⁷ Gwala’s defence argued that the judge was ‘misdirected’, since the defendants’ ‘lack of remorse was taken into account in assessing a proper sentence.’ The petitioners persisted in asserting their innocence. Furthermore, the evidence presented by the state through its witness had been concocted and the ‘police had been allowed to have control over unconvicted prisoners.’²⁰⁸ Available archival records, though incomplete,²⁰⁹ suggest that the petition was successful.²¹⁰ In a letter of request to the IDAF to fund the legal costs of the appeal, Navanethem Pillay said:

As we have stressed in the past that our clients stand an excellent chance of success on appeal. The fact that the Chief Justice had allowed leave to appeal both on merit and on sentence is a clear indication of our client’s prospects of success. In the nature of this case, clients should have the best available Counsel to argue the appeal.²¹¹

It is against this background that Navanethem Pillay instructed Messrs. Webber and Newdigate Attorneys of Bloemfontein to be the appellants’ attorneys. The appeal was set for hearing on 18, 19, 21 and 22 February 1980. As a result of the feud between Navanethem Pillay and Phyllis Naidoo, raising the funds to finance the appellants’ legal team was a challenge.²¹² At one point, the IDAF was reluctant to make payments for the outstanding trial and appeal costs because of difficulties with getting the two instructing attorneys’ firms to account for funds spent, especially welfare funds. Due to the IDAF’s reluctance to cover

²⁰⁷ Harry Gwala private papers, petition document, undated.

²⁰⁸ Harry Gwala private papers, petition document appellants’ heads of argument, undated.

²⁰⁹ The author was unable to find the heads of argument of the prosecution and of the defence.

²¹⁰ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and others file, correspondence between Navanethem Pillay & Co. and Carruthers & Co., 11 November 1977, 20 December 1977, 15 January 1978; NAR, Department of Prisons Papers, file no. 1238, declassified telegraphy from Navanethem Pillay & Co. to the Commanding Officer of Robben Island, 2 March 1978.

²¹¹ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and 9 others file, correspondence from Navanethem Pillay & Co. to Carruthers and Co., 1 August 1979.

²¹² UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and 9 others file, correspondence from Navanethem Pillay & Co. to Carruthers & Co., 5 December 1979.

other costs of the appeal, the services of senior counsel had to be dispensed with since there was no guarantee that the IDAF was going to accept the financial liability.²¹³

On 28 March 1980, the Appellate Division delivered the judgment which dismissed the appeal of Gwala and eight others against their conviction and sentences. When Navanethem Pillay visited Gwala to inform him about the outcome of the appeal, she recorded that ‘Gwala was tremendously disappointed’ as he had hoped that the appeal would be successful.²¹⁴ Nevertheless, Gwala asked Pillay to convey his ‘appreciation to the IDAF for its financial support throughout the trial including welfare’ to their families.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the evolution of Gwala’s politics towards a militant stance was a culmination of the state’s provocation and determination to disconnect him from his politics. Gwala’s politics cannot be studied in isolation from the historical shifts within the ANC and the manner in which the state handled challenges to its authority, particularly from March 1960. Gwala’s militant politics and the state trials are part of the complex narrative of the history of the armed struggle, particularly in Natal. The state’s trial of Gwala demonstrates the state’s use of ‘excessive violence’ and the modalities of power and discourse that sustained apartheid.²¹⁵ The political circumstances of the period from 1960 to 1977 inevitably made Gwala’s political path more militant, with ‘historically driven beginnings and a middle.’²¹⁶ The trials became a contest of ideas between two cohesive but rival political

²¹³ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and 9 others file, correspondence from Navanethem Pillay & Co. to Carruthers & Co., 5 December 1979.

²¹⁴ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603 (629), legal correspondence, Gwala and 9 others file, correspondence from Navanethem Pillay & Co. to Miller & Co., 28 April 1980.

²¹⁵ Lalu, ‘Sara’s suicide’, 92.

²¹⁶ Lalu and Harris, ‘Journeys from the Horizons of History’, 28.

positions, white assumptions of superiority on the one hand, and the assertion of black resistance on the other, both of which were clear expressions of race and politics.

This chapter has constructed a historical image of Gwala within the broader political context of the armed struggle and state political trials. The state's trial of Gwala became a site of a countervailing discourse, a site of establishing historical narratives that simultaneously questioned the authority of the apartheid state and legitimised the liberation struggle. The trials present the paradox of the oppressive South African state using the law in politically biased courts to deny justice to the majority. These trials were characterised by state censure intended to disconnect and vilify Gwala, but which instead aided the liberation movement's efforts through providing publicity, thus gaining much-needed public sympathy, international expressions of solidarity, and widespread exposure of the brutality of apartheid.

While the 1960s' state trials of Gwala were crucial in the local struggles of Pietermaritzburg and Natal, their coverage was eclipsed by the Rivonia trial on the one hand, and limited by the state's system for censoring media reporting about political trials on the other.²¹⁷ This chapter has shown how the political conditions of the 1970s were characterised by the reinvigoration of popular struggles by independent trade unions which led to the 1973 Durban strikes, the release of political prisoners who had been imprisoned, mainly at Robben Island, during the 1960s, and the emergence of radical student movements in the mid-1970s. This suggests that the had a profound influence on the way the state dealt with Gwala's politics of connectedness during his 1976 trial.

This chapter has examined how the prosecution's construction of events in court proceedings, its selection of witnesses, many of whom had been subjected to torture and coercion, and the

²¹⁷ C. Merrett, *A Culture of Censorship: Secrecy and Intellectual Repression in South Africa* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1994), 55.

presentation of unreliable evidence interferes with the process of writing history. Gwala's trials show how the courts provided a crucial and uncritical platform for the state to criminalise opposition to its authority. For this reason, the production of historical knowledge obtained through the close examination of court records should be balanced by a clear understanding that evidence presented before the courts in such circumstances served to reproduce a particular political viewpoint.

The chapter has constructed narratives that display Gwala as a victim of state torture and disconnectedness. The three trials discussed in this chapter are framed as being parts of a wider system of political control with specific and diverse political and ideological impact on Gwala's life. Gwala's trials became the state's means to eliminate its political foes, and should be understood within a wider battle for political dominance. These and other trials became an expression of power, and a tool of control that reduced the law to being an instrument for the state to exercise political power, and 'getting to know the enemy and rendering him harmless.'²¹⁸

The trials had a different impact on Gwala's political status. The imprisonment provided him with an opportunity to participate in robust political discussions with the ANC leadership and political prisoners at Robben Island about the dialectics of socialism and nationalism within the ANC. Although the state disconnected Gwala by imprisoning him, he gradually gained public sympathy that would later become vital in the process of rebuilding the ANC branches after its unbanning in 1990. This served to re-establish and reconfirm Gwala's identity as a 'lion of Pietermaritzburg, a theme that is explored in detail later.

²¹⁸ B J Vorster, 'Foreword', in L Strydom, *Rivonia Unmasked*, Johannesburg: Voortrekker Press, 1965. Vorster served as Prime Minister of South Africa from 1966 to 1978 and as the fourth State President from 1978 to 1979. Vorster was known for his staunch adherence to apartheid. He was the Minister of Justice during the Rivonia trial in which Nelson Mandela and other were sentenced to life imprisonment for sabotage.

CHAPTER FIVE

Harry Gwala's prison lives 1965-1988

Introduction

Robben Island and the memory of its political prisoners occupy a pivotal role in the chronicles of the South African liberation history. The corpus of ex-political prisoners' memoirs by Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada and others highlighted the cruelty of the apartheid system and the ability of political prisoners to overcome adversity.¹ Although Mandela and Kathrada appear to be dominant figures in the narratives of Robben Island, Harry Gwala's role, albeit complex, has not been examined to the same extent. Gwala participated in developing an intellectual framework that sustained political consciousness and connected ordinary prisoners with the political and intellectual worlds of both the ANC and the Communist Party.² This chapter seeks to address this lacuna by examining Harry Gwala's roles while he was imprisoned at Robben Island.

The first part of this chapter examines the germination of Gwala's complex roles in football and political education on Robben Island. Gwala's devotion to football (albeit slightly) and to political education, ingeniously transformed the jail and forged wider unity amongst political prisoners. Simultaneously, Gwala fought to reform harsh conditions, the result of which was to facilitate the development of political intellectualism and the recognition of Robben Island as a 'university' within the liberation struggle.³ Although conditions of repression contributed to the psychological homogeneity and political respectability among the prisoners, it was Gwala's series of lectures on 'the Man and his Country' which he presented underground,

¹ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*; Sisulu, *In Our Lifetime*; A. Kathrada, *Memoirs*, (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2004).

² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Vincent Diba.

³ P. Limb, 'Imprisonment in Apartheid South Africa II: Robben Island', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 2005, 666-668; A. Bady, 'Robben Island University', *Transition*, No. 116, 2014, 106-119.

that provided a political and philosophical induction to the theoretical intellectualism of the liberation struggle. Gwala's lectures, coupled with the political work of Martin Legassick, were part of the broader intellectual project that sought to reorganise the production of a new kind of political cadre of the liberation movement.⁴ As a result, Gwala earned himself accolades as 'a respected Marxist, intellectual and a theoretician of the struggle.'⁵ It was this robust intellectualism which, at a later stage, provided the impetus for reforms within the prison administration and later even negotiations to end apartheid.

The second part of the chapter examines how Gwala's family, mainly Elda, his wife, and later Lulu Gwala, his eldest daughter, dealt with his long absence. Since the imprisonment of Gwala in 1964 some white liberals in Pietermaritzburg took a personal interest in him and in his family's welfare.⁶ After the re-imprisonment of Gwala in 1975, Elda organised the wives of other prisoners into a support group of which she became a leader. The last section explores the conditions of Gwala's deteriorating health while in prison; epistolary exchange with members of the family, relatives and those who sympathised with his prison and medical conditions; and the mounting pressure from various organisations, national and international, that petitioned the prison authorities, the Minister of Justice and the State President to release Gwala unconditionally on medical grounds. This chapter argues that in spite of his imprisonment and isolation, Harry Gwala made use of prison conditions to advance the process of mobilisation, unity and political connectedness.

⁴ Noor Nieftagodien, address at the funeral service of Martin Legassick, 12 March 2016, St George's Cathedral, Cape Town.

⁵ S. Mhlongo, 'Isifundo: Iqiniso lomlando wezepolitiki', *Isolezwe*, 6 July 2013, 13.

⁶ In Pietermaritzburg white liberals worked very closely with the ANC and African communities. Alan Paton and Peter Brown, for example, were closely associated with key African leaders such as Chief Albert Luthuli and Harry Gwala, see M. Cardo, *Opening Men's Eyes: Peter Brown and the Liberal Party of South Africa* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2010); P. Limb (ed.), *A. B. Xuma: Autobiography and Selected Works* (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 2012).

Gwala, connectedness and football

On 7 June 1965, Harry Gwala was admitted to Robben Island to serve an eight-year term of imprisonment imposed by the Pietermaritzburg Supreme Court. Gwala claimed to have been informed ‘vaguely’ by his ‘comrades’ that Robben Island was the worst prison, but it was only when he arrived there that ‘he realised what they were talking about.’⁷ Between 1965 and 1988, Gwala’s life was shaped by the state’s imposition of high levels of isolation from society as he served two terms at Robben Island in this time. In 1987 he was transferred to Pietermaritzburg and Westville prisons. The state’s incarceration of Gwala at Robben Island was designed to isolate and disconnect him and locate him in an environment which would exclude him from having any political influence and render him harmless.⁸ Gwala’s pragmatism, however, enabled him to adapt to the prison conditions as he involved himself in sport and political education during both his first term of imprisonment and part of his second term.⁹ He remarked:

I must say that political education did not depend on the harshness of the authorities. It was a matter of do or die. It was underground work. We were subjected to underground work before we went to prison. So in prison it was a continuation of that, so we had no problem with the restrictions imposed on us because we carried out our political activities.¹⁰

The arrival of Gwala on Robben Island in 1965 coincided with the growing influx of prisoners, mainly young, and with increasing demands by prisoners to have access to recreational facilities. Chuck Korr and Marvin Close have documented how prisoners themselves overcame their trepidation and launched a campaign in 1964 to demand that

⁷ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala; Dlamuka Mxolisi interview with Monde Mkhunqwana.

⁸ Vorster, ‘Foreword’.

⁹ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁰ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

prisoners be allowed out in the fresh air for exercise.¹¹ As football had already taken centre stage in the lives of ordinary people by that time, mainly blacks, the group of young prisoners that arrived at Robben Island in 1964 and 1965 were football fanatics. Among them was Dimake Malepe, a PAC activist who was also a respected full-time football player in Cape Town.¹² Prisoners' interest in football, that started as kickabouts in cells in 1963, brought 'much needed fun into the prisoners' lives.' This interest in football grew steadily, and received a boost with the arrival of Malepe on Robben Island.¹³ As interest grew, the desire to play on a proper outside pitch intensified even though prison rules prohibited them from talking with another, let alone gather groups. As early as 1964, prison authorities had prohibited the use of pencils and board games such as chess and draughts. Given the tightening of security restrictions on recreational activities, prisoners knew that if they want to play football on an open pitch, prison rules would have to be changed. This seemed to be an impossible scenario, given the rigid nature of the prison managers.

Although Gwala did not initiate the demand to be allowed to play football, Monde Mkhunqwana remembers that he played a role in the campaign.¹⁴ To Gwala, the struggle to play football was not just an issue of access to recreation. He saw it as a tool of political mobilisation. Having been involved in football politics in Pietermaritzburg and Natal during the late 1940s and early 1950s, Gwala used the campaign as a tool to rebuild political morale that had been crippled by restriction and victimisation on Robben Island.

Prisoners were prohibited from campaigning or raising issues as a group. However, because prison management wanted to show the international community that it was following

¹¹ C. Korr and M. Close, *More Than Just a Game: Football v Apartheid* (London: Collins, 2008), 49.

¹² Mr Adriaan interview with Sedick Isaacs; Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 47.

¹³ Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 48.

¹⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Monde Mkhunqwana.

reasonable rules and regulations, they established a forum where prisoners were allowed to raise their 'complaints' and 'requests.'¹⁵ These sessions were held every Saturday morning. Even though prisoners considered these sessions to be worthless, they agreed to formally raise their football request with prison management. From December 1964, prisoners engaged in a campaign to be allowed to play football on Robben Island by raising the same request individually, again and again.¹⁶ This 'request' infuriated prison management and those who raised this request were punished by having their food rations withheld on the following weekend.

This campaign continued throughout 1965 with neither side being willing to back down. The intransigence of prison management had advantages for prisoners. For the first time, the prisoners experienced a sense of collective cohesion which transcended political lines of division and this unity of purpose shaped the nature of prisoners' resistance on Robben Island.¹⁷ When the International Red Cross (IRC) was allowed to visit Robben Island in 1966, prisoners raised the same request. From 1966, Helen Suzman began to visit Robben Island and communicated with Nelson Mandela. Mandela discussed with her the prisoner's request to be allowed to play football.¹⁸ Under pressure from Helen Suzman and the IRC, the excuse that allowing prisoners to play football was a security threat quickly lost credibility. By December 1967, Robben Island prison managers granted permission for prisoners to play football for 30 minutes every Saturday.¹⁹ This victory for the prisoners laid the basis for political cooperation, especially between ANC and PAC prisoners.

¹⁵ Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 49.

¹⁶ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁷ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁸ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 422.

¹⁹ Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 58.

Robben Island prison management had underestimated the will of prisoners to continue playing. Having granted permission, the prison authorities did not think that football would last more than two months.²⁰ In an attempt to expose the inability of prisoners to organise football matches, one Saturday, prison management unexpectedly ‘strode into cell block four and chose two teams of prisoners at random from those who had volunteered to play.’²¹ To their surprise, prisoners took this opportunity to name their teams Rangers and the Bucks. The prison management had cleared an open area next to the prison block to be used as a pitch. Prisoners played barefoot and in their uniforms. This 30-minute match marked the beginning of football on Robben Island which precipitated the formation of other clubs, formalisation of management structures, a competitive football league, recording the rules of the game (based on FIFA rules), and formalising the establishment of the Makana Football Association (MFA) in June 1969.²²

The records of the MFA records reveal the highest level of precision, with meticulously kept documentation. These records provide the opportunity to access the ‘community self-perceptions’ of life on Robben Island at a particular time. Unlike prison memoirs and interviews, the records were produced for the use of prisoners themselves, not for an outside audience.²³ They contain a sense of vulnerability, precariousness and nostalgia about the lives of prisoners and their relationship with the prison authorities. In addition, these records demonstrate the complexity of maintaining sporting standards in prison conditions, both in the administration as well as in the games themselves.

²⁰ Mr Adriaan interview with Sedick Isaacs.

²¹ Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 59.

²² Other clubs that were formed were: Hotspurs, Dynamos, Ditshitshidi, Black Eagles, Manong, Mphatlalatsane, and Gunners; see Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 62-73.

²³ F. Buntman, ‘Continuing and Extending Resistance and Struggle: The Role of Robben Island, 1963-1976’, unpublished paper presented at the Wits Institute for Advanced Social Research, University of the Witwatersrand, 17 October 1994, 24.

Other prisoners had played football before they were imprisoned, but Harry Gwala was an exception. He had not played football but, as shown previously, had been part of local and provincial football administrative bodies in Natal. As a skilled football administrator, he had experience in writing the rules and interpreting them during disputes. Gwala participated actively in the processes that led to being granted permission to play football on Robben Island. Perhaps, Gwala had anticipated football would have a positive impact in raising political consciousness on Robben Island. He was concerned about the possibility of prisoners losing political direction as a result of the impact to harsh prison conditions.²⁴

Besides being involved in writing the rules, Gwala was also active as a referee, and sometimes as a linesman. Korr and Close assert that Gwala made being a referee into a ‘calling.’²⁵ His hardline stance as a referee on the application of the rules of football and ensuring on the spot interpretation of these rules earned him much respect among political prisoners on Robben Island. Gwala’s political background as a communist influenced his understanding of the relationship between football and prisoners. In line with his politics of connectedness, he used football as a tool to educate prisoners about the collective political consciousness of the working class across the world. He hosted discussions on the history of football and discussed current football developments in other countries such as Hungary, Spain and Poland.²⁶

By the beginning of 1972, football on Robben Island had expanded and was becoming more complex to manage because of political rivalry and competition between the clubs. Because Gwala’s political stance was well known and he was a member of the Bucks FC, he was also accused of being biased by other groupings within the Robben Island football fraternity. On 8

²⁴ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

²⁵ Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 93.

²⁶ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

April 1972, Rangers FC lodged a complaint that Harry Gwala's refereeing decisions were biased because he was a member of the Bucks FC and because his decisions unfairly favoured teams dominated by ANC members.²⁷ After the Referees' Union (RU) informed Gwala about these allegations, he tendered his resignation as a referee because he 'was tired of being accused of favouritism.'²⁸

The management of the MFA was shocked by Gwala's decision and recommended that the RU should establish a commission to establish the 'deeper causes' behind his resignation. The commission established that allegations against Gwala could not be substantiated.²⁹ Furthermore, the commission found that Gwala's membership of the Bucks FC had not influenced his refereeing decisions and that he had consistently applied the laws of football without favour.³⁰ Gwala felt vindicated by the commission's finding. He believed that referees had shown the ability to distance themselves from their own clubs and rejected even the hint that his decisions on the field were based on anything other than his clearest judgement and his understanding of the rules of football.³¹ When the commission and the wider Robben Island fraternity withdrew its aspersions against his integrity. Gwala tore up his resignation letter to signify that he would continue serving as a referee.

By the time of his release in June 1972, Gwala had instilled a strong culture of complying with the rules of football and respecting the decisions and instructions of the referee. Because Gwala was using football as an opportunity to conduct clandestine political education, he was also mindful that it was equally important to instil the doctrine of respect for the authorities in

²⁷ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 64-14-1-133, Robben Island Sport Collection, letter from the Secretary of the Rangers FC to the Secretary of the MFA, 8 April 1972.

²⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala; Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 164.

²⁹ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

³⁰ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 64-14-1-206a, Robben Island Sport Collection, Report of the Referee Commission, 29 May 1972.

³¹ Korr and Close, *More Than Just a Game*, 164.

order to sustain the underground operations of the liberation movement. Gwala admitted that football did a lot to bring them together, 'PAC or what.'³² In certain instances, Gwala remembered, clubs were not formed along political lines. At times, clubs were formed to represent a block where prisoners lived.³³ Concerning the success of football to bring about political tolerance among political prisoners, Gwala remarked:

So we found that as times went on, there was more understanding, in particular between ANC and PAC. But what was significant there, is that according to the information we used to receive, when you put people who belong to different political organisation together in prison they fought among themselves. But there was not a single fight among us. I always admire that.³⁴

Inter-political connectedness and prison literacy

Raymond Suttner has characterised Robben Island as an institution that contributed to the formulation of political intellectuals.³⁵ Robben Island had a profound influence on the liberation struggle and the inculcation in the ANC of a culture of intellectual engagement, something which had been dominated largely by the Communist Party. Gwala's imprisonment signalled the establishment of Robben Island as an institution of intellectual and political clout within the borders of South Africa, and this was to play a central role in communications with the external missions in London and Lusaka. Through Gwala's stewardship, the juxtaposition of political and educational processes enabled Robben Island to produce political intellectuals, some of whom became strong independent thinkers within the ANC.

³² Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

³³ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

³⁴ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

³⁵ R. Suttner, 'The Character and Formation of Intellectuals Within the ANC-led South African Liberation Movement', in T Mkandawire (ed.), *African Intellectuals: Rethinking Politics, Language, Gender and Development*, Dakar (CODESRIA Books, 2005), 139.

There are contradictory views on how Harry Gwala became involved in political education. Ahmed Kathrada argues that Gwala ‘wasted little time in starting Marxism classes.’³⁶ Kathrada posits that Gwala started these classes in order to establish cells of the Communist Party. In addition, according to Kathrada, although Gwala’s classes had stimulated interest among many Communist Party prisoners, ANC prisoners who felt excluded were unhappy. The matter was referred to the uppermost leadership, the High Command.³⁷ After intense discussions, the High Command informed Gwala that there was no objection to his classes, but suggested that these should form part of the existing ANC political education syllabus for a wider group of ANC cells. Kathrada notes that Gwala accepted this instruction of the High Command, although reluctantly.

Gwala’s own admission suggests that when he arrived at Robben Island in 1965, he became aware that both the ANC and the PAC had already ‘developed underground political structures, even though scanty, that suited prison conditions.’³⁸ In his interviews, Gwala has not provided any indication that he did not initially join existing ANC cells. Rather he attempted to establish Communist Party ones. Perhaps, as Martin Legassick and Thula Simpson have argued, the leadership role that the Communist Party had taken in the establishment of the armed struggle might have caused Gwala to want the Party to have a strong presence on Robben Island.³⁹ Having joined the Communist Party two years before joining the ANC, Gwala was preoccupied with class consciousness throughout the time he was involved ANC leadership structures.

³⁶ Kathrada, *Memoirs*, 288.

³⁷ Kathrada, *Memoirs*, 288.

³⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

³⁹ See M. Legassick, *Armed Struggle and Democracy* (Uppsala: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2002); T. Simpson, *Umkhonto We Sizwe: The ANC’s Armed Struggle* (Cape Town: Penguin Books, 2016); T. Lodge and B. Nasson, *All, Here, and Now: Black Politics in South Africa in the 1980s* (Cape Town: David Philip 1991).

Contrary to Kathrada's view, Gwala said that after his arrival on Robben Island, he was 'immediately co-opted into the Disciplinary Committee (DC) of the ANC.'⁴⁰ The DC, as the highest decision making body in the general cells, carried out all the political work of the ANC on Robben Island, including reaching political decisions. It communicated with the High Command, which consisted on the Rivonia prisoners in the isolation cells. Furthermore, it was the DC that was in charge of correspondence and developing codes that became embedded in the clandestine culture of Robben Island.⁴¹ ANC prisoners in each cell organised themselves in smaller units under the leadership of a unit leader, who was under the direct command of the General Section leadership. As a member of the ANC, Gwala automatically belonged to an ANC cell unit. However, because of the repressive prison conditions, Gwala remarked that despite having a unit leader 'you would not know anything or who else was involved, except those who were with you in your unit.'⁴² Monde Mkhunqwana recalled that, in the harsh conditions of repression during the mid-1960s, Gwala encouraged prisoners to have 'discussions at every time during lunch time.'⁴³

Debates became a tool to negotiate the conditions of cooperation between the ANC and the PAC. Dikgang Moseneke remembered that the arrival of large groups of ANC prisoners from 1964 brought a new political culture at Robben Island, which had been previously dominated mainly by PAC prisoners. The arrival of the ANC prisoners meant that there was potential for meaningful and instructive debate about the prisoners' political positions.⁴⁴ Robust as they were, Moseneke argues that these debates brought prisoners from different political persuasions closer to each other and disputes between PAC and ANC prisoners were

⁴⁰ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

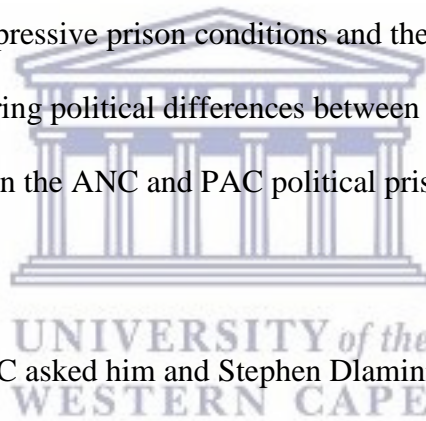
⁴¹ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

⁴² Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁴³ Dlamuka Mxolisi interview with Monde Mkhunqwana.

⁴⁴ Fran Buntman interview with Ernest Dikgang Moseneke; N. Solani and N. Nieftagodien, 'Political Imprisonment and Resistance in South Africa: The Case of Robben Island, 1960-1970', *The Road to Democracy in South Africa (SADET): Volume 1, 1960-1970* (Pretoria: Unisa Press, 2004), 393.

uncommon. Where disputes occurred, in most cases these involved ‘PAC or ANC prisoners alone because of differing over something and that built up to frustration.’⁴⁵ Sedick Isaacs remarked that he ‘later discovered that in adversity people’s differences evaporate and disappear and that’s probably what was in the process of happening’ on Robben Island.⁴⁶ He emphasised that later on ‘those differences became virtually non-existent and there was some time where organisations had intergroup meetings. It was only when conditions became slightly better that people separated again into their respective organisations.’⁴⁷ Moseneke posits that both the PAC and ANC adopted strategies directed at dealing with prison conditions to curb potential conflict between prisoners. These were ‘strategies of survival, which inevitably brought about greater cohesion, even between both the PAC and the ANC.’⁴⁸ Gwala argued that repressive prison conditions and the need for political education eclipsed, to a large extent, glaring political differences between the ANC and PAC. Nevertheless, relations between the ANC and PAC political prisoners deteriorated during the late 1960s and early 1970s.



Gwala remembered that the DC asked him and Stephen Dlamini to start underground political classes.⁴⁹ Gwala’s background as a trained teacher and having participated in the Communist Party schools between 1943 and 1944 positioned him well to play a vital role in the conceptualisation and implementation of this initiative. Classes were meant to deal with the history of the struggle, political economy, the Freedom Charter, and the policies of the ANC and the Congress Alliance. However, Gwala and Stephen Dlamini found a large population of old, non-literate prisoners who could not understand ‘abstract terminologies’,

⁴⁵ Fran Buntman interview with Dikgang Moseneke.

⁴⁶ Mr Adriaan interview with Sedick Isaacs.

⁴⁷ Mr Adriaan interview with Sedick Isaacs.

⁴⁸ Fran Buntman interview with Dikgang Moseneke.

⁴⁹ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

so they decided to organise literacy education.⁵⁰ In spite of deplorable conditions of repression, there was ample time to study. In maximum security on Robben Island lights were kept on all night so that prison authorities could monitor cells without hindrance.⁵¹ Prisoners took advantage of the light to study at night. By the end of 1965, the PAC had undertaken a similar literacy project for its own prisoners.⁵² Later, the idea of separate literacy classes for PAC and ANC members was abandoned and these classes were merged.

Harry Gwala, Stephen Dlamini and Moseneke were pivotal in the conceptualisation of Robben Island literacy project. The authorities did not know that literacy classes were taking place, and Moseneke recalled how prisoners had to produce their own teaching and writing material:

The normal cement container, right. We'd take those, cut off the ugly corners, take the cleaner part. I remember it did have about five, six sheets inside to make it strong, stick, and its thin little sheets inside. You tear this up, the clean part, you get all the cement off, the cement dust off it, cut it up into that size, a book size, bind it, get some wire and bind the rear, number the pages and mark it English exercise book, or whatever. And through that method and we had guys like me, I was still in standard eight then and I taught guys who were doing standard zero.⁵³

Robben Island management only approved literacy education for prisoners in 1966. By that time, the prisoners' own literacy project was at its heights. Moseneke remarked that 'in a matter of three to four years we had actually wiped off illiteracy on Robben Island, completely.'⁵⁴ Everybody could read and write at least in his mother-tongue. And 'we moved on, and issued little wonderful stickers for every step that he would have passed, and the

⁵⁰ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

⁵¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Monde Mkhunqwana.

⁵² Kgalema Motlanthe, address to the inaugural Harry Gwala memorial lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013.

⁵³ Fran Buntman interview with Dikgang Moseneke.

⁵⁴ Fran Buntman interview with Dikgang Moseneke.

heading always being ‘The University of Robben Island’ would go onto it, to give people all sorts of little things and all these written on cement paper.’⁵⁵

In 1968, the prison authorities agreed to allow prisoners to study at tertiary level and many prisoners enrolled at the University of South Africa (UNISA) to further their studies. Many prisoners, like Moseneke, registered at UNISA for the BA degree, but Gwala did not, for reasons that are not clear. He first enrolled for BA degree studies during the mid-1980s.

While there was a high level of cooperation between the PAC and the ANC on Robben Island, the political tensions of the late 1960s and 1970s should not be underestimated. While there were many pockets of cooperation, efforts to build unity within the prison proved to be extremely challenging.⁵⁶ Although Gwala emphasised how ANC and PAC prisoners ‘respected one another, played together, and did all sort of things together, including organising a hunger strike together’, he was emphatically clear that the notion of reconciling political differences was never a matter of discussion.⁵⁷ Exasperated by the PAC’s sometimes condescending opinions on the Communist Party and ANC, Gwala decided ‘it was high time we enlighten the PAC polemically.’⁵⁸ As a result, a debate in the general section was organised ‘one evening’ in 1967 with three speakers on each side. Gwala, Stephen Dlamini and Milner Ntsangani represented the Communist Party/ANC group, but there is no evidence of who represented the PAC group. Gwala remarked that the debate left the PAC ‘very badly bruised’ and it never again entered a formal debate.⁵⁹ Political differences re-emerged during the mid-1970s, but these were less intense than before.

⁵⁵ Fran Buntman interview with Dikgang Moseneke. Suttner posits that one of the beneficiaries of the literacy campaign was Jacob Zuma, Suttner, ‘The Character and Formation of Intellectuals’, 137.

⁵⁶ Karis and Gerhart, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 5 (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2013), Vol. 5, 302.

⁵⁷ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁵⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁵⁹ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

After the robust debates that Harry Gwala and Stephen Dlamini hosted with members of the PAC on Robben Island during the late 1960s, political education at the prison appears to have ground to a halt after Gwala's release in 1972. Football had become more prominent than political education because of the restrictive nature of the Robben Island environment. During the early 1970s, especially after the release of Gwala, there is no historical evidence to suggest that there was any further robust political education on Robben Island. Political education only regained momentum after the 1976 uprising which brought a new calibre of prisoners to the Island.

Gwala's connectedness, the 1976 uprisings, and political education

Noor Nieftagodien has argued that developments of the 1970s placed South Africa at the cusp of a new political era.⁶⁰ By June 1976, the complex combination of social and political forces resulted in an eruption that caught both the underground structures of the liberation movement and the state by surprise, dramatically shifting the attention of the international community on the festering problem of apartheid in South Africa.⁶¹ In the aftermath of the uprising, there was an exodus of youth into exile and into prison, mainly into Robben Island. The prison population at Robben Island exceeded its capacity. This coincided with the beginning of Gwala's second term of imprisonment on Robben Island in 1977. When Gwala arrived, he observed that some of the new inmates were youth who had little political orientation and understanding of the liberation struggle and political theory. This, Gwala believed, necessitated that new approaches be implemented in a severely restricted environment.⁶²

⁶⁰ N. Nieftagodien, 'Martin Legassick-obituary,' Martin Legassick: Messages of Condolences, Remembrance, Solidarity, 2016, unpublished brochure. A copy of the document is in the author's possession.

⁶¹ Lodge, *Black Politics in South Africa*, 356; Gerhart, *Black Power in South Africa*, 313; Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁶² Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

Kgalema Motlanthe, also imprisoned in 1977 at Robben Island, emphasised that the new prisoners who had been arrested because of their participation in the 1976 uprising posed complex challenges for political education on Robben Island.⁶³ He noted that some prisoners who were brought to Robben Island because of their involvement in the 1976 revolts many had been arrested and tried for activities relating to the student uprising, yet were in fact looters who had nothing to do with politics.⁶⁴ Because Gwala had been on Robben Island before, he already knew the prison setting. He quickly assessed the situation and clustered new prisoners according to their cell groups, he immediately identified the need to establish political education as a tool to address the political lacuna and to educate new prisoners about the struggle of liberation, its history, and its political purposes. Gwala argued that:

When comrades were incarcerated on Robben Island, a crying need was felt for a theory that would correctly interpret the world. In order to organise this theory for our own comrades, this required material which we lack, consequently we had to rely on memory.⁶⁵

It was in this context that Gwala's 'Man and his Country' lectures began and were disseminated. As George Mashamba remembered, Gwala's lectures became the source of knowledge as prisoners were prohibited from access to any political literature.⁶⁶

Vincent Diba recalled that when he arrived at Robben Island, Gwala asked him whether he was aware that the Freedom Charter was the first step towards socialism.⁶⁷ This indicated the extent to which Gwala's lectures juxtaposed key historical moments within political developments in South Africa. Through the 'Man and his Country' lectures, Gwala was able to teach prisoners the history of the ANC, its links with class struggles, and how the South

⁶³ Fran Buntman interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

⁶⁴ Fran Buntman interview with Kgalema Motlanthe; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

⁶⁵ T. H. Gwala, 'Foreword', in G. Mbeki, *Learning from Robben Island: The Prison Writings of Govan Mbeki* (Bellville, Cape Town: Mayibuye Books, 1991), vi.

⁶⁶ George Mashamba, lecture delivered at the Harry Gwala memorial lecture, 2 September 2015, Moses Mabhida Stadium, Durban. I am grateful to Sinothi Thabethe, Director of Durban's Local History Museums, for sharing documents relating to the lecture as well as media reports related to the lecture.

⁶⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Vincent Diba.

African liberation struggle was 'linked to the global struggles to overthrow capitalist system, in the case of South Africa, apartheid, and to establish the people's democracy based on socialist ethos.'⁶⁸ 'Man and his Country' was available to all prisoners regardless of their political affiliation and became the de facto curriculum of political education at Robben Island. Through these lectures, Gwala earned the title of '*umuntu omdala*', a wise elder, which showed the respect he was accorded in prison. Indeed, Gwala was older than the majority of prisoners and associated himself with the Rivonia trialists in the isolation cells.

The ANC and Communist Party frequently differed in their interpretation of the role of African nationalism and class consciousness in the struggle.⁶⁹ This was apart from the other differences between leaders of the High Command such as over the role of Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. Although their complex relationship had reached a level of political maturity by the 1970s, their political differences were often accompanied by robust debates that degenerated into acrimony. Gwala and Govan Mbeki held leftist radical ideas focused on the class dynamics of the oppressed. While they did not denounce the role of African nationalism in the liberation process, their focus on class struggles widened divisions between the ANC and the Communist Party on Robben Island.⁷⁰ Mandela acknowledged the coexistence of multiple interpretations of the liberation struggle and the relationship between class and African nationalism in the ANC and the Communist Party. He remarked:

We were constantly engaged in political debates. Some were dispatched in a day, others were disputed for years. I have always enjoyed the cut and thrust of debating, and was a ready participant.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Vincent Diba.

⁶⁹ My intension is to add to previous research debates and tension between Robben Island prisoners as covered by Fran Buntman, see F. Buntman, *Robben Island and Prisoners Resistance to Apartheid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁷⁰ W. M. Gumede, *Thabo Mbeki and the Battle for the Soul of the ANC* (Cape Town: Zebra Press, 2005), 27.

⁷¹ Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 374.

One of the earliest and longest-running debates concerned the relationship between the ANC and the Communist Party. Gwala, Govan Mbeki and other political prisoners who had been trained in socialist countries believed that the ANC and the Communist Party were one and the same.⁷² Gwala believed that because the Communist Party was not a separate entity on Robben Island, this meant that it had been incorporated into the ANC in a manner that did not constitute a merger; rather they co-existed with one another. This debate was never resolved until a secret document was prepared for the leadership in Lusaka which confirmed the separation of the parties.⁷³ The argument eventually withered away among the leadership on Robben Island.

The admission of Gwala on Robben Island for his second prison term, the release of young prisoners, marked by their literary training and the conception and dissemination of Gwala's 'Man and his Country' lecture series positioned Robben Island as a centre of intellectual and theoretical debates. These were able to respond to the changing international political landscape. This resulted in the crystallisation of conceptions of the struggle about the centrality of the ANC leadership in the struggle for the liberation of South Africa. As a result, many prisoners, especially non-political and non-ANC prisoners, became exposed to the collective theoretical paradigms of the struggle, and 'crossed over' to the ANC. Suttner asserts that 'Man and his Country' resulted in the broadening of abstract theoretical ideas of socialism that had not been clear before.⁷⁴ This was attributed to Gwala's ability to interpret Marxism in vernacular languages and situated it in the South African context. Kathrada has argued that two outspoken groups emerged, the 'communists', under Gwala and Mbeki, and the 'nationalists' under Mandela.⁷⁵ Kathrada reminds us that these terms were loosely applied

⁷² Mandela, *Long Walk to Freedom*, 374.

⁷³ Brian Bunting interview with Harry Gwala; Mandela, *Long walk to Freedom*, 415.

⁷⁴ Suttner, 'African Intellectuals', 139.

⁷⁵ Suttner, 'African Intellectuals', 139.

as some communists did not agree with Gwala and felt more comfortable in the nationalist camp.

The notion of symbiotic unity between the ANC and Communist Party caused a robust debate. Gwala and Mandela held divergent interpretations of the struggle and its aftermath, and how the Freedom Charter fitted within the broader transformation of global political practice. This fuelled further disagreement that became quite polemical. The Marxist group of Gwala and Govan Mbeki believed that the South African liberation struggle was no longer for the attainment of 'national' democracy, rather to achieve the 'people's democracy', which was a euphemism for socialism.⁷⁶ As Diba has remarked, Gwala believed that the post-democratic dispensation, modelled along the lines of the Freedom Charter, was going to be a socialist one.⁷⁷

By the beginning of 1978, the debate had reached a crescendo which obliged the High Command to request its secretariat to draft a discussion document to give political direction to wide-ranging controversies that had emerged within cell discussions because these were considered to have divisive effects on the unity of the liberation movement.⁷⁸ The secretariat duly produced the discussion document, entitled 'Inqindi-Marxism,' which encouraged prisoners to study Marxism and to remind themselves of the distinction between the national and class struggles. However, this did not succeed in calming the political divisions between the two camps. The leadership of B section, mainly Gwala, felt the document lacked an understanding of key developments within the Communist Party since it had been drafted by individuals who had been in prison for the previous 15 years, and were therefore detached

⁷⁶ Brian Bunting interview with Gwala; Kathrada, 'Memoirs', 290; C. Bundy, *Govan Mbeki: A Jacana Pocket Biography* (Johannesburg: Jacana, 2012), 154.

⁷⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Vincent Diba.

⁷⁸ Inqindi (first in Zulu and Xhosa) referred to the ANC. Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 6, Document 100, 'Inqindi-Marxism' – ANC discussion document circulated in Robben Island prison after 1978, handwritten by Ahmed Kathrada (abridged), 493.

from the grassroots. The High Command conceded that the document had shortcomings and that broader consultation with the prison population was necessary, especially those in B section.⁷⁹ It was against this background that the High Command requested Ahmed Kathrada to consolidate responses that had been received.⁸⁰

Harry Gwala's critique of the Mandela camp and the 'Inqindi-Marxism' document was based on his belief in non-racialism and class consciousness. According to Gwala, African nationalism was based on the conditions of the pre-liberation phase of the struggle, and these could not be used to reshape society after liberation.⁸¹ For Gwala, the role of African nationalism was to unite Africans in the struggle against national oppression. He warned the nationalists' camp that while African nationalism should be recognised as a driving force for the struggle, they should be careful not to give it too much weight as it had the potential to belittle the role played by Indians, coloureds and white democrats, all of whom had fought alongside the African people.⁸² Gwala was against the policy of separate development, a stance that would later result in direct conflict with Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi. The emphasis on studying Marxism and history in the Kathrada document was largely influenced by Gwala and his 'Man and his Country' lecture series. Gwala's stress on internationalism and history manifested itself as a belief that it was necessary to study the struggles of revolutionary movements in other parts of the world that had experiences that were similar to the South African context.

⁷⁹ Thomas Karis interview with Gwala.

⁸⁰ Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 6, Document 100, 'Inqindi-Marxism' – ANC discussion document circulated in Robben Island prison after 1978, handwritten by Ahmed Kathrada (abridged), 492.

⁸¹ Padraig O'Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 21 November 1994; Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 6, Document 100, 'Inqindi-Marxism' – ANC discussion document circulated in Robben Island prison after 1978, handwritten by Ahmed Kathrada (abridged), 497.

⁸² Padraig O'Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 21 November 1994.

While the ‘Inqindi-Marxism’ document did not succeed in bridging political divides in Robben Island politics, it managed to create an awareness of the need to link class struggle and national struggles. The debate seemed to have subsided after the transfer of Mandela to Pollsomoor prison in 1978. After the ‘Inqindi-Marxism’ discussions, Gwala’s political theory seemed to undergone a metamorphosis. He began to show new political thinking that leaned towards the realisation of the need to have the Communist Party as a separate entity, perhaps different from the ANC. His views were formulated during on-going political discussions about the role of dialectical materialism and the Communist Party developing a distinct political philosophy which sought the effective transfer of power to the working class.⁸³ However, he remained committed to the ANC and its processes of bringing social and political change in South Africa. Kgalema Motlanthe remarked that Gwala’s political education generated heightened political consciousness, which, in turn, served as the surest way to build a complete cadre armed with the necessary revolutionary philosophy to play a proper role in changing their own conditions.⁸⁴ Despite differing with Gwala, Mandela remarked:

Mphephethwa was a great “political teacher” who taught generation after generation of struggle. Many of today's leaders drank from the deep well of Mphephethwa’s political wisdom. But such was the nature of his teaching that the products of his education, would themselves develop into political giants in their own right; using the tools he gave them to develop independent thought and analysis.⁸⁵

Gwala’s identity, family welfare, and non-racial mobilisation

The imprisonment of Gwala from 1964 was part of the state’s strategy to exclude him from his political support. This exclusion severely affected Gwala’s family as his wife was left alone to raise their four children and she occasionally faced harassment by the Special

⁸³ Kathrada, *Memoirs*, 296; Padraig O’Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

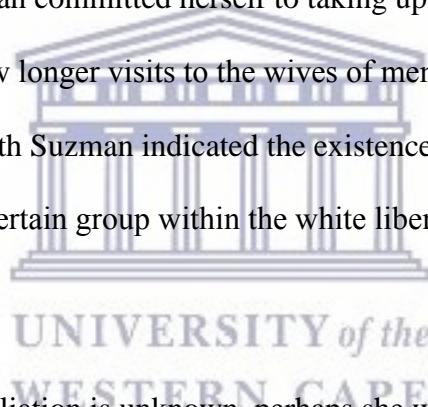
⁸⁴ Kgalema Motlanthe, unpublished address to the inaugural Harry Gwala memorial lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013.

⁸⁵ Speech by Nelson Mandela at the funeral service of Harry Gwala, 1 July 1995, www.anc.org.za/show.php?id=3564, accessed on 22 February 2016.

Branch.⁸⁶ The precarious financial and social circumstances of Gwala's family drew public sympathy from white liberals and other interest groups. In 1967, a certain Mary Corrigan of Alexandra Road in Pietermaritzburg wrote to Helen Suzman concerning Gwala's wife's visit to Robben Island.⁸⁷

Corrigan lamented that 'Elda had visited Robben Island once since her husband was imprisoned in 1964 and a second visit was being arranged.'⁸⁸ Her concern was for Elda's disappointment that, after having 'travelled so far from Pietermaritzburg that she was allowed less than half an hour with her husband.'⁸⁹ Corrigan urged Suzman to request the Minister of Prisons to allow the wives of political prisoners who have travelled long distances to have additional visiting time. Suzman committed herself to taking up the issue of Gwala and to persuade the 'Minister to allow longer visits to the wives of men on Robben Island.'⁹⁰

Corrigan's correspondence with Suzman indicated the existence of a level of connectedness between Gwala's wife and a certain group within the white liberal community that seriously empathised with her plight.



While Corrigan's political affiliation is unknown, perhaps she was part of a wide network of white liberals in Pietermaritzburg who took a particular interest in the plight of Gwala and his family. It is not clear how long her connection with Gwala's family lasted. Makhosazana Gwala remembers Elda's plight as extremely difficult living under poverty-stricken conditions without even a home after they had been forcibly removed from Ockertskraal in the mid-1960s, after its declaration as a whites-only area.⁹¹ Gwala's release in 1972 provided

⁸⁶ The Gwala children were: Lulu (25 April 1951-17 June 1992), Mfana, Linda and Lindiwe. It recently emerged that Gwala also had another child outside wedlock. Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

⁸⁷ Helen Suzman became the voice of many political prisoners who were experiencing hardship in South African prisons, see UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1 to Ab5, political prisoners 1965-1989.

⁸⁸ UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1.1, letter from Mrs Mary Corrigan to Mrs Helen Suzman, 17 March 1967.

⁸⁹ UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1.1, letter from Mrs Mary Corrigan to Mrs Helen Suzman, 17 March 1967.

⁹⁰ UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1.1, letter from Mrs Helen Suzman to Mrs Mary Corrigan, 22 March 1967.

⁹¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Makhosazana Gwala. Makhosazana is married to Harry Gwala's brother Caiphas Bhukuda Gwala.

a temporary relief for the financial difficulties of the family as he started a laundry ‘business’, even though this was a front for his clandestine political activities. This did not last as he was re-arrested in November 1975. The family found itself, again, in financial difficulty situation.

Elda’s reaction to the family’s plight this time was different to what it had been in the 1960s. Two factors influenced her reaction. She had learned that she could not rely on Gwala’s extended family for support since none had the financial means to do so. Gwala’s siblings, mainly Caiphas Bhukuda, were often followed by the Special Branch, and they were therefore reluctant to be associated with Elda and her children.⁹² In 1977, Gwala asked Elda whether she was struggling and she responded by saying ‘there [was] nothing I am struggling of, you prepared me for everything before you left.’⁹³

Secondly, unlike during the 1964 trial when Gwala was charged alone with little media attention, the 1976 trial brought an unprecedented level of public interest that served to connect the families of the detainees. This drew public sympathy and international agencies which were willing to provide welfare support. Having been exposed to the clandestine political operation in Natal, Elda led the wives of the detainees to form a support group that sought to mobilise local and international aid to sustain their families and to keep the memories of their husbands in the public mind once they had been sentenced.⁹⁴ The prominence of Gwala’s trial and the nature of the international aid discourse at the time made it easier for Elda and the wives of other accused men to mobilise political, legal and welfare support from interested groups and individuals, both locally and internationally. Already IDAF had committed itself to cover the legal and welfare costs of the detainees and their

⁹² Makhosazana Gwala remembered that there were times when they realised that they were being followed by the Special Branch and on certain instances several break-ins in their church mission residence in Ladysmith were believed to have been orchestrated by the Special Branch see, Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Makhosazana Gwala.

⁹³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu, 6 October 1984.

⁹⁴ Telephone conversation with Mrs Skhosana, 9 October 2015.

families, giving them hope. Nevertheless, correspondence from Elda indicated that IDAF's welfare support was insufficient to cover normal family expenses.⁹⁵

Gwala had established cordial relations with Pietermaritzburg's white liberals due to his stance on non-racialism.⁹⁶ Among these was Peter Brown who had been a co-founder of the Liberal Party of South Africa in 1953 and its leader from 1958 to 1964. After Brown's banning order expired, he devoted his life to liberal causes which included assisting the families of activists who has been banned, detained or imprisoned for their political activities.⁹⁷ In January 1976, Elda asked Brown to assist the Xaba and the Nene families.⁹⁸

Having been involved with the South African Institute of Race Relations, Brown was aware of the Dependants' Conference (DC), an ecumenical project of the South African Council of Churches (SACC). He asked Angela Pringle, Director of the DC whether 'there is anything [that] can be done to help in Pietermaritzburg.'⁹⁹ Pringle informed Brown that she had already given welfare funds to Phyllis Naidoo and indicated that the DC 'had little information of the state of things in Pietermaritzburg and had no mobile worker to look into things.'¹⁰⁰ In the absence of a DC field worker in Pietermaritzburg, Pringle asked Brown to be recognised as 'intermediaries of DC' to avoid setting up 'rival systems.'¹⁰¹ Although other families were already receiving welfare assistance through IDAF, these grants were insufficient to cover their expenses, so they called on Brown for assistance.

⁹⁵ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 603, file 391A, legal correspondence file, correspondence from Elda Gwala to Carruthers & Co, 17 August 1980; APC, PC16/14/1/2/2, profile of Mrs Joyce Bhengu and her family needs, undated; APC, PC16/14/1/2/4, profile of Mrs Regina Xaba and her family needs, undated; for a detailed discussion on the role of IDAF see Frieslaar, '(Re)Collections in the Archive'. For a detailed study of IDAF and social networks of support for families of victims see, See Helena Pohlandt-McCormick, 'Taking risks in the Post-colonial archive: Towards a post-colonial thinking of the archive', Unpublished seminar paper presented at the South African Contemporary History and Humanities Seminar, Centre for Humanities Research, University of the Western Cape (16 April 2013).

⁹⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with John Aitchison.

⁹⁷ For a detailed biographical analysis of Peter Brown see, Cardo, *Opening Men's Eyes*.

⁹⁸ APC, PC16/14/1/2/9, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 29 January 1976.

⁹⁹ APC, PC16/14/1/2/9, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 29 January 1976.

¹⁰⁰ APC, PC16/14/1/2/10, correspondence from Mrs Pringle to Peter Brown, 6 February 1976.

¹⁰¹ APC, PC16/14/1/2/10, correspondence from Mrs Pringle to Peter Brown, 6 February 1976; Cardo, 'Opening Men's Eyes', 225.

While Brown was in the process of sourcing funds for the families of the accused, he had started to get closer to them to better understand their economic circumstances. He discovered that most of the families were struggling financially as the accused men had either been the only family member in employment or unable to make financial contributions to meet family needs.¹⁰² In addition to school expenses and rent, it appeared that most families had hire purchase commitments which, since their husbands had been taken into detention, could not be met with IDAF's support. Brown approached Amnesty International to assist the struggling families, especially the Gwalas and Magubanes. During his visits, he provided advice to 'prioritise rent, food, school fees, and if anything was left over, a small payment on their hire purchase accounts.'¹⁰³ Seeing that most of the families were in miserable debt, Brown went as far as meeting 'hire purchase firms, who, after such meeting, demonstrated willingness to understand Brown's plea to reduce monthly instalments.'¹⁰⁴

By the end of February 1976, Brown had established contact with Phyllis Naidoo who had been assigned by IDAF to manage welfare funds for the families of the accused. Brown had become a 'point of support' in Pietermaritzburg, and the SACC started to raise funds from various benevolent groups and individuals.¹⁰⁵ Among the initial donors was the *Sunday Tribune* which offered R10 to go to John Nene's family.¹⁰⁶ John Nene's case was unique because in addition to his request for support for his wife and children, he also asked for support to cover rent for his mother at Machibisa in Edendale.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰² APC, PC16/14/1/2/23, correspondence from Peter Brown to Marianne Knappstein (West Germany), 16 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/78, Peter Brown's notes of the profiles of the families of the detainees, undated.

¹⁰³ APC, PC16/14/1/2/11, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 15 February 1976.

¹⁰⁴ APC, PC16/14/1/2/11, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 15 February 1976.

¹⁰⁵ Cardo, 'Opening Men's Eyes', 225; APC, PC16/14/1/2/13, correspondence from Peter Brown to Phyllis Naidoo, 15 February 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/14, correspondence from Phyllis Naidoo to Peter Brown, 18 February 1976.

¹⁰⁶ APC, PC16/1/2/15, correspondence from Phyllis Naidoo to Peter Brown, 20 February 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/16, correspondence from Peter Brown to Phyllis Naidoo, 25 February 1976.

¹⁰⁷ APC, PC16/14/1/2/64, correspondence from John Nene to Phyllis Naidoo, undated. Phyllis Naidoo forwarded Nene's request to Peter Brown, see APC, PC16/14/1/2/63, correspondence from Phyllis Naidoo to Peter Brown, 9 July 1976.

As Cardo points out, by March 1976 Brown had ‘rallied a small group of ex-liberals into action.’¹⁰⁸ This group included key liberals such as John Aitchison and Peter Kerchhoff who would later become founder members of the Pietermaritzburg DC. They extended their network to liaise with the Amnesty International offices in Sweden and West Germany. While Brown took a personal interest in Gwala’s family and would, at a later stage, often pay out of his own pocket for Elda to visit Gwala once he had been transferred to Robben Island, he did not neglect the plight of other detainees’ families.¹⁰⁹

At the beginning of the interaction, Amnesty International was reluctant to comply with Brown’s request because it ‘concerned itself with prisoners who [were] imprisoned because of their religious, political and moral beliefs and they should not have used or advocated violence.’¹¹⁰ Brown’s predicament was that detainees were not yet formally charged, but it was clear that the state was going to charge them for sabotage. However, Brown persuaded Amnesty International to agree that Gwala and other detainees were victims of apartheid’s discriminatory policies and their detention was a human rights violation.¹¹¹ Having been persuaded by Brown, Amnesty International agreed to offer support to the families of Magubane, Gwala, Meyiwa, Xaba, Nene and others.¹¹² In addition, Brown occasionally appealed to Pietermaritzburg liberals and local businesses to assist the wives of the detainees.

¹⁰⁸ Cardo, ‘Opening Men’s Eyes’, 225.

¹⁰⁹ APC, PC16/14/1/7/57, Minutes of the PCC/JRC [Justice and Reconciliation Commission] meeting, 3 November 1981; APC, PC14/1/3/18, correspondence from Muriel Horrell to Peter Kerchhoff, 16 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/20, correspondence from Mrs Katarina Dotter-Ekman to Muriel Horrell, 10 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/19, correspondence from Muriel Horrell to Mrs Katarina Dotter-Ekman, 16 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/23, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Marianne Knappstein, 16 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/26, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Katarina Dotter-Ekman, 26 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/28 correspondence from Mrs Marianne Knappstein to Peter Brown, 4 April 1976.

¹¹⁰ APC, PC16/14/1/2/17, correspondence from Mrs Marianne Knappstein to Peter Brown, 6 March 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/65, correspondence from Mrs Marianne Knappstein, 11 July 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/69, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Marianne Knappstein, 22 July 1976.

¹¹¹ APC, PC16/14/1/2/31, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Marianne Knappstein, 22 April 1976.

¹¹² APC, PC16/14/1/2/33, correspondences from Peter Brown to Margrit Betke, 23 April 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/47, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Katharina Huischen, 12 May 1976; APC, PC16/14/1/2/52, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Katharina Huischen, 1 June 1976. APC, PC16/14/1/2/62, correspondence from Margrit Betke to Peter Brown, 7 July 1976.

D. M. Craib, director of the *Natal Witness*, remarked that he was ‘impressed by Brown’s appeal’ to contribute to the fund for the dependants of the detainees.¹¹³ On behalf of the *Natal Witness*, Craib sent a donation by cheque which was not disclosed in his letter. Local and international support included sending money to cover additional expenses, settling hire purchase debts, as well providing clothes and education for their children.¹¹⁴

Until the end of 1977, the DC work in Pietermaritzburg was facilitated by Brown, and Elda was the de facto leader of the detainees’ wives. Norman Abraham dealt with the legal and financial aspects of support, while Bunty Biggs arranged for family members to visit Robben Island.¹¹⁵ Biggs had been a social worker who helped establish a child welfare section of the Edendale Welfare Society in 1958.

While there was no doubt about Brown’s ability to facilitate the activities of the DC, the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches (PCC) decided it was about time that it played a role in line with an SACC resolution. In January 1978, members of the PCC’s Commission for Justice and Reconciliation (JRC) met and agreed to act as the local DC, with Reverend Bob Clarke as chairperson.¹¹⁶ Although Brown was not elected to a leadership position, he continued to play a pivotal role in facilitating visits by families to Robben Island. Elda seems

¹¹³ APC, PC16/14/1/2/102, correspondence from DM Craib to Peter Brown, 8 November 1976.

¹¹⁴ APC, PC16/14/1/2/62, correspondence from Margrit Betke to Peter Brown, 7 July 1976.

¹¹⁵ APC, PC16/14/1/3/25, Report to the Amnesty International by Peter Brown, 18 May 1977; Cardo, ‘Opening Men’s Eyes’, 296; APC, PC16/14/1/2/74, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Marianne Knapstein, 11 August 1976.

¹¹⁶ APC, PC16/14/1/4/4, minutes of the PCC’s Justice and Reconciliation Commission, 24 January 1978. For a detailed discussion on the role of the Church in the struggle in Pietermaritzburg see, P. Denis, ‘The August 1985 Attack on the Federal Theological Seminary of Southern Africa’, Unpublished paper; F. Chikane, *No Life of My Own: An Autobiography of Frank Chikane*, (Johannesburg: Skotaville Publications, 1988); K. E. Mgojo, ‘Apartheid Under Siege: Challenges from the Churches, Sanctions and the White Right’, *Africa Today*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1989; T. D. Mufamadi, ‘The World Council of Churches and its Programme to Combat Racism: The Evolution and Development of their Fight against Apartheid, 1969–1994’, PhD dissertation, UNISA, 2011.

to have preferred communicating with Brown directly and he would subsequently bring Gwala family matters to the DC's attention during its monthly meetings.¹¹⁷

Prison visits, epistolary networks, and connectedness

As soon as Harry Gwala was admitted to Robben Island prison in 1977, he embarked on broader struggles that were characterised by a striving for connectedness. These included his political education inside the prison, attempts to undermine prison authority and, from 1980, the role of his family in frustrating the existing structures of prison control. In addition to his clandestine political education series, Gwala identified prison visiting hours as another arena of his struggle. After Mary Corrigan's 1967 request to allow Gwala's wife more visiting time since she had travelled all the way from Pietermaritzburg, Gwala challenged the prison authorities to extend visiting hours and allow prisoners to send and receive more than two letters a month.¹¹⁸ On 4 November 1977, Gwala applied for permission to be allowed a one-hour visit by his wife. In addition, he also applied to see her together with his daughter, Lulu, 'who could not visit at any other time due to her employment.'¹¹⁹ In addition, on 13 November, Gwala submitted a written complaint about letters that had been sent to him but he had not received. He had been informed by the prison censor that 'there were two letters that were due to him but since he had received the required number due for September and October, he would [only] be given those letters in December.'¹²⁰ He contended that since he had been in prison from August, he should be permitted to receive six letters retrospectively, two per month for the three months he had been incarcerated. Again, the prison censor

¹¹⁷ P. Walshe, 'South Africa: Prophetic Christianity and the Liberation Movement Author', *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 1, 1991, 27-60; K. E. Mgojo, 'The Church in Action in South Africa', *Africa Today*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 1989, 23-28.

¹¹⁸ Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

¹¹⁹ NAR, Department of Prisons (DOP) papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Commanding Officer, 4 November 1977.

¹²⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Commanding Officer, 13 November 1977.

declined his request, thus isolating him from the outside world. By 1979, he was still at loggerheads with the prison's censor about letters he was not receiving and others that were not received by the people they had been addressed to.¹²¹

From as early as 1977, records of the Department of Prisons suggest that Elda and Lulu visited Gwala more than three times a year. In addition, they exchanged letters, within the prescribed limits. Elda and Lulu's letters of application for prison visits have a collegial and respectful tone.¹²² This might have been due to the fact that they still had hope that Gwala's conviction and sentence would be overturned by the Appellate Division. After the Appeal Court upheld the conviction and sentence in 1980, the tone of their letters, now also in the name of Lindiwe, became more confrontational, uncooperative and to a certain extent, abrasive.¹²³ When Lindiwe's application to visit Gwala missed one digit of her identity number, Elda displayed anger that she had received a call from the Special Branch to ask whether Lindiwe was in fact her child.¹²⁴ She abrasively asked the Commanding Officer at Robben Island why her daughter's application had been sent to the police. She demanded that the permit be granted because 'Lindiwe had a right to visit her father.'¹²⁵

The second incident also involved Lindiwe. She had been granted permission, through Omar, Vassen and Company attorneys, to visit Gwala on 16 and 17 January 1982. However, when she arrived at Robben Island, she found that the visit had been cancelled because Gwala had refused the prison's instruction to communicate with his daughter in English.¹²⁶ Gwala

¹²¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the prison censor, 31 January 1979.

¹²² NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondences from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 15 February 1979, 7 February 1977, 20 February 1979, 20 November 1979.

¹²³ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 17 November 1981.

¹²⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 17 November 1981.

¹²⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 17 November 1981.

¹²⁶ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/11, correspondence from J. W. Harding (Commanding Officer Robben Island) to Dullah Omar, 28 January 1982.

refused because they were native speakers of Zulu and he insisted on speaking Zulu. Gwala was determined to be allowed to speak his native language to his family because other prisoners were allowed to ‘converse in Xhosa and others in Sotho.’¹²⁷ As Lindiwe was due to travel to Pietermaritzburg on 26 January, Dullah Omar ‘requested that she should be permitted to see her father on 23 and 24 January and that she be permitted to converse in their vernacular.’¹²⁸ After the prison authorities ‘persuaded’ Gwala to converse in English or Xhosa, the visit took place on 22 January. Gwala’s insistence on conversing in his mother tongue forced the Robben Island authorities to recruit Zulu intermediaries to avoid unnecessary tension. Nevertheless, by 1984 Gwala’s family was still given permission to visit him ‘on condition that they converse in English and/or Xhosa as the Zulu language was unfortunately not permitted.’¹²⁹

During the 1980s the Gwala family found itself in extremely difficult financial circumstances. As discussed in the previous chapter, IDAF had already indicated its displeasure about the manner in which its welfare funds were being managed, resulting in high levels of hostility between Phyllis Naidoo and Navanethem Pillay. As IDAF was winding up its welfare grant to those involved in the trial of Gwala and 9 others, the DC had to take over responsibility for all the financial support required by these families. In addition to ensuring that school fees were paid and the families had sufficient food, the DC also committed itself to facilitate families’ visits to Robben Island. Having to brief attorneys Omar, Vassen, Sonn and Abercrombie to communicate with Robben Island prison management concerning the visit of each family further increased the costs of providing

¹²⁷ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/12, correspondence from R. Vassen to J. W. Harding (Commanding Officer Robben Island) 19 January 1982.

¹²⁸ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/12, correspondence from R. Vassen to J. W. Harding (Commanding Officer Robben Island) 19 January 1982; UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/10, correspondence from D. Omar to J. W. Harding (Commanding Officer Robben Island) 22 February 1982.

¹²⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from R. Vorster to L. Gwala, 11 July 1984.

support.¹³⁰ Elda revealed the dire financial situation of her family when she wrote to IDAF to request assistance to supplement what she was receiving from the DC.¹³¹ She lamented:

The amount is however, not enough for me to be able to pay my children's school fees which this year came to R187.00. I enclose the account and I hope your clients will be able to send me a cheque to cover the above amount.¹³²

The Gwala's family financial woes were complicated by the state's attitude towards Lulu. During Gwala's detention in 1976, Lulu was also detained for eight months. Because the state believed that she was part of her father's clandestine political network she was often harassed by the Special Branch.¹³³ As a result she 'found it difficult to find employment.'¹³⁴ In addition, Lulu had had two children, Nonhlanhla and Xolani, whom Elda was obliged to support since the DC's stipend did not cover grandchildren of the detainees.¹³⁵ There is no archival evidence that IDAF was able to respond to her plea.

The decision of the DC to appoint Omar, Vassen, Sonn and Abercrombie attorneys might not have been well advised, given dwindling financial support, but the ability to commission legal intervention assisted families to secure prison visits in the face of the intransigent Robben Island prison management. In addition, these attorneys facilitated the transfer of gifts to Gwala from sympathisers, for example a gift of R20 from Omar Badsha. Badsha had known Gwala since the 1970s in Natal and the two had worked together in an attempt to

¹³⁰ Dullah Omar, Ramesh Vassen and Percy Sonn had been an anti-apartheid activists and human rights lawyers. Their law firm was among the leading legal resources that dealt with human rights violations in Cape Town, see UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP-2007-01-11-2-6, correspondence from R. Vassen to J. W. Harding (Commanding Officer Robben Island), 10 July 1984

¹³¹ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

¹³² UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

¹³³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip. APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Tom Montata, 26 February 1985.

¹³⁴ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

¹³⁵ Nonhlanhla was born in 25 November 1970 and Xolani was born in 1974. Elda stated that she supported Nonhlanhla fully while Xolani was partially supported by his father, see UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

revive SACTU.¹³⁶ Elda, Lulu, Mfana, Linda and Lindiwe were able to visit Gwala at Robben Island. Elda had her maiden family living in Langa and Gugulethu in Cape Town which gave them a place to stay when they visited Robben Island.

By the early 1980s, Brown had made arrangements to have the Pietermaritzburg local newspaper, *The Natal Witness* delivered to Harry Gwala on Robben Island.¹³⁷ Being able to read the newspaper and corresponding with family and friends enabled Gwala to be updated with what was happening in Pietermaritzburg. Gwala read about the passing of Selby Msimang in the newspaper. He lamented to his friend, Themba Xulu, that Msimang ‘was a man who outsmarted his contemporaries.’¹³⁸ Gwala had known Msimang from the 1940s and had regarded him as his ‘political elder’¹³⁹ It was also through *The Natal Witness* that Gwala read about Lindiwe when she ‘lost her clothes at the station’ on the way to school.¹⁴⁰ He tried to console her by saying she ‘should not worry but try to forget it as things like that should happen to the people.’¹⁴¹ He subsequently wrote to Elda and asked her to ‘try to comfort Lindiwe to forget’ it because he was worried that this was going to affect her concentration on her studies. Gwala seemed to be concerned about the future of his children and their education.¹⁴²

The Robben Island authorities seemed to have been reluctant to allow Gwala to receive letters from outside the prison. There is evidence that the prison censor hid some of the letters and that Gwala never received them.¹⁴³ Since most of Gwala’s letters were written in Zulu, they

¹³⁶ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/13, correspondence from R. Vassen to Harry Gwala, 14 December 1981; UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/14, correspondence from R. Vassen to J. W. Harding (Commanding Officer Robben Island), 14 December 1981.

¹³⁷ APC, PC16/14/3/1/7, Minutes of the PCC/ DCC [Dependants’ Conference Committee] meeting, 30 March 1988.

¹³⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Themba Xulu, 25 September 1982.

¹³⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Themba Xulu, 25 September 1982.

¹⁴⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 6 August 1983.

¹⁴¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 6 August 1983.

¹⁴² NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 6 August 1983.

¹⁴³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Makhosazana Gwala.

had to be translated into English before he was given the original. A copy was kept in the prison censor's office. In addition, as a strategy to isolate Gwala, the prison authorities were reluctant to approve visits by certain 'suspicious' individuals including Gwala's brother, Caiphaz Bhukuda who was a church priest. It was Elda who, again, took charge of facilitating the application to Robben Island's management on behalf of the extended family, relatives and friends who were eager to visit Gwala.

In March 1984, Elda applied to the prison authorities to visit Gwala on 12 and 13 May.¹⁴⁴ The epistolary exchange between Elda and Robben Island management suggested that it was common to apply for a visit a month before the planned trip. Elda's visit was approved, but with the dates amended to 19 and 20 May on the grounds that the requested dates were 'fully booked.'¹⁴⁵ During the month of May, Elda's asthma deteriorated and she had 'three attacks and nearly died on all these occasions.'¹⁴⁶ Despite her precarious health, she visited Gwala on 20 May and confided to him that her health had become weaker, exacerbated by the 'uncalm conditions of traveling from the mainland to the island.'¹⁴⁷ Just before they were separated by a warder, Gwala asked Elda how she was coping.¹⁴⁸ Despite visible signs of weakening health, Elda insisted that she was not struggling as Gwala had prepared her before his imprisonment.¹⁴⁹ Elda deliberately minimised the harsh realities that the family was going through. As Peter Brown reported during the deliberations of the Pietermaritzburg Dependents' Conference, throughout the 1980s, the Gwala's family was struggling and requiring additional support.¹⁵⁰ Perhaps Elda did not want Gwala to feel burdened by the

¹⁴⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to the Head of Prison, 1 March 1984.

¹⁴⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Head of Prison to Elda Gwala, 20 March 1984.

¹⁴⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁴⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁴⁸ Ruth Lundie interview with Harry Gwala.

¹⁴⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 6 October 1984.

¹⁵⁰ APC, PC16/14/2/3/2, minutes of the Dependants' Conference Committee, 22 January 1985.

plight of his family since there was nothing he could have done as a prisoner serving a life sentence.

After visiting Gwala, she was unable to travel back to Pietermaritzburg and decided to spend time with her brother's family in Gugulethu until she recovered. During the evening of 27 May she had another asthma attack which ended her life.¹⁵¹ Gwala described the death of Elda as 'sudden.'¹⁵² Correspondence between Gwala and the outside world suggests that the death of Elda caused him emotional distress and a sense of vulnerability. He remarked:

The passing away of Kaipi [Elda] is the end of an era in my life. We share all our joy and our sorrow but she always took it with a big heart. She was always a source of inspiration to me and the family will be poorer without her. But if she was a source of inspiration I think we shall have her honoured if we try to do all that would make her feel proud. She was so gentle and pure in spirit that even when she decided to leave this world and follow the path of our forefathers she had the decency to pay me a visit only to bid me farewell.¹⁵³

Gwala admitted that Elda's death upset him but that he was consoled by 'the sympathising telegraphs, letters and post cards' he received.¹⁵⁴ Among the people and organisations that sent letters and telegrams of condolences were MB Yengwa, the Natal Indian Congress and Victoria Mxenge.¹⁵⁵ Others preferred to visit Gwala on Robben Island just to 'console him, pass condolences and pledge their solidarity with his situation.'¹⁵⁶

¹⁵¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified telegraph from Ms B. Nattie (sister in law) to Harry Gwala, 28 June 1984; Guy Vezi, 'Unkosikazi kaGwala ushone evakashele umyeni wakhe eRobben Island', *Ilanga lase Natali*, 30 May-2 June 1984, 1.

¹⁵² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁵³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Amanda, 7 July 1984. Amanda's full identity is unknown. Lindiwe thinks Amanda could have been a pseudonym of an activist who did not want to be known to be corresponding with Gwala, telephone discussion with Lindiwe Gwala, 4 June 2016.

¹⁵⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁵⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from MB Yengwa to Harry Gwala, 7 June 1984; telegraph from the NIC to Harry Gwala, 12 June 1984; telegraph from Victoria Mxenge to Harry Gwala, 5 June 1984.

¹⁵⁶ NAR, DOP paper, file no.1238, declassified permit of Mr Paranjothee Anthony Pillay, an attorney from Durban, to visit Harry Gwala, 1 June 1984.

Gwala had wished Elda to be buried at Mountain Rise, a local cemetery in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁵⁷ However, despite Gwala's wishes, she was buried at Swayimane because members of the extended family were adamant that she should be buried with other family members.¹⁵⁸ Norman Abrahams, acting on behalf of the Gwala family, instructed Omar, Vassen, Sonn and Abercrombie to ask Robben Island management to temporarily release Gwala so that he could attend Elda's funeral.¹⁵⁹ This application was refused on the grounds that 'practical considerations' made it 'impossible' to accede to requests of this nature.¹⁶⁰ The funeral was organised by various pro-ANC organisations including the SACC, Federation of South African Women and the United Democratic Front (UDF). UDF-aligned organisations used Elda's funeral as an opportunity to air their political grievances against the South African government.

The funeral, held at the Edendale Lay Ecumenical Centre, was described as a 'customary heroine's funeral.'¹⁶¹ Scores of women marched into the hall bearing the black and green colours of the Federation of South African Women. Inside the hall, posters in black, green and gold (the colours of the ANC) declared 'jail shall not bend our leaders' and 'women unite in struggle.'¹⁶² Reverend Mazwi Tisani and A. S. Chetty presided over the funeral as co-programme directors. Tisani and Chetty had been active in the leadership of the SACC and NIC in Pietermaritzburg respectively. Among the key speakers was Victoria Mxenge, who had worked with Elda to support the wives of the detainees; Archie Gumede, UDF president

¹⁵⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified telegraph from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 30 June 1984.

¹⁵⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Makhosazana Gwala.

¹⁵⁹ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/8, correspondence from E. A. Venter, Commissioner of Prisons, to attorneys Vassen, Omar, Sonn & Abercrombie, 11 June 1984.

¹⁶⁰ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01/11/2/8, correspondence from EA Venter, Commissioner of Prisons, to attorneys Vassen, Omar, Sonn & Abercrombie, 11 June 1984. This was not the first time Robben Island authorities were faced with this scenario. Nelson Mandela's mother died in 1968 and his eldest son, Thembi, in 1969. He was not allowed to attend their funerals, see <https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/biography>, accessed 2 April 2016.

¹⁶¹ Khaba Mkhize, 'Gwala won't be released', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 7 June 1984.

¹⁶² Witness reporter, '600 at Gwala's wife's funeral', *The Natal Witness*, 11 June 1984.

and Gwala's legal team for the 1976 trial. Also among the speakers were Gladys Manzi as well as Khaba Mkhize.¹⁶³

During the funeral, speakers praised Elda as a freedom fighter. There were conflicting accounts of how many people attended the funeral with Lulu claiming that there were over 10 000 mourners, while the *Echo* and *The Natal Witness* estimated 200 and 600 mourners respectively.¹⁶⁴ The conclusion of the funeral at KwaSwayimane ended with a brawl as a Special Branch member Samuel Gule was attacked. Gule was a detective warrant officer, stationed at Greytown, and was a resident at Swayimane.¹⁶⁵ The attack on Gule, allegedly after he was confronted by 'woman demanding to know why he was not singing a freedom song that was being sung' indicated the extent of the politicisation of Elda's funeral and the militant political approaches that were emerging from the grassroots.¹⁶⁶ The attack on Gule, who later became a known supporter of Inkatha and often suspected of assisting it with arms, was an indication of growing militancy which was perhaps provoked by the state's attitude towards the Gwala family.

After Elda's passing, 'the responsibility to keep the family together fell on Lulu', at that time aged 30.¹⁶⁷ Gwala seems to have transcended patriarchal stereotypes and invested a lot of trust in his daughters. On 23 June 1984, nearly a month after Elda's passing, he wrote separate letters to Lulu and Lindiwe. Gwala's letter to Lindiwe's seems to have understood her emotional vulnerability and weakness and offered consolation. He emphatically

¹⁶³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 6 August 1984. Khaba Mkhize was a prominent *Natal Witness* journalist whose reportage covered mainly African areas. He later became the editor of *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*.

¹⁶⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 7 July 1984; Witness reporter, 'SB member attacked at Gwala funeral', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 14 June 1984, 3; '600 at Gwala's wife's funeral', *The Natal Witness*, 11 June 1984.

¹⁶⁵ Witness reporter, 'SB member attacked at Gwala funeral', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 14 June 1984, 3.

¹⁶⁶ Witness reporter, 'SB member attacked at Gwala funeral', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 14 June 1984, 3.

¹⁶⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

encouraged Lindiwe to ‘learn something from her mother and be inspired by her spirit.’¹⁶⁸

Gwala drifted from the loss of Elda to focus on giving Lindiwe encouragement about her studies and career. He wanted Lindiwe to enrol for a degree at the University of Natal, because ‘it was nearer and the most important thing is a degree and you can do anything thereafter.’¹⁶⁹

Gwala’s letter to Lulu was different. Gwala challenged her to face her mother’s death. He wrote:

In such an incident what can we do? Yes, we are crying as our hearts are painful and torn. Death is the everyday occurrence, the time it comes you must be shocked and it is a surprising thing. What we must bear in our minds is that it’s each and every individual’s path to be followed here on earth. It is just the same as the birth of a person.¹⁷⁰

Gwala’s letter suggested he had a relationship with Lulu based on respectability, trust and a sense of collegiality, something he never had with the other children. Perhaps this was because Lulu was the eldest and already had two children of her own which Gwala had taken responsibility for as they were born out of wedlock.

Gwala’s intention in the 23 June letters to his daughters was to establish the new social order in his family. The will that he had drawn up in 1976 was based on the probability of him dying first. In 1984, the question was how Gwala’s four children and three grandchildren would sustain themselves and maintain the integrity of the family that Elda had built since Gwala’s imprisonment. Of his four children, Lulu was most outspoken, and became a prominent face of youth of the families of detainees. She visited Gwala more often than the other children, she wrote regular letters, and developed a high level of connectedness with her

¹⁶⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁶⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁷⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

father and the ANC in exile, both in Lusaka and in London.¹⁷¹ It was against this background that Gwala bestowed on Lulu the responsibility of being the head of the family before he met with Norman Abrahams about administering Elda's estate and determining the fate of Gwala's children. Gwala wrote:

The death of your mother left a big job over your shoulders as far as the children of your family are concerned. That means you should work with cooperation there at home, support each other with a clear spirit to close the gap of your mother. There must be no one who may say wish that my mother is still available. Secondly, you must cool down your spirit and anger to stop the quarrel in between one another.¹⁷²

Gwala went on to caution Lulu about the financial difficulties she would be facing. He advised her not to wait for assistance, rather to work hard to earn an income to afford 'paying for rent and taxes.'¹⁷³ He cautioned her to ensure that debts were paid and never to forget 'that your mother did not want to stay with a debt.'¹⁷⁴ Gwala's belief in education as tool of emancipation was undiminished and he instructed Lulu to ensure that 'all children must be at school.'¹⁷⁵ He wrote:

There must be no one then who does not go to school. When your aunt was here she notified me about the burial preparation. I asked her to tell you that all my children should stay at home and they should continue with their studies.¹⁷⁶

Gwala's letter also demonstrated his frustration about the instability that Elda's death was likely to cause the family. He emphasised:

There must be no child who may experience any hardship or disabled access to anything. You must work in such a way that your mother's gap is closed very soon.¹⁷⁷

¹⁷¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from MB Yengwa to Harry Gwala, 7 June 1984.

¹⁷² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984. Gwala later met with Norman Abrahams. However, it is not clear what he discussed with Gwala about the estate of Elda, NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified permit of N. C. Abrahams to visit Harry Gwala at Robben Island, 27 July 1984.

¹⁷³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁷⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁷⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁷⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁷⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

Gwala's letters to his daughters suggested a personal feeling of disconnectedness and void that he wanted to close. Elda had been the one who was the face of the family and Gwala's linkage between his life in prison and the world outside. After Elda's death, Gwala had to accept the disconnectedness and establish another way to maintain his family and to put an alternative authority figure in place, Lulu. Gwala expressed his disappointment that, of all the children, only Lulu wrote to him.¹⁷⁸ He emphatically urged Lulu to tell the other children to 'get used to writing letters' to him.¹⁷⁹

Gwala's family and the Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches

After Gwala had given Lulu authority as head of the family, she began to take over the responsibilities of her mother. Cassius Lubisi remembers that after 'mam Gwala passed away the responsibility to keep the family together fell on Lulu Gwala.'¹⁸⁰ Lulu seems to have identified three areas of focus as the new head of the Gwala family. These were to be the face of the Gwala family in the broader structures of mass mobilisation as well as in communicating with Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches, to work with civil society organisation to ensure that the memory of Gwala was kept intact, and to coordinate access to Gwala in prison.

As prisoners had a limited number of visitors per month, Lulu took it upon herself to manage visits to Gwala. Correspondence between July and December 1984 suggested that she had developed a relationship with prison authorities as she would often recommend who should be given permission to visit Gwala. This was to ensure that Gwala was properly briefed about his family and was connected with the broader developments that were taking place in Natal.

¹⁷⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁷⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

¹⁸⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

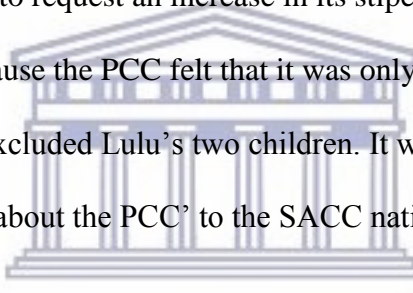
Lulu seems to have carefully selected those she recommended should be permitted to visit Gwala, mainly key family members, his children and relatives.¹⁸¹

Lulu started communicating directly with the PCC's Dependants' Conference in July 1985 in her capacity as head of the family. The PCC had been established as a regional structure of the SACC in Natal and acted as the Dependants' Conference in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁸²

Correspondence suggests Lulu felt ambiguous about the DC. While she appreciated the support of the DC and of Brown for the Gwala family, she had misgivings about the manner in which the DC conducted its operations to support detainees' families in Pietermaritzburg. She felt its policies did not take into consideration the particularities of family dynamics.¹⁸³

Lulu had approached the PCC to request an increase in its stipend to the Gwala family.¹⁸⁴

This request was declined because the PCC felt that it was only obliged to support direct dependants of Gwala, which excluded Lulu's two children. It was against this background that Lulu lodged a 'complaint about the PCC' to the SACC national office.¹⁸⁵ Lulu wrote:



I've got a big complaint about Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches. I've got two children whom my father was supporting before he went to jail and my mom died. The two kids were under my parents because I am not married. As from this year the D. C. people told me they have nothing to do with my children. I have to go and look for a job.¹⁸⁶

Lulu's desperation was caused by the fact that the SACC had changed its policy on supporting extended families, mainly grandchildren. In December 1984 the SACC approved

¹⁸¹ Lulu arranged permits for the following people: Bhabha Mhlongo, Caiphaz Gwala, Musawenkosi Gwala, Charles Gwala, Nontobeko Nxasana, Victor Mhlongo, Mandla Gwala, Lindiwe and Nonhlanhla Gwala, Linda Gwala, Mfana Gwala, Faith Khumalo and Makhosazana Gwala, see NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence between Robben Island prison management and Lulu Gwala, July 1984 to December 1985.

¹⁸² For a detailed discussion of the role of the SACC and the role of the church in the struggle against apartheid, see S. Zondi, 'Of Faith and Action: Aspects of the Role of Faith Institutions in the struggle against apartheid', in SADET, *The Road to Democracy Vol. 4, 1980-1990*, 1439-1481; J. W. de Gruchy and S. de Gruchy, *The Church Struggle in South Africa: Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition* (London: SCM Press, 2004); R. Denniston, *Trevor Huddleston: A Life* (London: Macmillan Publishers, 1999); Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 6, 93-103.

¹⁸³ APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

¹⁸⁴ APC, PC16/14/2/3/2, minutes of the meeting of the Dependants' Conference Committee, 22 January 1985.

¹⁸⁵ APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

¹⁸⁶ APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

a new funding structure for families of detainees which limited the definition of a dependant to children of the detainees and those who were either imprisoned or detained and 'were unemployed or under-employed.'¹⁸⁷ The re-evaluation of the grant policy was necessitated by declining local and international donor support to the SACC and PCC. The impact on Gwala's family was that the grant was significantly reduced. Perhaps Lulu felt the PCC had taken this decision arbitrarily and capriciously, and she alleged that 'there was a lot of corruption within the PCC.'¹⁸⁸ These allegations were never investigated.

In her capacity as the leader of the detainees' wives, Elda had been able to source aid for these families from the DC and from foreign donors, but conditions had changed by the time Lulu became the head of the Gwala family. The DC had fewer resources at its disposal.¹⁸⁹ Lulu had already been targeted by the Special Branch during its close surveillance of the Gwala family.¹⁹⁰ By the end of June 1984, Lulu had to look for a job as her business had not been successful. It appears that around September 1984 she found a job somewhere in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁹¹ However, in January 1985, Brown reported to the PCC that Lulu 'was fired because she did not do her job.'¹⁹² Brown's version came from a report from Lulu's former employers. However, Lulu asserted that the Special Branch came to these employers and instructed them to dismiss her within three months, a claim supported by Lindiwe and Cassius Lubisi.¹⁹³

¹⁸⁷ APC, PC16/14/2/5/14, SACC Dependants' Conference: Policies and procedures, December 1984; APC, PC16/14/2/3/2, minutes of the meeting of the Dependants' Conference Committee, 22 January 1985.

¹⁸⁸ APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

¹⁸⁹ For an analysis of the SACC's complexities see, K. M. Zondi, 'The Relationship Between the South African Council of Churches and Inkatha Freedom Party', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 1996, 319-333.

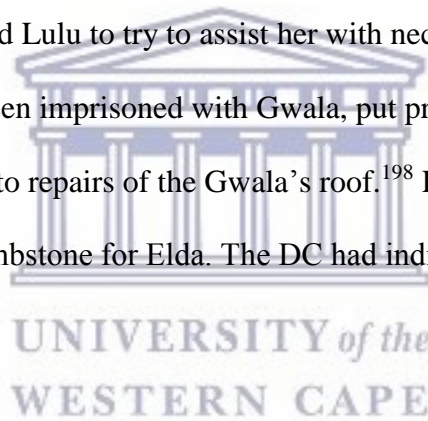
¹⁹⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

¹⁹¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 10 October 1984.

¹⁹² APC, PC16/14/2/3/2, minutes of the meeting of the Dependants' Conference Committee, 22 January 1985.

¹⁹³ APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985; Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Lindiwe Gwala; Mxolisi Dlamuka, interview with Cassius Lubisi.

Lulu had a collegial, yet sometimes complex, relationship with the PCC. Minutes of the DC suggested that field workers and sometimes Brown himself visited Lulu a number of times each month to try to help her to take care of the family's financial needs, and to resolve an on-going family dispute that occasionally erupted between her and her brother, Mfana.¹⁹⁴ By June 1985, Gwala's family grant from the DC had decreased to R70 from R140 because since November 1984 Lindiwe was regarded as the only legitimate beneficiary according to the 'new guidelines of the SACC.'¹⁹⁵ By the end of 1985, Lulu was finding it increasingly difficult to adhere to Gwala's wish that all children must be at school and should reside at his home. Key challenges included a leak in the roof of the house and the need for the sewerage system inside the house to be refurbished.¹⁹⁶ Brown and Azaria Ndebele, now working as a field worker for the DC, visited Lulu to try to assist her with necessary repairs to the house.¹⁹⁷ Ndebele, previously having been imprisoned with Gwala, put pressure on the health inspector, Mr Ntuli, to look into repairs of the Gwala's roof.¹⁹⁸ Lulu also found herself under immense pressure to buy a tombstone for Elda. The DC had indicated that 'this was not their matter.'¹⁹⁹



By 1986, the SACC and PCC were in a dire financial situation. Reverend Mazwi Tisani and Brown, in their capacities as chairman and vice-chairman respectively, often issued appeals for donations from the general public and donor community.²⁰⁰ At the same time, Lulu sought

¹⁹⁴ Although the brother's identity is not disclosed in the DC minutes, Gwala had previously raised his concerns about Mfana's drinking problem and had told Lulu to tell him to stop drinking, see NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 24 November 1984; APC, PC16/14/2/4/27, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 23 July 1985.

¹⁹⁵ APC, PC14/2/3/26, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 20 June 1985.

¹⁹⁶ APC, PC16/14/2/4/15, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 21 January 1986.

¹⁹⁷ APC, PC16/14/2/4/7, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 18 February 1986.

¹⁹⁸ APC, PC16/14/2/4/14, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 18 March 1986.

¹⁹⁹ APC, PC16/14/2/4/14, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 18 March 1986.

²⁰⁰ APC, PC16/14/2/5/1, appeal for funds documents, 20 March 1986. The following were recorded as donors in December 1986: Abraham & Sengham, 1st floor, 543 Church Street, Pietermaritzburg; R. Wellington, 3 Chapter Close, Taunton Road, Pietermaritzburg; J. B. Wright, 11 Evans Road, Pietermaritzburg; C. E. Merrett, 23 Spilsby Avenue, Pietermaritzburg; C. O. Gardner, 24 Yalts Road, Pietermaritzburg; W. G. McConkey, 33 Waalhaven, Alexander Road, Pietermaritzburg; N. S. Middleton, CUSA, 434 Boom Street, Pietermaritzburg; H. H. Prozesky, 19 Lone Tree Place, Pietermaritzburg; C. Volans, 8 Theatre Lane, Pietermaritzburg; Bishop A. H. Zulu, PO Box 426 Ulundi; R. Lundie, c/o Advice Office, Ubunye House; M.

assistance from donors outside South Africa since it was clear that neither the SACC nor PCC were in any position to assist the Gwala family to meet its financial obligations. It was in this context that Mr and Mrs Trevitt came across the plight of the Gwala family and began to communicate directly with Lulu and Lindiwe.²⁰¹ From 1985, the question of where Lindiwe was studying was not clear to the DC as she had matriculated in 1984 at Ukusa High School in Mpumalanga township, outside Hammarsdale. There were conflicting reports purporting that she was student at Mangosuthu Technikon while others indicated that she was enrolled for a secretarial course in one of the private colleges in Durban.²⁰²

From 1986, the Trevitts began to donate an amount of R500 directly into Lulu's bank account for Lindiwe's education, including boarding expenses, at 'Mangosuthu Technikon.' The Trevitts had become concerned about the Gwala family, including Lulu's asthma, and it appears that there was regular communication between the Trevitts and both Lulu and Lindiwe.²⁰³ Having been contributors to IDAF, the Trevitts were familiar with how international aid operated. After not receiving proper reports on how the money they were donating to the Gwala family was being spent, they approached the PCC, through Norman Abrahams, to be the conduit of funds to the Gwala family and to take responsibility for accounting for this expenditure.²⁰⁴ The Trevitts responded to a request from Lulu for R410 to pay for Lindiwe's educational needs by sending it to the PCC together with a request that this amount be 'administered according to the normal policy of the PCC.'²⁰⁵ The Trevitts also

Hickson, 19a McAllistair Avenue, Pietermaritzburg; G. F. Walker, 7 Armstrong Avenue, Pietermaritzburg; E. M. P. Lief, 27 Cordwalles Road, Pietermaritzburg; C. Luffingham, 49 Groenekloof Road, Hayfields; M. R. Deeplaul, 41 Manning Road, Pietermaritzburg; J Roberts, c/o Edendale Society for Child Welfare, Ubunye House; B. Biggs, 15 St. Swithans Leonard Stanely, Glos. GL10 3LS, United Kingdom; C. F. Alferts, Lingold, Robert Road, Pietermaritzburg; E. A. B. Lund, 1 Palm Mews, Pietermaritzburg; A. M. Barrett, 5 Sweetwaters Road, Pietermaritzburg; M Cowlong, 2 Irvine Road, Hilton; L. Weinberg, c/o PO Box 100, Pietermaritzburg; P. Brown, PO Box 71, Hilton; and Mr & Mrs Kerchhoff, c/o PACSA, Pietermaritzburg, see APC, PC16/14/2/4, Pietermaritzburg Council of Churches Dependants' Conference: List of donors, December 1986.

²⁰¹ APC, PC16/14/2/3/58, correspondence from Mr Trevitt to Norman Abrahams, 5 September 1986.

²⁰² APC, PC16/14/2/3/6, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 27 February 1985.

²⁰³ APC, PC16/14/2/5/1, correspondence from Mr Trevitt to Norman Abrahams, 21 January 1987.

²⁰⁴ APC, PC16/14/2/4/32, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 22 September 1986.

²⁰⁵ APC, PC16/14/2/3/58, correspondence from Mr Trevitt to Norman Abrahams, 5 September 1986.

asked the PCC to investigate how the funds they had transferred earlier to the Gwala family had been utilised. Brown made several attempts to contact Lulu and Lindiwe but failed. The PCC decided to contact Mangosuthu Technikon to enquire whether Lindiwe was in fact a student there.²⁰⁶

Mangosuthu Technikon's reply was that 'Lindiwe Gwala is not enrolled at this Technikon and our records do not show that she has done so before.'²⁰⁷ When Brown confronted Lulu with the Mangosuthu Technikon response, she said that perhaps Lindiwe registered with her English name, Precious, and Brown should make further enquiries. When it became clear that Lindiwe had never been enrolled at Mangosuthu Technikon, Brown made several attempts to arrange a meeting during the school holidays with both Lulu and Lindiwe, but these meetings never materialised.

Understanding the complex interplay between Lulu, donor funding, and accountability requires appreciating the broader context that shaped Lulu's life and that of the Gwala family. When Gwala bestowed upon Lulu the responsibility of leading the family, he was under the impression that his family was sufficiently supported by funding from international agencies and benevolent individuals. However, the declining donor funding and the closure of the International Red Cross in South Africa caused a major shift in the financial health of families of the detainees.²⁰⁸ Because it was no longer able to raise as much funding as had been possible in the past, the PCC decided to provide food parcels and reduce the number of visits to Robben Island from twelve to six per annum.

²⁰⁶ APC, PC16/14/2/4/32, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 22 September 1986.

²⁰⁷ APC, PC16/14/2/4/35, correspondence from S. D. Hibbett (Registrar) to the Secretary of the PCC, 6 October 1986; APC, PC16/14/2/5/17, correspondence from Peter Brown to Norman Abraham, 5 May 1987.

²⁰⁸ APC, PC16/14/2/4/40, memorandum from Sophie Mazibuko to the regional offices of the SACC, 19 November 1986.

Lulu's financial situation was made more precarious because she had given birth to two additional children, Nomathemba and Noluthando in 1985 and 1987 respectively, while Mfana also had a child.²⁰⁹ Lulu found herself in a situation where she had to lie in order to fulfil her commitment to Gwala, to ensure that the children were educated and taken care of. Lindiwe remarked that even after her mother had passed away she felt taken care of, hence she was able to enrol for a post-matric qualification.²¹⁰ Lulu made her siblings her highest priority, becoming a mother and father to them under extremely difficult circumstances.²¹¹ Despite these conflicted times, her relationship with white liberals, specifically Brown and Peter Kerchhoff, was able to transcend these difficulties.²¹²

Gwala's health in prison and the new frontiers of struggle

While Harry Gwala had sought to be a strong fulcrum for various roles in his life, he had numerous health complications. Gwala, Elda and Lulu were asthmatic. However, the severity of Gwala's asthma did not stop him from being actively involved in the politics of mass mobilisation and radicalisation of both the ANC and Communist Party. Lindiwe remembers that Gwala did not want to be reminded about his asthma.²¹³ Even though Gwala had been living with asthma since the late 1940s, it was only disclosed to the public in September 1976 during the course of his trial.²¹⁴ Despite his health conditions, Gwala downplayed the impact of asthma in his life until 1982 when he admitted to his friend, Themba Xulu, that he 'was suffering from asthma' but believed that if he could be transferred to a dry place he would be 'alright.'²¹⁵ Perhaps Gwala and Elda spoke about their asthmatic conditions during visits. Motlanthe was among the few who knew that Gwala was asthmatic, saying:

²⁰⁹ Nomathemba was born on 31 August 1985 and Noluthando was born on 8 August 1987.

²¹⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

²¹¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²¹² Everatt, *The Origins of Non-Racialism*.

²¹³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

²¹⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, Harry Gwala's health records, 13 January 1977.

²¹⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Themba Xulu, 25 September 1982.

Harry Gwala was asthmatic. He suffered from asthma. And when everybody else had gone to bed and slept, he would wake up and go into the ablution sections, the section which is separated from the cell, which is where the showers and the toilets were. And so he would wake up and go and clean the toilets and showers earlier, thoroughly, so that you would not find a speck of dust. And then of course he would start with his exercises. One of his favourite exercises was to stand on his head, so that more oxygen would be supplied to the brain.²¹⁶

Motlanthe remembered that ‘Gwala was emotionally disturbed by Elda’s passing’ and he had to spend time with him trying to console him.²¹⁷ Although Gwala received emotional support from fellow prisoners, he became weak and in October 1984 he confided to Lulu about his ‘unusual deteriorating’ health condition. By November 1984 he had developed a ‘progressive weakness of his upper limbs’, which he reported to the prison authorities.²¹⁸ On 11 November 1984, Gwala was referred to the Groote Schuur hospital for observation and diagnosis, marking the beginning of the decline of his health.²¹⁹

Throughout 1985 Gwala’s health steadily deteriorated and he was an occasional patient at Groote Schuur Hospital.²²⁰ After several consultations, specialists agreed that he was suffering from a rare disease, motor neuron, which they concurred was progressive and terminal. He was admitted at Groote Schuur Hospital for observation from 19 January to 3 February 1987 during which ‘extensive investigations and symptomatic treatment’ were applied.²²¹ Doctors referred him for physiotherapy to try to reverse the incapacitation of his limbs, prescribed treatment for pain, and requested the prison authorities to ‘incorporate fresh

²¹⁶ Kgalema Motlanthe, address to the inaugural Harry Gwala memorial lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013.

²¹⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe; Harvey, *Kgalema Motlanthe*.

²¹⁸ NAR, DOJ papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Dr E. Ackermann to Major Anderson, 5 April 1988; NAR, DOJ papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Professor P. L. A. Bill (neurologist at Wentworth Hospital) to X. R. Lombard (Department of National Health and Population Development), 8 November 1988.

²¹⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 19 November 1984; NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified approval report of the Robben Island Institutional Committee, 18 November 1984.

²²⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence between the Robben Island hospital section and Groote Schuur Hospital, 28 August 1986 to 20 June 1987.

²²¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified discharge report/ letter of Harry Gwala from Groote Schuur Hospital, 3 February 1987.

milk and fruits into his diet.²²² From March 1987 it appeared that doctors had stopped trying to treat the disease, focusing instead on providing regular physiotherapy.²²³

There was a general belief that Gwala's contraction of motor neuron disease was not natural. Vincent Diba argues that Gwala was poisoned by the state in order to destroy him as it had become aware of his clandestine political education activities on Robben Island.²²⁴ Perhaps, this belief was fuelled by the fact that doctors at Groote Schuur no longer tried to cure Gwala of this disease, instead focusing on physiotherapy which did not stop the progression of the disease.

While Gwala's health was deteriorating, he seemed to have chosen to concentrate on himself rather than on the broad intellectual education of prisoners. As early as 1980 Gwala had been trying to register for a Bachelor of Arts degree at UNISA.²²⁵ Elda posted money for his registration but it was intentionally delayed by the Robben Island prison authorities and only sent on after registration had closed.²²⁶ It was not until 1985 that he was able to enrol for a BA at UNISA. His tuition fees were paid by Navanethem Pillay and company who requested sponsorship on Gwala's behalf.²²⁷ In line with his political viewpoints, Gwala registered for courses in ancient history, the theory of law and international politics in his first year.²²⁸ The examination results of December 1985 indicated that Gwala failed ancient history dismally

²²² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified discharge report/letter of Harry Gwala from Groote Schuur Hospital, 3 February 1987.

²²³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Dr Prinsloo, Groote Schuur Hospital, to the Medical Officer, Robben Island, 27 March 1987.

²²⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Vincent Diba. A praise poem for Gwala suggests a degree of human intervention in his contraction of motor neuron disease, see L. Gunner and M. Gwala (eds.), *Musho! Zulu Popular Praises* (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University Press, 1991).

²²⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Harry Gwala, 26 January 1980.

²²⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Harry Gwala, 26 January 1980; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

²²⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondences between Navanethem Pillay and Co. and Harry Gwala, 28 August 1985, 5 September 1985, 5 October 1985, 2 February 1987, 4 February 1987, 3 March 1987, and 26 June 1987.

²²⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified prisoner study document, 15 February 1985.

with a mark of only 17%, while he passed theory of law and was absent from examinations for the international politics course.²²⁹

Two factors could have contributed to Gwala's failure at UNISA. During the course of 1985, his health was deteriorating, leading to the discovery that he had motor neuron disease. Thus, he might not have been in a right emotional state to focus on his studies. In addition, Gwala's interpretation of the South African history and the global political situation was contrary to that of the then dominant political viewpoint. It was not surprising that he scored only 17% in ancient history. Despite underachieving, Gwala was determined to pursue his education even though his health was steadily deteriorating.²³⁰

Gwala's commitment to continue his studies was not affected by his health. By March 1987, as his arms became weaker, he applied to the head of prison to be granted permission to purchase a typewriter.²³¹ Despite being fully informed about Gwala's state of health, the Robben Island prison authorities were reluctant to grant permission for him to use a typewriter. W. S. J. Coetzee, Deputy Director for Educational Services, was 'not in favour of making typewriters available to prisoners.'²³² However, Coetzee suggested that an opinion from the District Surgeon should be sought. The District Surgeon's report indicated that a typewriter could have been of assistance to Gwala and it 'would serve as occupational therapy for his affected muscles.'²³³

²²⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified prisoner's statement of results, 20 December 1985.

²³⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified report of the Robben Island prison officer commanding, 1 January 1986. Gwala registered the following courses in 1986: INP 20-k; INP 202-I, IRW 100-4. He passed INP 20-k (56%) and INP 202-I (505) and failed IRW 100-4 (37%), see NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from Harry Gwala to N. Pillay, 17 December 1986.

²³¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Head of Prison, Robben Island, 18 March 1987.

²³² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified memorandum from W. S. J. Coetzee, Director of Educational Services, to Lieutenant-Colonel J. T. de Klerk, Deputy Director Administrative Support Services, 30 April 1987.

²³³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified memorandum from W. S. J. Coetzee, Director of Educational Services, to Lieutenant-Colonel J. T. de Klerk, Deputy Director Administrative Support Services, 30 April 1987.

While the prison authorities were aware of Gwala's deteriorating health, they believed that 'there was an attached risk that a prisoner could use a typewriter for other purposes.'²³⁴ By May 1987 Gwala 'was virtually unable to hold a pen in his right hand.'²³⁵ Dr Philcox, acting head of the neurology section at Groote Schuur Hospital, indicated that Gwala's disability was 'such that he would be unable to complete a standard 3-hour written examination in less than double of that time' and that an alternative method of examination need to be explored.²³⁶ Philcox's medical report and demands made by Mlaba, Made and Partners, Gwala's new legal firm, as well as the Release Mandela Campaign (RMC) compelled the Robben Island prison authorities to agree to provide Gwala with a typewriter. R. A. van Deventer, writing on behalf of the Commanding Officer, stated that 'we have no choice but to grant the prisoner a typewriter.'²³⁷ However, the approval was subject to strict conditions such as that 'the prison authority would not accept responsibility for any damage; the typewriter should not be electrically wired; it must be purchased from the prisoner's personal money; and he was the only person authorised to use the typewriter.'²³⁸

As the issue of granting Gwala permission to purchase a typewriter was being discussed, the RMC was applying pressure on the authorities to transfer him to Pietermaritzburg. Health practitioners had warned that Gwala might die at any time because his condition was progressive. The Department of Prisons transferred Gwala to Pietermaritzburg prison on 28 July 1987 before he had been advised that permission to acquire the typewriter had been

²³⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified memorandum from W. S. J. Coetzee, Director of Educational Services, to Lieutenant-Colonel J. T. de Klerk, Deputy Director Administrative Support Services, 30 April 1987.

²³⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified medical certificate issued by Dr D. V. Philcox, Groote Schuur Hospital, 21 May 1987.

²³⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified medical certificate issued by Dr D. V. Philcox, Groote Schuur Hospital, 21 May 1987.

²³⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

²³⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

granted. A warder by the name of Swanepoel had suggested that ‘announcement of approval be delayed until the prisoner’ had been transferred off Robben Island.²³⁹

The process of transferring Gwala was ‘treated with the greatest sensitivity and confidentiality’ in order not to mitigate the risk of media attention.²⁴⁰ Instructions were given that Gwala must be transported in a Kombi ‘as it makes it possible for the prisoners to be transferred lying down.’²⁴¹ Further instructions were that Gwala was to be accompanied by three officials - two warders and a nurse. Once he had formally been handed over to Pietermaritzburg Prison, the authorities there were informed that he had been given approval to acquire a typewriter, subject to the abovementioned conditions.²⁴² The typewriter was eventually purchased towards the end of 1987.

Despite the state saying Gwala was being transferred to Pietermaritzburg so that he should be ‘closer to his family’, this was not its genuine intention. When Gwala arrived in Pietermaritzburg Prison, he encountered systemic problems that were to make his life more difficult. However, Gwala seem to have settled quickly into the new environment. On 1 August 1987, Gwala’s letters indicated the direction of his new struggle for connectedness. In the first letter, addressed to his lawyers, Mlaba, Made and Partners of Durban, he complained about the manner in which he was treated at Pietermaritzburg Prison. He informed them that while he had medical attention at Robben Island and a special diet as prescribed by doctors of Groote Schuur Hospital, there was no access to health facilities or his medically prescribed

²³⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Commissioner of Prison to W. S. J. Coetzee, 3 August 1987; NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified press inquiry: Themba Harry Gwala, undated; NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Swanepoel to Deputy Director Detention, 23 July 1987.

²⁴⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

²⁴¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

²⁴² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from E. J. B. Smith to the Commanding Officer, Pietermaritzburg Prison, 8 August 1987.

diet in Pietermaritzburg Prison.²⁴³ Based on this complaint he applied to the Supreme Court to:

Restrain the Pietermaritzburg Prison officials from mixing [him] with common law prisoners particularly who are beyond the pale. One of them is a habitual criminal who seemed to be mentally touched. This can only suggest one thing, that harm must befall me or alternatively that I must spend restless nights. If nothing is done about this I demand that I be immediately transferred back to Robben Island where I have received all the reasonable care, alternatively that I should be released from prison.²⁴⁴

While there are no archival records on how the Supreme Court dealt with Gwala's application, Mlaba, Made and Partners did take Gwala's matter to the Commissioner of Prisons. The two common law prisoners were duly removed from his cell.²⁴⁵ The second letter was addressed to the Registrar of UNISA, in which he notified UNISA about his new 'temporary address.'²⁴⁶ Perhaps Gwala's reference to Pietermaritzburg Prison as a 'temporary address' indicated his intention to put pressure on the state to release him, a struggle that Lulu started during mid-1986.²⁴⁷ Gwala reiterated his request to UNISA to be examined by means of a tape recorder. He also made enquiries about his ancient history marks that had not been calculated properly.²⁴⁸ It seems as if UNISA acceded to Gwala's request to be examined by tape recorder. However, it was not clear whether it was the responsibility of Gwala or of UNISA to provide the recording machine.²⁴⁹

²⁴³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 1 August 1987.

²⁴⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified application by Harry Gwala to the Supreme Court, undated. This was probably written in August 1987.

²⁴⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from the Commissioner of Prison to J. H. J. Vorstman, 25 August 1987.

²⁴⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Registrar, UNISA, 1 August 1987.

²⁴⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 26 September 1886. letter).

²⁴⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Registrar, UNISA, 1 August 1987.

²⁴⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Registrar, UNISA, 18 August 1987.

Dis/connectedness and Gwala's prison struggles

After Gwala had been diagnosed with a motor neuron disease and been informed by various medical specialists that he was unlikely to live more than two to three years, he spent his life in perpetual pain.²⁵⁰ His deteriorating health became a focal point around which the struggle for his release was fought. While at Robben Island, Lulu had approached Mlaba, Made and Partners, to present compelling reasons for Gwala's release.²⁵¹ Kwenzakwakhe Mlaba, affectionately known as Kwenza, was an anti-apartheid lawyer who represented various freedom fighters in Natal during the 1980s. Mlaba and Nomalungelo Makhaye, his legal partner, had visited Gwala at Robben Island on 25 and 26 June 1987, a month before his transfer, but were 'unable to reach conclusive consensus' on how to approach the prison management about Gwala's release.²⁵² Once Gwala had been transferred to Pietermaritzburg Prison, Mlaba, Made and Partners began a process of engaging the prison authorities about the 'instruction by his [Gwala's] family to bring action relating to his ill-health.'²⁵³

By the end of October 1987, Gwala's appeal to the authorities to be allowed to consult his legal representatives had fallen on deaf ears on the grounds that he was not 'entitled to have privileged consultations with legal advisors.'²⁵⁴ Prison authorities were only willing to allow Mlaba, Made and Partners to visit him as 'normal visitors', and to deduct these visits from Gwala's annual visit allocation.²⁵⁵ Gwala's attorneys were later given permission to consult with him after they had threatened to 'take the matter to the supreme court.'²⁵⁶ In addition to

²⁵⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁵¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 3 July 1987.

²⁵² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 3 July 1987.

²⁵³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to Harry Gwala, 18 August 1987.

²⁵⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to Harry Gwala, 9 October 1987.

²⁵⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from the Head of Prison to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 2 October 1987.

²⁵⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to the Prison Commander, Pietermaritzburg Prison, 8 October 1987.

representing Gwala against the prison authorities, Mlaba, Made and Partners were also legal representatives in the Harry Gwala vs D. V. Ngcobo matter in the Pietermaritzburg Magistrate's Court. The cause of the dispute was not divulged, but Ngcobo had impregnated Lulu.²⁵⁷

While Harry Gwala was fighting for access to his legal representative, he was also trying to comprehend the causes of the political turmoil that was unfolding in Natal from the mid-1980s. Since the early 1980s, Brown had made arrangements for *The Natal Witness* to be sent to Gwala. By 1985, Gwala had managed also to obtain permission for a subscription to the *Sunday Tribune*.²⁵⁸ In September 1987, he applied to the prison authorities to be allowed to possess a 'portable FM radio', which had been brought by his family.²⁵⁹ After permission was granted, Gwala's family applied to bring him a television. In the meantime, Gwala's family was, at this stage, being assisted by certain warders who were in sympathy with the Mass Democratic Movement (MDM) and had befriended the Gwala family.²⁶⁰ The applications to allow Gwala to have radio and television served to orientate him with the broader struggles in Pietermaritzburg, Natal and South Africa more broadly.

At the time when Gwala was being transferred to Pietermaritzburg Prison in May 1987, the Commissioner of Prisons requested the Release Advisory Board (RAB) to consider the possibility of releasing him and made such recommendation to the Minister of Prisons.²⁶¹ The RAB met on 3 November 1987 to consider the application for Gwala's release. It recommended that the application be postponed to a meeting that was scheduled for 15

²⁵⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to Harry Gwala, 9 October 1987.

²⁵⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Navanethem Pillay and Co., 5 October 1985.

²⁵⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Commanding Officer, 7 September 1987.

²⁶⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁶¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

January 1988. At that meeting the RAB decided to postpone it again to 15 April 1988 because it was concerned that Gwala's release could fuel unrest in Edendale since he still believed in the ideals of the ANC.²⁶² Furthermore, it requested medical reports from independent medical specialists concerning Gwala's health. It had already requested that the prison management should arrange for Gwala to be admitted for two nights at Grey's Hospital for 'tests.'²⁶³

At Grey's Hospital, Gwala was examined by Dr Errol Ackermann, a neurosurgeon specialist who predicted that he will only survive a year or two.²⁶⁴ However, the Ackermann report did not overcome the state's anxiety about the potential threat that Gwala's release would pose to national security. When the RAB met on 15 April it resolved to 'leave Gwala's case over until 27 May 1988 until input from the South African Police' (SAP) had been received.²⁶⁵

The report of the SAP which, was written by Major Muller, raised serious concerns about the potential danger to the domestic security situation should Gwala be released unconditionally.

At the same time, the RAB had held thorough deliberations which 'considered the extreme sensitive strategic and humanitarian complication if Gwala was to die in prison.'²⁶⁶ The RAB recommended that he be released unconditionally on medical grounds. However, it remained concerned that Gwala's deteriorating health outweighed the impact he could have had on the security situation in Pietermaritzburg and other areas, despite his weakened state.²⁶⁷ Perhaps the views of the RAB epitomised the state's anxiety about the possibility of Gwala's re-involvement in the ANC propaganda machinery, even though his health had been weakened

²⁶² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Lieutenant-Colonel Van Vuuren to Major Anderson, 4 March 1988.

²⁶³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the parliamentary office, 8 March 1988.

²⁶⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Dr Ackermann to Major Anderson, 5 April 1988.

²⁶⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

²⁶⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

²⁶⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

by motor neuron disease.²⁶⁸ While the SAP report indicated that Lulu would be ‘able to take care of Gwala’, it raised concerns that despite Gwala weakened state he was still able to communicate well and in a ‘normal state of mind.’²⁶⁹

After considering the recommendations of the RAB and the mounting pressure for the unconditional release of Gwala, Minister of Justice, H. J. (Kobie) Coetsee recommended that Gwala should be unconditionally released. Final approval was still required from State President, P. W. Botha. Botha approved Gwala’s release but he added the condition that Gwala should divorce himself from the military activities and violence.²⁷⁰ Botha’s condition indicated the state’s ambivalence about Gwala, despite his deteriorating health. The state offered Gwala a parole, meaning that he would be given a conditional release. Gwala rejected the offer on the grounds that he did not believe in violence, and that accordingly the state’s offer did not apply to him.

It became apparent that the state’s decision to transfer Gwala to a prison facility in Pietermaritzburg had backfired as it seemed to bolster his confidence and political agency. On the other side he received increasing grassroots support and public sympathy. As he had rejected the conditional parole, as a display of desperation, the state began a process of transferring him to Westville prison in Durban where he was to receive access to 24-hour nursing care in better equipped medical facilities, away from his major support base in Pietermaritzburg.²⁷¹ He was finally transferred to Westville on 4 July 1988. While the state

²⁶⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum Major Muller (prison’s social worker) to the Chairperson of the prison institutional committee, 9 October 1987.

²⁶⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

²⁷⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from P. O. Gillingham to the Deputy Commandant Management Services, undated.

²⁷¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from P. O. Gillingham to the Deputy Commandant Management Services, undated; NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commanding Officer to Deputy Director Detentions, 27 June 1988.

pretended to be motivated by compassion for Gwala's health, its hypocrisy became evident in its detention strategy. The Commanding Officer of Westville Prison noted that:

One of the passages in medium A hospital has been identified for the detention of [Gwala]. The barred gate has in the meanwhile been closed to prevent sight of and contact with other prisoners. One of the cell's toilets has been removed and sealed, and a table has been provided so that it serves as an eating/recreational room. Some of the other cells have been made suitable for the storage of emergency medical equipment, as well as the prisoner's medical records. Other prisoners who must keep him company will be accommodated in the remaining cells. There is a bath and a shower in this section and the windows have been painted to prevent prisoners in the passage seeing him when he is being bathed.²⁷²

The state remained worried that Gwala 'continued to enjoy a good reputation among radical black youth, who view him as a father figure and [that] he has the capacity to incite a crowd which could give rise to escalating unrest-related incidents.'²⁷³ The detention strategy was influenced by the state's belief that placing him with criminals would displace his politics and isolate him from Pietermaritzburg, his major political base. The strategy had been developed on the instruction from the Deputy Director of Detentions who warned that Gwala's case was politically sensitive and it should be handled as such. As part of the detention strategy, Gwala was kept with two other prisoners who were regarded as having a 'relatively low intellectual capacity' to 'dilute left-wing manipulation.'²⁷⁴

While Gwala's fate was being handled through the bureaucratic processes of the state machinery, the public pressure to release him was mounting rapidly. By June 1988, individuals and civic organisations, both local and international, began to petition the State President to release Gwala on compassionate grounds. Correspondence between Helen

²⁷² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commanding Officer to Deputy Director Detentions, 27 June 1988.

²⁷³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from P. O. Gillingham to the Deputy Commandant Management Services, undated.

²⁷⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commanding Officer to Deputy Director Detentions, 27 June 1988; NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from Deputy Director Detentions to Commanding Officer, 22 June 1988.

Suzman and Brown suggests that he requested Helen Suzman to ‘make enquiries about Themba Harry Gwala’, which she promised to do when she met with ‘Thaba [Thabo] Mbeki in Harare.’²⁷⁵ Suzman further committed herself to securing an ‘appointment with Minister Coetsee to see if [she] can get his release on compassionate grounds.’²⁷⁶ Suzman spoke with Coetsee on 7 June 1988 and he told her that Gwala’s release was under consideration. However, Suzman gathered that the chances were not ‘unfavourable’ and she ‘was not a given a firm decision by the Minister’.²⁷⁷ Brown undertook to inform the Gwala family about Suzman’s meeting with the Minister but to ‘tell them to expect nothing.’²⁷⁸

In the meantime, Mlaba, Made and Partners petitioned the State President to release Gwala. The petition was based on Gwala’s deteriorating health and the inability of the prison authorities to deal with Gwala’s health conditions.²⁷⁹ Mlaba requested the State President to release Gwala on ‘humanitarian grounds to be allowed to die in dignity in the midst of his loved ones.’²⁸⁰ However, PW Botha did not make a determination based on Mlaba’s petition. Instead, he sent the matter on to the Minister of Justice as ‘the matter fell under his jurisdiction.’²⁸¹

Various correspondence between Peter Brown and Helen Suzman, Mlaba and the offices of the State President and Ministry of Justice indicate that pressure to release Gwala was intensifying from various sectors of society. In addition, Gwala’s condition was receiving more media coverage which resulted in the growing interest by local and international media

²⁷⁵ APC, PC16/14/3/1/18, in her response, Helen Suzman refers to Peter Brown’s letters dated 17 May 1988, 2 June 1988.

²⁷⁶ APC, PC16/14/3/1/18, correspondence from Helen Suzman to Peter Brown, 2 June 1988.

²⁷⁷ APC, PC16/14/3/1/18, correspondence from Helen Suzman to Peter Brown, 2 June 1988.

²⁷⁸ APC, PC16/14/3/1/23, correspondence from Peter Brown to Helen Suzman, 3 July 1988.

²⁷⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, petition from Mlaba, Made and Partners to the State President, 25 May 1988.

²⁸⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, petition from Mlaba, Made and Partners to the State President, 25 May 1988.

²⁸¹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from the State President’s Administrative Secretary to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 7 June 1988.

in how the state was treating him.²⁸² Perhaps this could be attributed to the RMC campaign to release Gwala. The prison authorities received letters from a certain Cecil Spencer, Reverend H. W. Hopper from Eastbourne and Northern Ireland respectively, both requesting that Gwala be 'released as he was terminally ill' and that 'he was unlikely to be a law breaker in the future.'²⁸³ L. E. Guffatho's letter from England pleaded for the authorities to release Gwala so that 'the end of his life might be easier and that he may have the care he needs.'²⁸⁴

The SACC had been indirectly brought into the Gwala matter through its ecumenical Dependants' Conference. While the Pietermaritzburg DC continued to be actively involved in supporting the welfare of the Gwala family, from June 1988, the SACC took a more direct interest in Gwala's imprisonment and his state of health. During its national conference on 27 and 28 June 1988, the SACC resolved to appeal to the Minister of Justice 'for the release of Mr Harry Gwala on humanitarian grounds.'²⁸⁵ Coetsee's response to SACC head, Reverend Frank Chikane, suggested ambivalence on the part of the state regarding the mounting pressure to release Gwala.²⁸⁶ While the state was concerned about the consequences of Gwala dying in prison, it was similarly concerned about his unwillingness to change his politics and divorce himself from the militant ideological viewpoints of the Communist Party and the ANC.

Up to this point, the pressure for Gwala's release had come from concerned individuals and bodies other than Gwala himself. However, from September 1988 Gwala seemed to have

²⁸² *City Press* and *Business Day* both sent media enquiries to the Prisons Department enquiring about Gwala's conditions and possibility of his release, see NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, media enquiries from Daniel Simon (*Business Day*) to the Prison Service, 5 June 1988; Staff reporter, 'Lawyers call on PW to release terminally ill ANC veteran Gwala', *City Press*, 5 June 1988, 2.

²⁸³ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified letter from Cecil E. Spencer to the Governor, Pietermaritzburg Prison, 23 June 1988. Another letter, dated 7 June 1988 was received from Rev. H. W. Hopper.

²⁸⁴ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified letter from L. E Guffatho to the Prison authorities, 28 June 1988.

²⁸⁵ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from Rev. Frank Chikane [signed by B. H. Bam], Secretary General of the SACC to Mr K. [H. J.] Coetzee [Coetsee], Minister of Justice, 1 August 1988.

²⁸⁶ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from H. J. Coetsee to Reverend Chikane, 27 October 1988.

decided not to rely on other people to fight for his cause. On 24 September, Gwala was assisted to write a letter to the Head of Prison requesting that he be released.²⁸⁷ Gwala's letter included highlights of the conclusions of medical practitioners from Groote Schuur, Grey's and St Augustine's hospitals. He requested to be 'released on medical grounds as a humanitarian gesture by the state...so that [I] may have a peaceful death among members of [my] family.'²⁸⁸ In spite of the pressure, the state remained convinced about Gwala's potential to incite violence. Although there was clear medical evidence from specialists that Gwala's health had deteriorated so much that he had become physically paralysed, the state was determined to seek further medical evidence.

The prison medical practitioner, Dr J. D. Strydom, was instructed to consult with other specialists about Gwala's medical condition and to arrive at a firm conclusion. Strydom sought the opinion of Dr Hugh Staub, a neurologist at Chelmsford Medical Centre, who concluded that 'a very urgent and forceful application for his [Gwala] early release should be made to the authorities based on the fact that he has a disease which is progressive and terminal.'²⁸⁹ The state also referred Gwala to Dr J. de la Rey Nel, specialist physician at Westville Hospital, who also concluded that Gwala's condition was not reversible.²⁹⁰ Despite these medical reports the state remained undecided.

The Release Mandela Campaign and the struggle to release Gwala

The Release Mandela Campaign applied created 'enormous pressure to release Gwala'.²⁹¹

The RMC had been founded on 9 March 1980 when the *Sunday Post* of Johannesburg

²⁸⁷ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from written for T. H. Gwala to the Head of Prison, 24 September 1988.

²⁸⁸ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence written for T. H. Gwala to the Head of Prison, 24 September 1988.

²⁸⁹ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from Dr H. Staub to Dr J. D. Strydom, 3 October 1988.

²⁹⁰ NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from Dr J. de la Rey Nel to Dr J. P. Strydom, Westville Prison, 14 October 1988. Gwala was also seen by Dr Y. T. Singh and Dr W. F. C. Kennedy and who also concluded that his medical conditions were incurable and progressive and recommended that he should be released from prison.

²⁹¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi; Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

launched a nationwide petition, signed by about 15 million people, for the release of Mandela. By the mid-1980s, the RMC had support from many other African countries and international anti-apartheid organisations in Europe. In 1984, Kenneth Kaunda, the President of Zambia, became a fervent supporter of the RMC and called on the South African government to release all political prisoners.²⁹² Other organisations that supported the RMC included the Soweto Committee of 10, Inkatha ye Nkululeko Yesizwe (later the Inkatha Freedom Party), the Azanian People's Organisation (Azapo), the Labour Party, the NIC and the SACC.²⁹³ Cassius Lubisi remembered that

While the RMC was focusing on Mandela, it did not only concern Mandela's release. Instead, Mandela was a symbol of our struggle because he was known internationally and the RMC used his name for symbolic purposes. The RMC was fighting for the release of Nelson Mandela and all other political prisoners, return of all exiles and the subsequent implementation of the Freedom Charter.²⁹⁴

The election of Lubisi to the executive of the RMC in 1986 raised new prospects for the RMC in Natal.²⁹⁵ Under conditions of heightened apartheid repression, the RMC was determined to 'constantly put the names of key leaders in the public domain.' In the case of Natal, the RMC had identified Harry Gwala as one of the key leaders to focus on due to the political momentum that had been built by Elda and her subsequent funeral. In 1987, the RMC had decided run a project around Pietermaritzburg to highlight the leaders who were in prison on Robben Island at the time. The person who symbolised that was Gwala. Through this project, the RMC visited places such as Sobantu, Imbali, Dambuza and Mpumalanga

²⁹² Ilanga reporter, 'UKaunda uthi iSA ayikhulule uMandela', *Ilanga lase Natali*, 11-13 June 1984, 7.

²⁹³ <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/nelson-mandela-timeline-1980-1989>, accessed 5 July 2016.

²⁹⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁹⁵ Lubisi was originally from Nelspruit and had come to Pietermaritzburg to study for a BSc degree at the University of Natal Pietermaritzburg at the beginning of 1985. By June of that year he had been elected as vice chairperson of the local branch of the Azanian Students' Convention (AZASCO). He utilised his new position, with the support of fellow students and founders of the D. C. O. Matiwane Youth League, Siphoshezi, Andile Reve, Aubrey Ngcobo and Thandi and Phumla Gqubule, to reorientate AZASCO from a 'cheese and wine' leisure group to a proactive and militant student movement concerned with bread and butter issues that operated both on campus and in the broader community. In 1986 Lubisi was elected to the national leadership of the Release Mandela Campaign. He consequently undertook frequent clandestine trips to Lusaka and Harare to consult with the ANC on RMC and youth matters. It was during these trips early in 1987 that he was recruited by Ngaoko Ramatlodi and Super Molozi unto the ANC, see Sithole, 'The ANC Underground'.

Township to conscientise ordinary people about Gwala. Linked to Harry Gwala's name were the names of Anton 'Mfenendala' Xaba, John 'Mabulala' Nene, Zakhele Mdlalose, Matthew Meyiwa and Truman Magubane, who were imprisoned with him during the 1976 trial. Lubisi argues that the RMC chose these names because they believed that 'there was no chance that people would have forgotten about them.' Gwala, as the 'chief commander', became the symbol of the RMC in Natal.²⁹⁶

During the RMC's campaign to release Gwala, Lulu, who was already politically active, became the face of the family. It was through Lulu that Lubisi and Ben Martins became very close to the Gwala family.²⁹⁷ Gwala's other children were also involved in one way or another. Now and then Lubisi stayed at Gwala's house even before Gwala's release from prison. Lubisi and other RMC members became Gwala's regular visitors while he was imprisoned in Pietermaritzburg and Westville.²⁹⁸ To the RMC, the transfer of Gwala to Natal prisons meant that his release was imminent, so they had to establish a Reception Committee (RC) to ensure that his house was improved in line with his political stature, in order to manage security and access, and to accommodate his disability as he was suffering from motor neuron disease.²⁹⁹ It was against this background that the RMC requested Beyers Naudé and Sydney Mafumadi from the ANC to work with Kwenza Mlaba and Linda Zama to ensure that there were sufficient funds to 'make Gwala's house a bit respectable.'³⁰⁰ On the request of the RMC, Linda Zama, a prominent anti-apartheid lawyer, established the Harry

²⁹⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁹⁷ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁹⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁹⁹ The Reception Committee consisted of Reggie Hadebe, Skhumbuzo Ngwenya, Mdu Ndlovu, Thami Mseleku, Shakes Cele, Blade Nzimande, A. S. Chetty, Chota Motala, see Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

³⁰⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi. The reconstruction of Gwala's house started in mid-1989 and was finalised, after numerous delays due to late payments by donors, in June 1990. See UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, financial report from Linda Zama and Company to Messrs Birkbeck Montagu (St. Bride Street, London), 30 July 1990.

Gwala Trust and raised funds from local and international donors to improve Gwala's house.

In a funding proposal to build Gwala's house Zama stated:

What is uppermost is that he [Gwala] lived in a 2-bedroom house with 9 additional members of the family including grandchildren. The house is crowded and there is no security. A person of Mr Gwala's standing is vulnerable. Political assassinations are prevalent in South Africa.³⁰¹

The state finally acceded to the pressure and petitions from various organisations, countries, medical specialists, and individuals locally and abroad to release Gwala. He was unconditionally released on 26 November 1988 into the 'care and supervision of his daughter, Lulu Gwala.'³⁰² Lulu had informed the RC about Gwala's imminent release in order to plan a 'warm reception.' Unlike his release in 1972, which was quiet and unnoticed, this time a large group of youth waited at his home to welcome Gwala in a 'revolutionary mode, particularly by the young people.'³⁰³ As Gwala was approaching, the narrow streets of Dambuza reverberated with youth singing, toyi-toying and ululating '*uHarry Gwala, ubaba wethu, thina sonqoba*' [Harry Gwala our father, we will conquer]. Gwala's reception became a mini-political rally, an indication that, although he had been absent for many years, he remained immensely present in the political fabric of Edendale, Pietermaritzburg and Natal.³⁰⁴ Reporting about Gwala's reception, the *Echo* highlighted that:

Neighbours, old friends and host of Maritzburgers streamed to see the ailing Mr Gwala upon his return home. The list read like a Pietermaritzburg who's who.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, 'motivation for funding Mr Harry Gwala', from Linda Zama and Company to the sponsor, London, 18 July 1989. After Gwala's release from prison, the Trust extended its functions to include raising funds to cover Gwala's medical expenses and acting as his legal representative. The SACC granted a monthly stipend of R450.00 to contribute towards the Gwalas maintenance costs. However, this was inadequate since the IRC had employed a nurse at a cost of R400.00 per month. UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Linda Zama and Company to the sponsors-London, 29 August 1989; UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, memorandum from Linda Zama, 20 June 1989.

³⁰² NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, release certificate, 26 November 1988.

³⁰³ Video interview with Gwala, unrecognised interviewer, UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, INTV EP 1 & 5.

³⁰⁴ See Gwala's interaction with the youth during his reception event at his home, UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, INTV EP1, video recording of Gwala's reception and video interview conducted by Mzala (Jabulani Nxumalo), 1990.

³⁰⁵ Lakela Kaunda, 'Welcome home, Harry Gwala', *Echo*, supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 1 December 1989.

The media coverage of Gwala's release highlighted the bias and censorship that characterised news agencies. While the *UmAfrika*, a pro-UDF regional newspaper, highlighted Gwala's release in a bold front page story with a picture of Harry Gwala, *The Natal Witness* and *Ilanga* newspapers reported it as a minor story.³⁰⁶ While reportage in *UmAfrika* and *Echo* covered Gwala's political life from the 1940s, *Ilanga* and *The Natal Witness* focused on his 'ailing health' and said that he might not survive for more than a year.

Conclusion

This chapter has interwoven Gwala's involvement in football during the late 1940s in Pietermaritzburg and mid-1960s at Robben Island as a continuation of his politics of connectedness. While football has been understood to have followed political party lines, oral interviews have revealed that it was a catalyst that brought about political unity among the varying political formations on Robben Island.³⁰⁷ This chapter has also demonstrated that Gwala occupied various roles on Robben Island that were multi-layered, complex and fraught with ambiguities of class consciousness. His outspoken defence of the analytical interpretation of society in terms of class resulted in confrontation with proponents of African nationalism. This was expressed in the political turmoil that stifled prospects for political connectedness between various formations on Robben Island.

The chapter has further demonstrated that despite its limitations, Gwala's politics of connection enabled him to develop political education as a modality to stimulate political consciousness and enhance the struggle against apartheid on Robben Island. It was through Gwala's political education programmes that Robben Island earned its title 'university of the

³⁰⁶ Staff reporter, 'Inkakha kaKhongolose idedelwe etilongweni', *UmAfrika*, 3 December 1988; Staff reporter, 'Owe ANC owayegweshelwe ukudilikelwa yijele udedelwe ngeledluli', *Ilanga*, 28-30 November 1988; Lakela Kaunda, 'Welcome home, Harry Gwala', *Echo*, supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 1 December 1989.

³⁰⁷ J. Danilewitz, 'Athletics & Apartheid: The Evolution of Integrated Sports in South Africa', *Harvard International Review*, Vol. 20, No. 4, 1998, 36-39.

struggle.’ As Mandela remarked, the products of Gwala’s political education would themselves develop into political giants in their own right, using the tools he gave them to develop independent thought and analysis.³⁰⁸ The chapter has also argued that the 1960s were especially very difficult years in the history of the liberation politics as the ANC and other liberation movements faced direct repression by the state that led to the banning, imprisonment and exile of many of the leaders. Despite attempts to regenerate the ANC during the Morogoro conference in 1969, the nature of the repressive systems that had been introduced by the South African state prevented any possibility that political education could have been influenced by such developments.

This chapter has also demonstrated how the sudden death of Elda in 1984 left Gwala’s children in a state of political exclusion and financial vulnerability. Lulu, aged 30, became head of the family and played a key role in keeping the family intact and connected Gwala’s name with the new wave of mass mobilisation to ensure that his political identity was not obliterated by state. Despite Gwala’s imprisonment, his family employed his politics of connectedness to mobilise grassroots organisations and public sympathy to put pressure on the state to release him unconditionally.

³⁰⁸ Nelson Mandela, speech at the funeral of Harry Gwala, 1 July 1996.

CHAPTER SIX

Harry Gwala, militancy and violence in Natal, 1988-1995

Introduction

From the mid-1980s, the greater Pietermaritzburg and Natal exploded into one of the bloodiest episodes of political violence of the last decade of apartheid. When Harry Gwala was released from prison on 26 November 1988, he found himself in a complex, violent political environment that required him to take proactive political stances to protect his constituency in Dambuza and greater Pietermaritzburg. Violence in Natal and Zululand was accompanied by crowd resistance and mass mobilisation that had been key features of events in Pietermaritzburg during the late 1950s. The 1980s, however, were different as crowd resistance and mass mobilisation became violent. This was because, unlike the 1950s, the 1980s were characterised by the dominance of Inkatha which had been established by Mangosuthu Buthelezi on 21 March 1975. Inkatha promoted narrow notions of Zulu nationalism and the existence of a homogenous Zuluness that had to be defended.¹ Despite Buthelezi's commitment to non-violence when Inkatha was established, by the mid-1980s his approach seemed to have undergone a metamorphosis as Inkatha was embroiled in aggressive and violent attacks on its those who did not support it.² By the time Gwala was released from prison, the stage was already set for a showdown.

John Aitchison has argued that Gwala's release heralded a birth of a new era in Pietermaritzburg and Natal. To the people of Edendale, Gwala's release filled the leadership void they had been waiting for many years, especially in the face of violence that had

¹ P. D. S. Forsyth, 'The Past as the Present: Chief A. N. M. G. Buthelezi's Use of History as a Source of Political Legitimation', MA thesis, University of Natal, 1989; For a detailed discussion on conflict in Africa, see M. Mamdani, 'Making Sense of Political Violence in Postcolonial Africa', *Identity, Culture and Politics*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 2002

² UWL, HLP, Buthelezi's speeches, A1045, 'We March Together to Achieve Victory', delivered by M. G. Buthelezi at Ondini, 13 September 1980.

devastated many families.³ During this period, Gwala's life was characterised by notions of political militancy, the re-establishment and expansion of the ANC's influence on local politics, and navigating the complex interplay between regional and national politics. This chapter seeks to deepen our understanding of Gwala's interpretations of violence and how the modalities of retaliation became instruments of political defence to protect ANC supporters. It seeks to understand Gwala's interpretation of violence beyond the work of Matthew Krentz, John Aitchison, Gerhard Mare' and Ashwin Desai who have argued that violence in Natal was the cathartic release of aggression and a form of protest against apartheid.⁴

Matthew Krentz, John Aitchison and Gerhard Mare' have described the patterns of regional violence and have raised similar questions about the persistence and interplay between the notion of a 'third force' and histories of economic and social deprivation. Based on their work I argue that the entanglement of violence with Gwala limits our ability to recognise the role of organised class and political interests in the liberation struggle. I do not, however, try to dispel the notion that Gwala persona might have played a role in the violence as he often poetically stated during his public addresses, '*kuzokhala isigwagwaga*.'⁵

Recent studies by David Welsh, Mac Maharaj and Mxolisi Mchunu have characterised Gwala as an ANC warlord.⁶ Welsh has described Harry Gwala as a 'counterpart in the ANC who either believed that negotiations were futile or that political grounds had to be defended and expanded by violence.'⁷ Welsh further argues that Gwala was linked to the violence that

³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with John Aitchison.

⁴ M. Krentz, *An Unofficial War: Inside the Conflict in Pietermaritzburg* (Cape Town: David Philip, 1990); G. Mare, 'Inkatha and Regional Control: Policing Liberation Politics', *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 45, 1990; J. Aitchison, *Death from Political Violence in Natal Midlands, 1980-1992* (Pietermaritzburg: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1993); A. Desai, 'The Eye of a Violent Storm: Inanda, 1985', *New Contree*, No.70, Special edition, 2014.

⁵ This is a Zulu expression that refers to the rattle of a machine gun.

⁶ Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 416; M. R. Mchunu, 'A History of Political Violence in KwaShange, Vulindlela District and of its Effects on the Memories of Survivors (1987-2008)', PhD dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2013; P. O'Malley, *Shades of Difference: Mac Maharaj and the Struggle for South Africa* (Johannesburg: Penguin, 2007).

⁷ Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 416.

unfolded in Natal by saying, ‘he did not support peace talks between Mandela and Buthelezi, despite Jacob Zuma’s advice to Mandela.’⁸ Mchunu and Maharaj characterise Gwala as an ANC warlord who did not own up to the violence committed by supporters. Such characterisation indicates the extent to which Gwala’s involvement in the realignment of the post-1990 geo-politics of Natal has been misunderstood and read in an unproblematised and ahistorical manner.⁹

The views of Welsh, Maharaj and Mchunu that Gwala was a warlord reflect the dominance of uncritical, dogmatic perspectives of understanding violence in Natal and KwaZulu during the 1980s and 1990s. These views are not based on a nuanced analysis of Gwala’s role and do not take into consideration a variety of sources that have documented wider histories of violence in Natal Midlands. The labelling of Gwala as a warlord is the result of an inability to locate him within the context of Natal at that time, a context which was dominated by conflict, violence and low intensity war.

Violence in Natal and early interactions with Inkatha

The situation in Natal and the role of Buthelezi in the political dispensation that was unfolding during the 1980s was discussed extensively on Robben Island. Due to the lack of understanding of conditions on the ground, Gwala and the rest of the political leadership had taken a view that the violent approaches of supporters of the Congress of South African Trade Union (COSATU) and UDF was at odds with the ANC’s vision.¹⁰ In anticipation of Gwala’s release, as he was being transferred to Pietermaritzburg prison, the leadership at Robben Island mandated him to explore ways to stop violence in Pietermaritzburg and in Natal more broadly. After Gwala had been transferred to prisons in Natal, he was regularly

⁸ Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 576.

⁹ Mchunu, ‘A History of Political Violence in KwaShange’; O’Malley, *Shades of Difference*.

¹⁰ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

briefed by his daughter Lulu, Cassius Lubisi and other political leaders of the UDF and COSATU during prison visits. In addition, access to a television, radio, and daily newspapers (*The Natal Witness* and *The Natal Mercury*) enabled him to have access to wider knowledge of political conditions in Natal as they were unfolding. However, he was still convinced that it was necessary to ‘negotiate with Inkatha to end the violence’ as it was ‘one of the good steps in the direction of eliminating apartheid.’¹¹ However, when Gwala was released, his enthusiasm for a peaceful settlement seemed to have dwindled as he was exposed to the extreme brutality and violence in Natal. This caused him to gravitate towards mobilising communities into politics of violent confrontation with Inkatha.¹²

From the mid-1980s, there had been a prevailing climate of political intolerance in Natal between supporters of Inkatha on the one hand and the supporters of the UDF and COSATU on the other.¹³ This degenerated into violence which Anthea Jeffery has referred to as a low-intensity civil war.¹⁴ The roots of violent confrontation can be traced back to the attacks of 1983 when Inkatha’s *amabutho* (militias) attacked students at the residences of the University of Zululand. The establishment of the UDF and COSATU in 1983 and 1985 respectively exacerbated the climate of political turmoil because Buthelezi saw these formations as threats to the dominance of Inkatha. By 1985, violence had started in Mpumalanga Township, near

¹¹ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

¹² APC, PC189/7/1/1, ‘Police involvement in the Natal Conflict’, affidavit of Father Timothy Smith, undated. Smith was a Roman Catholic priest stationed at Elandskop from 1983 until 1990. As part of the Christian mission, Smith documented incidents of violence and provided counselling to victims of violence.

¹³ M. Butler, *Natal, Violence and the Elections* (Pietermaritzburg: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1994), 3-4.

¹⁴ For a detailed discussion on the proliferation of violence in Pietermaritzburg see A. J. Jeffery, *The Natal Story: Sixteen Years of Conflict* (Johannesburg: South African Institute of Race Relations, 1997); A. J. Jeffery, *People’s War: New Light on the Struggle for South Africa* (Cape Town: Jonathan Ball, 2009); N. Gwala, ‘Political Violence and the Struggle for Control in Pietermaritzburg’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 15, No.3, 506-524; Kentridge, ‘An Unofficial War’; S. Mathis, ‘From Warlords to Freedom Fighters: Political Violence and State Formation in Mbumbulu, South Africa’, *African Affairs*, Vol. 112, No. 448, 421-439; G. Kynoch, ‘Reassessing Transition Violence: Voices from South Africa’s Township Wars, 1990-4’, *African Affairs*, Vol. 112, No. 447, 283-303; G. Mare and J. Wright, ‘Ethnicity, Society and Conflict in Natal’, *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 21, No. 59, 121-127; A. Sitas, ‘The Making of the ‘Comrades’ in Natal, 1985-91’, *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1992, 629-641; APC, PC186/1/1/1, ‘The tightening noose’: Violence against anti-apartheid organisations in Natal/KwaZulu during the 1980s’, Report of the Unrest Monitoring Project; A. Minnaar, *Patterns of Violence: Case Study of Conflict in Natal* (Pretoria: Human Sciences Research Council, 1992); D. Hallows, *Violent Conflict in KwaZulu-Natal: A Report* (Durban: Olive Publications, 2002).

Hammarsdale, and on parts of Edendale. It intensified after a group of operatives trained on the Caprivi Strip border zone in what is now Namibia returned to join the KwaZulu Police (KZP). Witness testimonies during the hearings of the TRC indicated that these trainees never underwent any police training or followed proper admissions procedures, not even filling in KZP application forms. They were issued with KZP appointment certificates and with official police firearms. Under the disguise of being official law enforcement agents, they engaged in large-scale hit squad assassinations of supporters of the UDF and COSATU, mainly in the Natal Midlands including Edendale and Mpumalanga townships.¹⁵

Kentridge has attributed the emergence of violence to Inkatha as it tried to ‘invade non-Inkatha territories’ to redraw the political geography of Natal.¹⁶ The appointment of Brigadier Mac Buchner in November 1987 as the head of the Security Branch in Pietermaritzburg with overall command of the riot police coincided with the re-emergence of the Congress movement and its militant youth. This challenged Buthelezi’s dominance of the political space and presented fertile grounds for violent encounters in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁷ Buchner had been an experienced security policeman, with a vast background in fighting the ANC, especially turning former ANC guerrillas into ‘askaris.’ He viewed violence in Pietermaritzburg as a product of ANC’s threat to attack Inkatha and ‘dealing with that threat [was] always naturally [his] first concern.’¹⁸

¹⁵ Pierre Cronje’s affidavit indicates the extent to which police targeted unarmed civilians and ignored numerous calls to arrest armed Inkatha supporters, see APC, PC186/9/1/1, statement by Pierre Cronje, 26 March 1989; Affidavits of Mduzuzi Sililo, Essop Cajee, Sidney Sililo, Wanda Mseleku, Mlungisi Mseleku, Nkosinathi Ndaba, Shumpula Ndaba, Hamilton Ndlovu, Alfred Dladla and Cyprian Ndlovu also suggested that David Ntombela, assisted by the South African Police, had assaulted and attached unarmed civilians, see APC, PC 11/2/7/3, Court cases against Warlords accused of murder’, Mandla Wilfred Mkhize and Mangethe Mkhize vs David Ntombela and six others, case number 2887/87; Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Vol. 3, 194; Gerhart and Glaser, ‘From Protest to Challenge’ Vol. 6, 113.

¹⁶ Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 1.

¹⁷ APC, PC189/7/1/1, ‘The Warlord and the Police’, affidavit of Father Timothy Smith, undated; Kentridge, ‘An Unofficial War’, 211.

¹⁸ Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 212.

Once Gwala had been transferred to prisons in Natal his proximity seemed to have brought a sense of legitimacy and identity formation to the supporters of UDF and COSATU. They began to use Gwala as a symbol of the struggle, with his profile becoming a tool to build mass support against Inkatha. It was against this background that Musa Gwala was able to mobilise the youth to denounce Inkatha at Swayimane, marking the beginning of an era of brutal violence between the supporters of UDF and Psychology Ndlovu, a local leader of Inkatha. While imprisoned, Gwala had accumulated much respect both on Robben Island and in the Natal Midlands, particularly after the RMC had taken an interest in him. Gwala's political profile served to disprove Buthelezi's claims that the UDF was 'undisciplined' and that they were manipulating school children in Natal's townships.¹⁹ Gwala became the embodiment and symbol of a political moment that connected the UDF and COSATU to broader sense of comradeship.²⁰

There is no doubt that Buthelezi was aware that Gwala had become an iconic and highly respected leader within the broad political structures of both the UDF and COSATU. Cassius Lubisi said that after Gwala was released, one of the first groups to arrive to welcome him was a Kombi-load of Inkatha officials sent by Buthelezi.²¹ Among them were David Ntombela and Velaphi Ndlovu. Ntombela and Ndlovu had been leaders of Inkatha in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area. They took the opportunity to brief Gwala about their views on violence that was taking place in Natal.²² After having facilitated a visit by the local leadership of Inkatha, Buthelezi wrote a letter to Gwala on 2 December 1989. In the letter

¹⁹ UWL, HLP, Buthelezi's speeches, A1045, 'We March Together to Achieve Victory', delivered by M. G. Buthelezi at Ondini, 13 September 1980. Students in KwaMashu embarked on a strike action in 1980s that marked the revival of students' organisation in the early 1980s, see Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Sihle Mbongwa; J. Seekings, *The UDF: A History of the United Democratic Front in South Africa, 1983-1991* (Cape Town: David Philip, 2000), 280-290; F. Meer, *Resistance in the Townships* (Durban: Madiba Publishers, 1989), 36; B. Nzimande, *Schooling in the Context of Violence* (Durban: Education Policy Unit, 1993), 9.

²⁰ For a detailed discussion on comrades see Sitas, 'The Making of the Comrades', 629-641.

²¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

Buthelezi addressed Gwala as a ‘brother’, suggesting a desperate need for collegiality, mutual political respect, and an attempt to initiate grounds of a political treaty. Buthelezi further wrote:

You are a son of Africa; a son of South Africa and one of the greatest of many who have suffered in the process of bringing about a better South Africa. Some suffer out of jail; some suffer in jail and it is the suffering of the masses that has inspired people like you to do what you have done. You are one of those few in the history of the struggle who was sentenced to life imprisonment. I say few knowing that even one would be far too many.²³

Being aware that Gwala had already been in prison when Inkatha was formed, Buthelezi’s letter tried to convince Gwala about his political belief that ‘there is no one way in which apartheid could be eradicated.’²⁴ Exercising his ability to use history to claim political legitimacy for himself, Buthelezi situated the establishment of Inkatha within the broader historical and political developments that gave rise to the BCM, BPC and independent trade unions during the 1970s.²⁵ He appealed to Gwala to understand what he described as the necessity of a ‘multi-strategy approach in which each does what each can best do in their own circumstances.’²⁶ Ntombela and Ndlovu had already briefed Gwala about their perspectives on violence, and the relevant part of Buthelezi’s letter reads:

One of the pangs I feel intensely, and daily, is the violence between Blacks in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area, which involves the ANC/UDF-COSATU alliance, and Inkatha. I have tried to do all that is possible to contribute towards peace in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area. There has, for example, been the Peace Accord signed by COSATU in Pietermaritzburg and Inkatha. I feel that this ACCORD can never really stop the violence unless the leadership of the ANC and the UDF also

²³ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from M. G. Buthelezi to Mr Harry Gwala, 2 December 1989.

²⁴ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from M. G. Buthelezi to Mr Harry Gwala, 2 December 1989.

²⁵ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from M. G. Buthelezi to Mr Harry Gwala, 2 December 1989. For a broader discussion on Buthelezi’s use of the past, see Forsyth, ‘The Past as the Present’; C. Hamilton, *Terrific Majesty: The Powers of Shaka Zulu and the Limits of Historical Invention* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

²⁶ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from M. G. Buthelezi to Mr Harry Gwala, 2 December 1989.

identify with the Peace Accord. I share this as a pain which I know you must feel as intensely as I do.²⁷

Gwala's reply was characterised by sarcasm and corrections of political and historical distortions in Buthelezi's letter. He sarcastically addressed Buthelezi as '*Mtwana* [*mntwana*]', and acknowledged that Buthelezi's letter had 'touched some of the important aspects that affect the African people.'²⁸ Gwala concurred with Buthelezi that opposition to apartheid required 'multi-strategies' but emphasised that in 'a society divided into social classes, race, colour, and nationality, the people will respond to this oppression in the way they feel it.'²⁹ Without making a direct reference to Inkatha, Gwala warned Buthelezi that 'the Nationalist government has created various agencies to deceive the people, thus making efforts to create some social classes among the oppressed which should act as shock absorbers as the struggle against apartheid intensifies.'³⁰

Gwala's statement that 'the tactics of the enemy have tended to confuse the oppressed into thinking that apartheid would be destroyed by the people in collaboration with a reforming Nationalist regime' suggested how he viewed Inkatha within the broader politics of the liberation struggle.³¹ Indirectly critiquing Inkatha's approach, Gwala said that 'the multi-strategies of the people which are raising out of their objective conditions should not be allowed to make the people fight among themselves, each claiming that his strategy is the

²⁷ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from M. G. Buthelezi to Mr Harry Gwala, 2 December 1989.

²⁸ In Zulu, *mntwana* is a person of royal blood, a prince. SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989. Gwala's sarcastic reference to Chief Buthelezi as *mntwana* could have been influenced by Mzala's book which exposed that Buthelezi was not a legitimate heir to the Buthelezi throne and his use of royal lineage was mainly to advance his political aims, see Mzala, *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda* (London: Zed Books, 1988).

²⁹ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

³⁰ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

³¹ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

only one that should be used.³² While Buthelezi's references to violence in his letter were limited to Natal, Gwala described 'bloodshed' as a national phenomenon and he quoted other areas affected by violence such as the Western Cape, Eastern Cape and Transvaal. Gwala stated that 'the bloodshed...should make every patriot worried.'³³ Gwala's letter suggested that Buthelezi's politics of collaboration should shift to identify the National Party government as the oppressor and to 'explain to our people who the real enemy is.'³⁴

The epistolary exchange of correspondence between Buthelezi and Gwala shows their differing political approaches to opposing apartheid. They also highlight the level of personal and political animosity between them that later contributed to fuelling political violence between Inkatha and ANC/UDF supporters. Buthelezi, however, claimed that he had a 'cordial' relationship with Gwala dating back to the 1950s.³⁵ Buthelezi claimed that when Gwala was released from prison in 1988, he even gave him an amount of R2 000 to perform the traditional Zulu cleansing ritual of slaughtering a goat which was performed when a man is released from prison. However, Lindiwe Gwala did not remember such ritual being performed and it is unlikely that Gwala would have performed such a ritual as he did not have much of a connection with ancestral belief systems.³⁶

Violence and the politics of mass mobilisation in Natal

Before Harry Gwala's release from prison, a number of peace settlements to resolve the stalemate of violence in Natal and KwaZulu had been proposed. By 1987, the KwaZulu-Natal Indaba had been established with Buthelezi as a key player. However, it was rejected by both

³² SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

³³ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

³⁴ SAHA, AL 2421, Natal Indian Congress collection, section 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, letter from T. H. Gwala to The Chief Minister of KwaZulu and President of Inkatha, 20 December 1989.

³⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

³⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

the UDF and COSATU on the grounds that it was undemocratic because it ‘lodged itself on a regional solution based on similar principles as offered by the tricameral system.’³⁷ When it became apparent that the KwaZulu-Natal Indaba had no impact in curbing violence, the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce initiated the Peace Accord to mediate the conflict. This also failed and violence increased exponentially. By that time UDF and COSATU had collected witness statements and affidavits about perpetrators of violence, which implicated the Inkatha leadership. However, lack of prosecution by law enforcement agencies convinced the UDF and COSATU that the state agencies and Inkatha were colluding with one another.

Correspondence between Archie Gumede of the UDF and Buthelezi suggested that while both wanted to engage their organisations in peaceful negotiations, the atmosphere of violence, political intolerance and broad political differences prevented them from reaching consensus on key principles to underpin a peaceful settlement.³⁸ In a letter addressed to Buthelezi which was published in the media before Buthelezi received it, Gumede and UDF-affiliated organisations tabled a series of demands as a precondition for any peaceful negotiations.³⁹ The UDF’s demands were the establishment of a democratic framework, with a strong focus on freedom of association, expression, movement and organisation. Gumede argued that such a democratic framework should remove ‘restrictions on the UDF to meet, discuss and deliberate openly.’⁴⁰

Gumede was pessimistic about areas of convergence since Buthelezi insisted on ‘Black unity’ while the UDF called for a ‘non-racial unity.’⁴¹ Moreover, Gumede had demanded that the

³⁷ The tricameral Parliament (1984 to 1994) had separate chambers for whites, coloureds and Indians, but no representation for Africans. ‘Business and Trade Unions’, Document 96: speech by Jay Naidoo to the business conference, 27 November 1987, in Gerhart and Glaser, *From Protest to Challenge*, Vol. 6.

³⁸ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence between A. Gumede and M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987, 9 February 1988.

³⁹ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

⁴⁰ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

⁴¹ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

culture of forcing people to join Inkatha should be abolished. He emphasised that Buthelezi had made 'it clear that he was expecting civil servants of KwaZulu to identify with Inkatha' and UDF members were not welcomed in the state employ.⁴² In addition, Gumede alleged that 'Inkatha's intolerance of democratic organisations often becomes displayed as opposition to non-Zulus' and accused Buthelezi of rhetoric that perpetuated ethnic discrimination.⁴³

Cases involving violence in Pietermaritzburg occupied the courts to an unprecedented extent. Courts were finding it more and more difficult to preside over such matters due to their scale and, in most cases, the lack of crucial evidence. As a result, in a criminal case involving Phineas Zondo and others vs Inkatha and others, the court compelled the leadership of Inkatha and COSATU to enter into an agreement to find an alternative solution that would 'ameliorate the violence between resident of the townships in the greater Pietermaritzburg.'⁴⁴ This resulted in the adoption of a 'Joint Declaration' which condemned violence and 'recognised the right of every community resident to make a free and unfettered choice to join any political party.'⁴⁵ As part of the declaration, the organisations agreed to establish the 'Complaints Adjudication Board', which was to be chaired by an independent chairperson and assessors nominated by both organisations. The organisations also agreed that Justice N. R. Leon would be the convenor and appoint a chairperson.⁴⁶

In an environment that was characterised by high levels of impunity from punishment and police bias towards Inkatha, the 'Joint Declaration' was destined to fail. During the address at

⁴² SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

⁴³ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

⁴⁴ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, agreement of settlement in the matter of Phineas Zondo and others v Inkatha and others (case no. 372/88) and in other matters referred to in paragraph 5 hereof, 2 September 1988; SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, confidential memorandum from Cheadle Thompson and Haysom to COSATU, entitled re-evaluation of COSATU's position on the structure and function of the Complaints Adjudication Board, 9 December 1988.

⁴⁵ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, Joint Declaration adopted by Congress of South African Trade Unions and Inkatha, undated.

⁴⁶ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, the structure, function and operation of the Complaints Adjudication Board, undated.

the King Shaka Day commemoration at Taylor's Halt on 25 September 1988, Buthelezi indicated that he was pessimistic about the potential of the Joint Declaration to succeed as he announced that he was 'poised to drive towards unity...but there were factors that incite our people to more and more self-lacerating violence.'⁴⁷ In addition, lack of funding, the inability of the Board to have a dedicated coordinator, and displacement of witnesses were other factors that paralysed its functioning to such an extent that it collapsed.⁴⁸ By the time Gwala was released, Archbishop Denis Hurley and Jay Naidoo had approached Buthelezi in an attempt to calm Inkatha-UDF violence in the Pietermaritzburg region.⁴⁹

As all attempts to curb violence crumbled, various explanations were offered for the seemingly intractable conflict. The leadership of the UDF and COSATU attributed violence to the 'emergent trend of warlords in Pietermaritzburg and Natal' who wanted 'complete control and identified with violence in each area.'⁵⁰ A contrary view was offered by Gavin Woods, director of the Inkatha Institute, a think-tank that was established by Buthelezi with donor funding. He argued that violence was a product of frustrated youth in the townships because they felt 'alienated and anxious due to the absence of a future purpose.'⁵¹ Woods based his claim on the unfounded observation that 90% of all types of violence was perpetrated by youth aged between 15 and 24 years who were deeply frustrated about their lives and the poverty they lived in, which manifested as anger and aggression. In addition, Woods also claimed that 50% of violence was driven by gangsterism and criminal elements

⁴⁷ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, address by M. G. Buthelezi during the King Shaka Day commemoration, Taylor's Halt, 25 September 1988.

⁴⁸ SAHA, AL2421, Natal Indian Congress Collection, 01.5 to 01.10, box 7, file 2, letter from Alec Erwin to Jay Naidoo, Sydney Mafumadi, Max Xulu, John Copelyn, Professor Sineke, Elias Banda, Bheki Ngidi, Siphon Gcabashe, Michael Vilakazi, Thami Mohlomi, Samuel Mthethwa, Siphon Cele, and W. Mchunu, 3 February 1989. Alec Erwin had had a meeting on 2 February 1989 to discuss the functionality of the Board. The following individuals attended meeting: Fink Haysom, Mathew Dontzin, Martin Potgieter, John Jeffery, and John Wills.

⁴⁹ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence between M. G. Buthelezi, A. Gumede, J. Naidoo and Denis Hurley, 9 February 1989, 19 April 1989, 15 November 1989, 30 November 1989.

⁵⁰ SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, VIOLENCE IN PMB: A memorandum by COSATU and UDF, 4 November 1987.

⁵¹ G. Woods, 'A position paper on research findings into black township violence in Natal/KwaZulu', Inkatha Institute for South Africa, 1989.

that operated in the name of a political body.⁵² His theoretical interpretations ignored the role of political formations in violence such as Inkatha, UDF and COSATU.

William Beinart, Gerhard Mare' and John Wright offered interpretations that are very different to those offered by Woods.⁵³ They argued that the violence that unfolded in KwaZulu and Natal could be separated from the political developments of the regions, especially the rise of Inkatha, its vigilantism and the emergence of an insurrectionary 'comrades' movement in the 1980s.⁵⁴ Furthermore, their interpretations situated the upheavals in Natal, KwaZulu and other areas in South Africa within the context of long-established historical patterns of violence in the region. The problems of 'tribal' explanations were that they were based on assumptions that Zulus are predisposed to be warlike and that the crisis was generated from below.

Nkosinathi Gwala (as Blade Nzimande was known as) extended earlier arguments by Beinart, Mare' and Wright as he attributed violence to Inkatha's attempts to spread its 'hegemony to the rest of Natal and KwaZulu.'⁵⁵ In the case of Pietermaritzburg, especially Edendale, Nkosinathi Gwala argued that, since the banning of the ANC, no political party had had a strong hold in the area and neither Inkatha nor UDF could claim to be in the majority. He argued that the real spark which ignited conflict was Inkatha's forcible recruitment which terrorised Edendale and other townships in the Natal Midlands.⁵⁶

⁵² G. Woods, 'A position paper on research findings into black township violence in Natal/KwaZulu', Inkatha Institute for South Africa, 1989.

⁵³ W. Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence in Southern African Historiography', *Journal of Southern African Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1992; G. Mare, 'History and Dimension of the Violence in Natal: Inkatha's Role in Negotiating Political Peace', *Social Justice*, Vol.18, No. 1, 1991, 186-208; Mare' and Wright, 'Ethnicity, Society and Conflict'.

⁵⁴ Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence'.

⁵⁵ Nkosinathi Gwala, 'Political Violence and the Struggle for Control', 514.

⁵⁶ Nkosinathi Gwala, 'Political Violence and the Struggle for Control', 515.

Gwala's approach, which was supported by the broader leadership of the ANC and Communist Party, was that violence was unacceptable and that the UDF and COSATU supporters should not be involved in violent confrontation with Inkatha.⁵⁷ In addition, Gwala's militant approach of the 1960s had become more moderate and he was optimistic that a peaceful solution was possible.⁵⁸ He denounced Buthelezi's view of localising violence to Natal and its ethnic interpretation as simplistic and argued that it was orchestrated by the ruling apartheid elites to frustrate the liberation project. He emphasised that:

The ANC believed in peaceful solutions of problems. Now this violence, which is not only confined to Natal, is violence that is unfortunate. Because we do not want the people to fight among themselves and forget the primary objective, the real source of the problem.⁵⁹

Harry Gwala argued that political formations in Natal were different to that of other regions in South Africa. He emphasised that the situation was unique in Natal and KwaZulu since there was a single unified tribal group, the Zulu nation.⁶⁰ He posited that when the apartheid government developed the bantustans, there was a dividing line between the KwaZulu government, the Zulu royal family and Inkatha. When the violence started, Gwala argued that it assumed its own peculiarity that had an ethnic undertone, yet Inkatha represented ruling class interests.⁶¹ He disputed the analysis of the Inkatha Institute that located violence within the domain of criminality. Instead he argued that violence in Natal, and other areas in South Africa, was a political outcome that was perpetuated by the apartheid government. For him, there was no conflict between 'Inkatha and ANC, instead the conflict was between apartheid on one side, which did not want the people to advance, and the people on the other side, who were trying to liberate themselves.'⁶² Gwala maintained that an organisation like Inkatha was

⁵⁷ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁵⁸ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁵⁹ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁶⁰ RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

⁶¹ RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

⁶² Pdraig O'Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

being used as a ‘pawn by the ruling class in the country to uphold apartheid institutions’, and regarded Buthelezi as an ‘instrument of apartheid.’⁶³ Two days after his release, Gwala emphasised that the killings were an ‘ugly aspect of the revolution’ and that talks were vital.⁶⁴

Gwala’s stance on violence underwent a metamorphosis after his release from prison as he was exposed to material conditions of brutality that were orchestrated by Inkatha and police.⁶⁵ Cassius Lubisi believes that Gwala’s exposure to ‘sites of death where people had been hacked and mass burials’ had an impact on his understanding of the context of violence.⁶⁶ He felt that there was a need to protect the people against Inkatha’s brutal attacks. During the funerals and UDF rallies he began to adopt militant rhetoric which emphasised that people must defend themselves and retaliate against Inkatha attacks. By the end of December 1989, the relationship between Gwala and Buthelezi had become antagonistic as the two leaders began to criticise each other publicly during political rallies. While Gwala perceived Buthelezi and Inkatha to be ‘apartheid proxies’, Buthelezi claims he does not remember having a fall out with Gwala and he was surprised when he heard Gwala criticising him on public platforms.⁶⁷

Gwala described violence in Pietermaritzburg as a war. Unlike Buthelezi who characterised it as ‘black on black violence’, Gwala argued that it was ‘a war between apartheid and the people that was taking different forms.’⁶⁸ Furthermore, he rejected the argument that characterised violence as ‘black on black’ as ‘racist to the core.’⁶⁹ Lubisi argues that Gwala ‘did not subscribe to the notion of the third force.’⁷⁰ Instead, Gwala’s view was that there

⁶³ Pdraig O’Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993; J. Saul, ‘South Africa: Between “Barbarism” and “Structural Reform”’, *New Left Review*, Vol. 188, 1991, 3-44; Mxolisi Dlamuka, Interview with Dikobe Ben Martins.

⁶⁴ APC, PC 11/2/5/6/63, ‘Natal killings ugly aspect of revolution’, an opinion letter by Harry Gwala, 29 November 1988.

⁶⁵ APC, PC 186/9/1/1/, statement by Pierre Cronje, 26 March 1989.

⁶⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

⁶⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with M. G. Buthelezi.

⁶⁸ Pdraig O’Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993; Jeffery, ‘The Natal Story’, 225.

⁶⁹ Mzala, ‘The violence in Natal’, *The Natal Witness*, 3 May 1990, 10.

⁷⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

were two sides, the side of liberation fighters who sought to liberate South Africa, and the side of the enemy, the apartheid regime. According to Gwala, it was clear that Inkatha was on the side of apartheid. Gwala interpreted violence of the later 1980s and 1990s as a continuation of the violent nature of the state which manifested itself through forced removals, detention, imprisonment and torture, something he and other political leaders experienced from the 1960s. It was in that context that he believed that calling to people to defend themselves was in line with the declaration by the 1985 Kabwe ANC conference which persuaded South Africans to make the country ungovernable.⁷¹

Gwala formulated a new political epistemology and a framework of critiquing violence. For him, while violence was a tool of the ruling class, for it to be justified, it had to be driven by collective demands and should thus be a collective action.⁷² Mzala (as Jabulani Nxumalo was known) argued that Gwala ‘saw violence in Natal as an expression of the problems in South Africa.’⁷³ Gwala’s understanding of the role of violence in the process of the destruction of colonial order was different to that of Frantz Fanon. Unlike Fanon, Gwala did not believe that ‘decolonisation [should] always [be] a violent phenomenon.’⁷⁴ While Fanon believed that violence was a tool for building nationalism, Gwala despised its destructive nature, yet utilised it to protect his supporters against Inkatha’s aggression. Gwala’s theoretical interpretations of violence seems rather to have been similar to that of Amilcar Cabral, who never saw violence as an end in itself.⁷⁵ Gwala’s attitude towards violence should be understood within the context of self-defence and self-protection as Inkatha had resorted to aggression in order to prevent the UDF’s support base from growing. Like Cabral, Gwala’s

⁷¹ <http://www.anc.org.za/content/second-national-consultative-conference-report-main-decisions-and-recommendations>, accessed 13 August 2016.

⁷² Mxolisi Dlamuka Interview with Robert Haswell.

⁷³ Mzala, ‘The violence in Natal’, *The Natal Witness*, 3 May 1990, 10.

⁷⁴ F. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (translated by Constance Farrington) (London: Penguin, 1963), 25.

⁷⁵ A. Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979), xi.

method of retaliation, meeting violence with violence, was a necessary step for oppressed people seeking their self-determination and the destruction of the apartheid state. Lubisi argues that Gwala's notion of violence was influenced by the material conditions of what he had witnessed in Natal after his release from prison in November 1988.⁷⁶ Gwala's statement that 'we don't want war, we don't want death but war is imposed upon us' indicated the extent to which he saw violence as an inevitable part of ending apartheid with specific ways of responding to it being necessary.⁷⁷

Harry Gwala's views were that violence would not provide a solution. But he viewed it as a political struggle to identify and isolate his opponents, Inkatha and eventually the South African government. He often reminded his supporters that the ANC was a political organisation with the aim of liberating South Africa, not a military force. In addition, he emphasised that the ANC had to overthrow the National Party because 'it was responsible for stoking the violence as it supplied weapons and support to Inkatha when it was attacking ANC areas.'⁷⁸ Gwala believed that apartheid and capitalism were founded on the premise of a violence project that sought to pit the members of the working class against each other, thus perpetuating class disconnection.⁷⁹ Despite the escalating brutality, he believed that there was still a possibility to 'negotiate with Inkatha to end the violence, [as] it [would be] one of the good steps in the direction of eliminating apartheid.'⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

⁷⁷ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁷⁸ Padraig O'Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993; A. Truluck, *No Blood on Our Hands: Political Violence in the Natal Midlands 1987-mid 1992, and the Role of the State, 'White' Political Parties and Business* (Pietermaritzburg: Black Sash, 1992), 15.

⁷⁹ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

⁸⁰ Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

The revival of ANC branches and ambiguities of peace in Natal

After Gwala's release from prison, his home became a place of meeting for UDF/ COSATU-aligned supporters and victims of violence in Edendale. By January 1989, he was visiting areas in greater Pietermaritzburg and Natal that were affected by violence. As his influence grew in the Natal's politics, Gwala was invited by Nelson Mandela for a visit to Victor Verster Prison at his 'nearest possible convenience.'⁸¹ Gwala, accompanied by Linda Zama and Lulu, undertook the visit on 5 May 1989.⁸² During the meeting, which lasted for four hours, Mandela informed Gwala that he had been approached by members of the De Klerk cabinet to consider initiating negotiations.⁸³ Gwala claimed to have been 'disturbed by Mandela's approach' because he believed that his prison conditions would not enable him to engage in an unbiased manner.⁸⁴ Perhaps, the brutality of the state police and allegations that Inkatha had orchestrated the Trust Feed Massacre on 3 December 1988 had an impact on Gwala's perception that Mandela might not have the recent understanding of violence during negotiations.⁸⁵

There is no doubt that violence and the deteriorating situation in Natal was part of the discussion as Mandela's letter to Linda Zama, five days after the meeting, emphasised that 'our people, especially those in Natal, should seriously consider the question of security for Mphephethe [Gwala].'⁸⁶ The prospects of establishing a peace settlement and negotiations

⁸¹ RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 374, correspondence from Nelson Mandela to Harry Gwala, 18 April 1989.

⁸² Flight details suggested that Gwala flew with Lulu to Port Elizabeth on 4 May, and slept there. They then flew to Cape Town on the morning of 5 May to join Linda Zama, see RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 374, flights tickets of South African Airways.

⁸³ Fran Buntman Interview with Kobie Coetsee.

⁸⁴ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

⁸⁵ The Trust Feed Massacre on 3 December 1988 claimed the lives of 11 people. The youngest victim was a four-year-old boy and the oldest a 66-year-old woman (Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa, Vol. 3, 200-204; Report of the members of the Natal Church Leaders Delegation, 29 January 1990, the delegation consisted of Dr Khoza Mgojo, Dr Stanley Mogoba, Rev. Michael Nuttall, Rev. Frank Chikane, Rev. Ben Nsimbi, Rev. Lawrence Sibisi, Father Timothy Smith, Father Martin Moore-Corry, and Rev. John Aitchison, see APC, PC 186/1/1/1.

⁸⁶ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Baba [Nelson Mandela] to Linda Zama, 10 May 1989. Although the author of this letter is referred to as 'Baba' [father] it is in Nelson Mandela's handwriting.

with the apartheid state were discussed extensively during the visit.⁸⁷ While Gwala did not disagree with Mandela on the necessity of ending violence, it appeared that the volatile conditions in Pietermaritzburg coupled with Inkatha's aggression left Gwala in a state of ambiguity as the demands to 'defend' UDF and COSATU supporters grew rapidly.⁸⁸ As Bonnin has argued, the patterns of violence shifted as it became more deadly as the KZP, which overtly supported Inkatha, took over policing in townships.⁸⁹ Moreover, by mid-1989, it became apparent that the KZP was facilitating the licensing and provision of G5 machine guns for Inkatha supporters. Gwala's connection with the unfolding events in the greater Pietermaritzburg areas and elsewhere in Natal and Zululand made him to choose to 'protect' supporters of the UDF and COSATU while he was considering how Mandela's peace might take effect.⁹⁰

While Gwala was still caught in the dilemma of choosing whether to endorse peace or adopt a protective stance, he became a victim of police violence during the funeral of a trade unionist, Mrs Jabu Ndlovu, at Mountain Rise cemetery. Gwala was part of the crowd that was sjamboked by members of the South African Police which had imposed severe restrictions on supporters of the UDF and COSATU.⁹¹ Despite the SAP's denial, Dr Motala, a medical doctor and a leader of the NIC in Pietermaritzburg, examined Gwala and confirmed that 'he had sjambok wounds and [had been] severely beaten in his back and had an injury above the knee', possibly as a result of falling during the incident.⁹² In an attempt to vilify the state and to garner public sympathy, Gwala called a media meeting and explained how he had been

⁸⁷ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

⁸⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worship.

⁸⁹ D. R. Bonnin, 'Space, Place and Identity: Political Violence in Mpumalanga Township, KwaZulu-Natal, 1987-1993', PhD dissertation, University of Witwatersrand, 2007; G. R. 45, Commission of Inquiry Regarding the Prevention of Public Violence and Intimidation: Final report of the Goldstone Commission, 27 October 1994.

⁹⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with John Aitchison.

⁹¹ Witness reporter, 'Crowds of mourners whipped outside cemetery', *The Natal Witness*, 13 June 1989.

⁹² UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, medical report by Dr M. M. Motala, 13 June 1989.

sjamboked and showed 'his bruises' to the public.⁹³ Furthermore, he instructed Linda Zama to sue the SAP for damages and loss of dignity. It appeared that Linda Zama did lodge charges against the state on 4 October 1989.⁹⁴ By mid-1990 the matter was reported as 'not finalised' and there are no archival documents that indicate what the outcome of the case was.⁹⁵

The announcement by F. W. de Klerk on 2 February 1990 that government would unban the liberation movements and unconditionally release Nelson Mandela necessitated a shift in the ANC's approach as it now had to operate as a legal organisation inside South Africa with branches and organisational processes, something it last had during the late 1950s. The major challenge was to re-launch the organisation and make necessary preparations to negotiate a peaceful settlement and design a new political dispensation. Harry Gwala had already assumed leadership of UDF and COSATU affiliates in Pietermaritzburg, despite not being elected to any leadership position. Months before the unbanning, Gwala had initiated the process of preparing the ANC to operate as a legal organisation. Makhosi Khoza remembered that, at the end of 1989, Gwala persuaded her not to leave Pietermaritzburg so that she could assist in opening an ANC office, which was initially run from his house.⁹⁶ After the unbanning of the ANC, Gwala began to broaden his political approach as he occupied himself with mobilising grassroots support for the ANC in the greater Pietermaritzburg area and in Natal more broadly. It was through the ANC office that Gwala began a process of encouraging the youth to establish ANC and Communist Party branches throughout Natal and KwaZulu. ANC branches were launched in Dambuza, Machibisa, Ashdown, Imbali, Sobantu,

⁹³ Mercury reporter, 'Gwala is to take action after funeral', *Natal Mercury*, 14 June 1989.

⁹⁴ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Linda Zama to the Commissioner of Police, 4 October 1989.

⁹⁵ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Linda Zama to Mrs Birkbeck Montagu, 20 July 1990.

⁹⁶ Ruth Lundie interview with Makhosi Khoza.

Mpumalanga township, Wembezi, Swayimane, KwaXimba and many other areas soon after the unbanning of the ANC. Because violence continued unabated, Gwala had to provide 'protection' for the emerging ANC branches and its supporters.

The release of Nelson Mandela on 11 February 1990 marked a turning point in the politics of Natal and of South Africa. Mandela's choice to hold his first political rally at King's Park Stadium in Durban on 25 February was an indication of how important the leadership of the ANC considered Natal to be. At a packed stadium, Mandela's message to the supporters of the ANC was to 'take your guns, your knives, and your pangas, and throw them into the sea. Close down the factories of war, end the violence now.'⁹⁷ Gwala was present at the rally as part of the leadership of the ANC in Natal. While he supported the idea of a peaceful settlement to end violence, he did not approve of Mandela's call to throw weapons into the sea.⁹⁸ Gwala emphasised that the ANC supporters had no weapons; instead it was Inkatha that had distributed weapons to its supporters, and it had the backing of the KZP.⁹⁹ Perhaps, as Lubisi contends, Mandela's decision to call for peace was because 'the ANC leadership on Robben Island had misunderstood what was happening in Natal and had a relatively positive disposition towards Buthelezi.'¹⁰⁰

The attention that the ANC leadership gave Natal seemed to suggest that ending the violence was one of its top priorities. By the end of February 1990 there was speculation in the media about a possible meeting between Buthelezi and Mandela. Buthelezi emphasised that such a meeting would not be an unusual phenomenon since 'Mandela and I were old family friends

⁹⁷ Nelson Mandela, speech delivered at King's Park stadium, 25 February 1990.

⁹⁸ Strini Moodley, 'Throw away your weapons - Mandela', *The Natal Witness*, 26 February 1990, 1.

⁹⁹ Padraig O'Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 10 November 1993.

¹⁰⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

and his visit would be natural expression of that friendship.’¹⁰¹ When the leadership of the UDF and COSATU in Natal questioned Mandela about this, he argued that it was important to talk to Buthelezi so that he could not be used by the apartheid state against the ANC. In addition, Mandela mentioned Buthelezi’s history with the ANC Youth League, and he emphasised his belief that the ANC and Buthelezi should work together.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Mandela’s visit to KwaPhindangene, Buthelezi’s royal homestead, did not materialise. Even though the meeting did not ‘go ahead as planned’, talks of reconciliation between Buthelezi and Mandela continued. Gwala claimed that these talks were facilitated by the national leadership of the ANC in Shell House (the national ANC headquarters) without consulting with the regional leadership of Natal and Zululand.¹⁰³

As arrangements for a possible peace initiative between Buthelezi and Mandela were being made, the Edendale and Vulindlela areas reverberated with gunfire on 25 March 1990. Inkatha supporters returning from a political rally at King’s Park in Durban began to attack ANC supporters. This marked the beginning of the ‘Seven Days War’ which only ended on 31 March.¹⁰⁴ As the war was raging, Gwala insisted on witnessing the war for himself rather than to be informed by the accounts of others. Lubisi remembers that in Ashdown, Gwala was nearly killed by heavily-armed Inkatha vigilantes shooting and moving in his direction.¹⁰⁵ As bullets flew past him, Gwala had to be physically taken away from the battlefield as he insisted that ‘let’s not go, if we die let’s all die here.’¹⁰⁶ By the seventh day, 31 March, about 100 people had been killed and over 20 000 people were seeking refuge in

¹⁰¹ APC, PC129/1/6/278, Statement to the Second Session of the Sixth KwaZulu Legislative Assembly by the Chief Minister [Buthelezi], 28 March 1990. The correspondence during the 1980s between Mandela and Buthelezi suggested a relationship of collegiality, see APC, PC129/1/1/26, correspondence from M. G. Buthelezi to Nelson Mandela, 2 June 1986.

¹⁰² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹⁰³ Pdraig O’Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

¹⁰⁴ John Aitchison took detailed affidavits from victims of the war, see J. Aitchison (ed.), *The Seven Days’ War: 25-31 March 1990: Victims’ Narrative* (Pietermaritzburg: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1991).

¹⁰⁵ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹⁰⁶ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

churches, church halls and schools in the Edendale area and in refugee camps that had been set up by the newly established Midlands Crisis Relief Committee. The Seven Days War had a significant impact on Gwala and he adopted 'a much harder line in regard to Inkatha.'¹⁰⁷

The war also reinforced Gwala's perception that violence was due to Inkatha aggression. He argued that the 'people of Edendale valley have never gone out of their boundaries to attack Inkatha, they have always defended themselves and as I said we shall defend ourselves successfully, we will give them a hot reception.'¹⁰⁸

By mid-1990, relations between Gwala and Buthelezi had deteriorated to such an extent that Gwala claimed to have received information from ANC intelligence that a hit squad from Ulundi had been dispatched to assassinate him and Patrick 'Terror' Lekota, who was a convener of the Southern Natal ANC. Buthelezi described these allegations as 'ludicrous in the extreme, devoid of truth and can only cause more violence in an already overheated situation.'¹⁰⁹ Gwala's lawyers, possibly Linda Zama, indicated that Gwala's life was under threat after family members claimed to have seen a red car with four occupants, two of them white, apparently keeping Gwala's Dambuza house under 'surveillance.'¹¹⁰ However, during the interview I had with Buthelezi he claimed that he did not know what had caused such poor relations between him and Gwala. Buthelezi emphasised that he had been friends with Gwala for a long time and denied having ever been involved in an attempt to kill Gwala or even to have felt any hatred towards him.¹¹¹

Towards the end of June 1990, the ANC claimed that, despite attempts to initiate a peaceful settlement in Natal, these had been 'repeatedly scuttled by the leadership of Inkatha and the

¹⁰⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

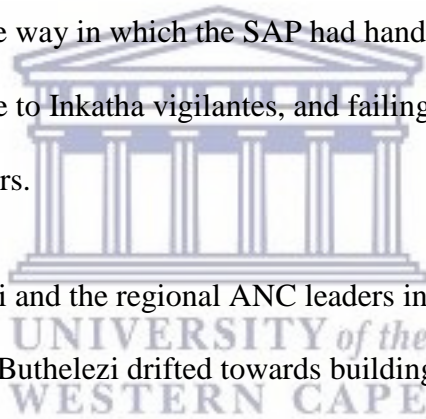
¹⁰⁸ Stephen Coan interview with Harry Gwala published as 'A veteran of Natal politics' *The Natal Witness*, 5 May 1990.

¹⁰⁹ Echo reporter, 'Gwala says hit squad is after him', *The Natal Witness*, 15 July 1990.

¹¹⁰ Echo reporter, 'Gwala says hit squad is after him', *The Natal Witness*, 15 July 1990.

¹¹¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

apartheid regime.’¹¹² Gwala convinced the ANC national leadership that the war in Natal was a national political issue which could only be resolved by putting pressure on the national government to end it, since regional attempts had failed. It was against this background that a week of a national mass action was planned from 2 to 6 July 1990, which culminated in a national rally in Pietermaritzburg on Saturday, 7 July. The national mass action drew major crowds in Durban and Johannesburg, but the rally in Pietermaritzburg became the epicentre of events on the day as Gwala and Anton ‘Mfenendala’ Xaba led about 10 000 demonstrators in a march for peace. The march started at Market Square (now called Freedom Square) and proceeded to the Loop Street police station where a memorandum was handed over to Captain Stef Steyn who represented the district commissioner.¹¹³ The memorandum contained complaints about the way in which the SAP had handled violence. It accused the SAP of giving direct assistance to Inkatha vigilantes, and failing to investigate crimes and assaults against ANC supporters.



As relations between Buthelezi and the regional ANC leaders in Natal, mainly Gwala and Archie Gumede, deteriorated, Buthelezi drifted towards building good relations with Mandela and the national leadership of the ANC. The ANC national executive committee had already established a sub-committee on Natal in July 1990, chaired by John Nkademeng, whose task was to ‘work towards finding a solution to the violence in Natal.’¹¹⁴ Nkademeng’s sub-committee and a delegation of Inkatha, led by Dr Frank Mdlalose, established the Joint Working Committee whose role was to prepare for a joint summit to be held in January 1991

¹¹² ‘Statement on week of national mass action against violence in Natal’, issued by COSATU, UDF and SAYCO [South African Youth Congress], 28 June 1990, www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/dc/sta19900628.043.027/pdf, accessed 27 August 2016.

¹¹³ Witness reporter, ‘Thousands join in marches for peace in Natal’, *The Natal Witness*, 9 July 1990, 1.

¹¹⁴ APC, PC 129/1/7332, opening speech by Nelson Mandela at the ANC/IFP summit, 29 January 1991; M. Mbona, ‘The Church as a Peace Broker: The Case of the Natal Church Leaders’ Group and Political Violence in KwaZulu-Natal (1990-1994)’, *Studia Historiae Ecclesiasticae*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2011, 249-269.

between the ANC and Inkatha, which had re-established itself in July 1990 as the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP).¹¹⁵

The joint summit took place on 29 January 1991 in Durban and was attended by Central Committee members of the IFP and the National Executive Committee of the ANC, led by Buthelezi and Mandela respectively.¹¹⁶ At the end, a joint statement emphasised that ‘the primary purpose was to explore ways and means to bring about the final cessation of the violence which had already cost more than eight thousand lives.’¹¹⁷ In addition, the parties committed themselves to a joint declaration that emphasised the principles of promoting political tolerance, desisting from vilification and freedom of political activity, as well as the establishment of joint mechanisms to promote peace and stability through organising joint tours to affected areas.¹¹⁸ Gwala did not attend the summit for reasons which are not clear.

The signing of the ANC-IFP joint declaration did not curtail the escalation of violence in the greater Pietermaritzburg areas as Inkatha, supported by both KZP and SAP, continued to attack ANC supporters who retaliated with violence.¹¹⁹ It was the brutal assassination of Chief Mhlabanzima Maphumulo on 25 February 1991, less than a month after the signing of a Peace Accord, that fuelled Gwala’s militancy. Maphumulo had been president of the Congress of Traditional Leaders of South Africa (CONTRALESA) and a local chief in Mkhambathini area. A subsequent affidavit by Siphso Madlala, an intelligence agent who claimed to have participated in the orchestrated assassination of Chief Maphumulo, was an indication of the extent of the state’s involvement in violence in Pietermaritzburg.¹²⁰

¹¹⁵ See Christina Scott, ‘Ivulwe ngesasasa Inkatha Entsha’, *UmAfrika*, 21 July 1990, 3.

¹¹⁶ Staff reporter, ‘ANC to meet king for peace’, *New Nation*, 1 February 1991, 1; staff reporter, ‘Emuva kwezimpophoma zegazi eNatal seluze lwafika usuke baze bahlangana abaholi’, *UmAfrika*, 2 February 1991, 1.

¹¹⁷ APC, PC 129/1/7/332, joint statement of the IFP/ANC meeting held at the Royal Hotel, Durban, 29 January 1991.

¹¹⁸ APC, PC 129/1/7/332, joint declaration of the ANC and IFP, 29 January 1991.

¹¹⁹ T. H. Gwala papers, affidavits of Wilford Mncwabe, Gugu Ndlovu, Mlindeli Zondi, William Nguni, Donatus Nyide, Nhlalayenza Khowane, 21 November 1992.

¹²⁰ Affidavit of Siphso Alfred Madlala, published in *UmAfrika*, 4 May 1991, 2.

Maphumulo had been a close friend of Harry Gwala and together they were working towards the establishment of an ANC branch in Maqongqo. Jill Kelly argues that, before his assassination, Chief Maphumulo had already turned from an attitude of peace to one of arms and self-defence.¹²¹ Kelly attributed this to Gwala's influence and his first-hand experience of the government's inability or unwillingness to enforce law and order, and the police *kitskonstabel*¹²² attacks on his homestead.¹²³

Throughout 1991 there was evidence that the IFP was still collaborating with the SAP to attack ANC supporters. The affidavit of Wilford Mncwabe revealed the details of Inkatha attacks on ANC supporters in areas around Bulwer. When Mncwabe attempted to report an attack on his house and its burning, Sergeant Dickson of the Bulwer police station asked him which political party he belonged to. When Mncwabe informed him that he was a member of the ANC, Dickson's reaction revealed an attitude against the ANC and that the SAP was complicit in fuelling violence in Natal. In his affidavit, Mncwabe said:

He [Dickson] said to me that my house was burnt because I was a member of the ANC and he refused to take a statement from me. He went on to say that he was glad that my house was burnt. He said that he did not want to see me in Bulwer again, he said that as all my property was burnt I had no reason to be in Bulwer.¹²⁴

Perhaps reports of the escalating violence and police bias against ANC supporters exasperated Gwala and made him pessimistic about the prospect of the joint declaration succeeding.¹²⁵

¹²¹ J. E. Kelly, "Only the Fourth chief": Conflict, Land, and Chiefly Authority in 20th Century KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 2012, 310.

¹²² *Kitskonstabel* is an Afrikaans expression which means 'instant constable'. The *kitskonstabels* were poorly trained and rapidly integrated into state police forces.

¹²³ Kelly, 'Only the Fourth Chief', 310.

¹²⁴ T. H. Gwala papers, affidavit of Wilford Mncwabe, 21 November 1992.

¹²⁵ T. H. Gwala papers, memorandum from J. Wills of Cheadle, Thompson and Haysom to T. H. Gwala, 23 September 1992.

By mid-1991, in keeping with the agreed resolution, Buthelezi invited Mandela to address an IFP political rally in Taylor's Halt in Vulindlela where attacks by IFP supporters on the ANC, driven largely by David Ntombela, had continued. Lubisi remembers that after it had become known that Mandela and the national ANC leadership had accepted Buthelezi's invitation, Gwala organised taxi loads of his supporters, mainly the youth, to Shell House to oppose such a joint address as violence continued unabated.¹²⁶ Gwala's concern was that such a joint address had the potential to strengthen the IFP's legitimacy by bestowing equal status on the IFP and the ANC. Mandela agreed to rebuff Buthelezi's invitation. He insisted that he and a delegation of senior members of the ANC would visit Pietermaritzburg in order to observe first-hand the conditions that Gwala described.¹²⁷ Buthelezi claims to have been disappointed when he received a message that Mandela would not be attending the joint rally after having been 'almost manhandled by Gwala at Shell House.'¹²⁸

The paradox of increasing violence while peace negotiations were taking place demonstrated 'elite coalescence' of the peace processes.¹²⁹ While Mandela and Buthelezi were engaging in talks about signing a peace accord at joint rallies, Gwala's reservations about these initiatives were being ignored, which was an attempt to isolate him. Perhaps, Mandela underestimated Gwala's influence in the political landscape of Natal.

Militancy, warlordism and Gwala's political discomfort

In April 1990, the ANC national leadership announced the appointment of convenors to head its regional offices in each of the organisation's major districts. Gwala was appointed

¹²⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹²⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹²⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

¹²⁹ T. D. Sisk, *Democratisation in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 29.

convenor for the Natal Midlands.¹³⁰ It was through Gwala's leadership that the ANC in Pietermaritzburg established an interim committee and opened offices in May 1990 in Church Street in the centre of Pietermaritzburg.¹³¹ The committee had to deal with specific issues such as political education, finance and recruitment of new members to the ANC.¹³² The interim committee's major tasks were to build the membership of the ANC in the Natal Midlands and to facilitate the establishment of ANC branches which would lead to a regional elective conference later in the year. The elective conference was held in Cedara on 2 December 1990. Gwala received an overwhelming majority of votes and became the first chairperson of the regional executive.¹³³ His election meant that grassroots political structures of the ANC and Communist Party in the Natal Midlands, Zululand and greater Natal were represented in the official regional ANC structure.

The election of Gwala as chairperson of the ANC's Midlands region coincided with increasing attacks by Inkatha on the ANC's support base and, Gwala had to find ways to 'defend' ANC supporters. Michael Worsnip, then lecturer at the Federal Theological Seminar of Southern Africa (FEDSEM), was working as an underground operative to mobilise the churches and be a conduit for funding of ANC-related activities in Natal.¹³⁴ Worsnip remembers establishing contact with Gwala as soon as he was released and was inspired by his commitment to non-racialism. Worsnip travelled between the Pietermaritzburg and Johannesburg offices of the SACC to collect money from Beyers Naude.¹³⁵ The money was

¹³⁰ Others appointed were: Kgalema Motlanthe (PWV [Pretoria-Witwatersrand-Vereeniging]), Thoba Makunyane (Northern Transvaal), Terror Lekota (Southern Natal), Trevor Manuel (Western Cape), Benson Fihla (Eastern Cape), Arnold Stofile (Border), A Xobololo (Transkei) and Jomo Khasu (Northern Cape) see Sapa, 'Harry Gwala to head ANC Natal Midlands office', *The Natal Witness*, 3 April 1990, 2.

¹³¹ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹³² Members of the committee were Siphon Gcabashe, Makhosi Khoza, Happy Blose, Moses Cele, Reggie Hadebe, Skumbuzo Ngwenya, Reverend Ben Nsimbe, Yunus Carrim, Mthunzi Makhathini and John Jeffrey, see Witness reporter, 'ANC form city interim committee', *The Natal Witness*, 8 May 1990, 4.

¹³³ Executive committee members were: Anthony Xaba (vice chairman), Shakes Cele (regional secretary) and Jethro Ndlovu (treasurer), see Siza Ntshakala, 'Gwala voted midlands leader', *The Natal Witness*, 3 December 1990, 1.

¹³⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

¹³⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

used by Gwala to buy weapons from Mozambique and sometimes Swaziland.¹³⁶ Once Gwala had been elected as a leader of the Natal Midlands ANC, a highly influential political position in Natal, the responsibility to protect ANC supporters fell on him. Worsnip asserts that he had witnessed SAP and KZP distributing weapons to IFP supporters. Worsnip elaborates:

What Gwala was doing and there is no doubt in my mind that he was defending us. He was defending people who were not Inkatha. I think that must never be forgotten. Because if it was not for Gwala, we would have been finished. We were living in dangerous times and had it not been the ANC, an armed ANC fighting for us we would all have been dead.¹³⁷

The role of the ANC in the violence that was unfolding in Natal and elsewhere in the country was an axis of incongruous relations between Gwala and Mandela. Gwala's stance on violence in Natal put him at loggerheads with Mandela, who had been elected as Deputy President of the ANC on 2 April 1990. As discussed earlier, Gwala and Mandela respectively represented opposing socialist and nationalist political views in the ANC.¹³⁸ These divergent political views had resulted in endless robust debates within the ANC on Robben Island during the late 1970s. The nature and the extent of political differences between Gwala and Mandela were highlighted in the South African media and in state intelligence agent reports as it 'was in their interests to articulate differences within the ANC.'¹³⁹ Ben Martins is emphatic that even though the relationship between Gwala and Mandela appeared to have been extremely polarised, this disagreement was at a theoretical and political level and did not degenerate into the personal animosity that was reported by the media.¹⁴⁰ For Martins, the reportage about the deteriorating relations between Gwala and Mandela was intended to divide the ANC and misdirect the liberation struggle.

¹³⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

¹³⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

¹³⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹³⁹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹⁴⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

As Worsnip has argued, the on-going political violence required Gwala to respond by taking steps to defend ANC supporters. During the Workers' Day rally on 1 May 1990, Gwala warned the government that the armed struggle would continue, but did not discount the possibility of a peaceful settlement.¹⁴¹ It was in this context that he established links with networks in Mozambique to purchase weapons to be utilised by ANC members to defend themselves against IFP attacks.¹⁴² Gwala had anticipated that once the ANC was unbanned, members of MK would come to defend ANC supporters in violent parts of Natal. To this end, he facilitated the deployment of a large number of MK operatives in Natal and Zululand to assist ANC supporters to defend themselves against the IFP. The IFP was sponsored by state forces including operatives trained in Caprivi.¹⁴³ Gwala was, however, 'taken back by the ANC's decision to suspend the armed struggle.'¹⁴⁴ For Gwala, at that stage, arms were necessary for self-defence, and to maintain the ANC's connectedness with the people.

Ben Martins remembers that Gwala was very critical of the process that had been followed by the national leadership's decision to suspend the armed struggle. Gwala would have preferred for such a decision to be taken after consultation with ANC branches and with a final decision taken by delegates at an ANC consultative conference. It was against this background that the national leadership dispatched Chris Hani, commander in chief of MK, to visit Gwala to explain to him the context of the decision.¹⁴⁵ Gwala strongly believed that Mandela, including the national leadership, did not understand the objective conditions on the

¹⁴¹ S. Weinberg, 'Gwala takes a hard line on arms struggle', *The Natal Witness*, 2 May 1990, 1; Heidi Gibson, 'Troops out, struggle in, urges Gwala', *Witness Echo*, 3 May 1990, 3.

¹⁴² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

¹⁴³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

¹⁴⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹⁴⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

ground in Natal, which led them to a different understanding of how to deal with Buthelezi and the IFP.¹⁴⁶

Ben Martins has argued that Gwala understood that MK was merely an extension of a political struggle and took its direction from the ANC, so such a decision could not be questioned.¹⁴⁷ However, he suggests further, that although the ANC leadership had taken a decision to cease armed operations against the apartheid government, particularities of Pietermaritzburg necessitated a different approach. Gwala and the local leadership of the ANC in Pietermaritzburg agreed that the suspension of the armed struggle did not mean the ‘suspension of their right to self-defence.’¹⁴⁸

In March 1991, Gwala was reported to have survived two assassination attempts. The first attempt took place in Richmond where he was addressing a rally and the second attempt took place in Pietermaritzburg.¹⁴⁹ It was within this context that in May 1992, despite the decision of the national leadership of the ANC to suspend the armed struggle and pursue peace, Gwala and Lekota authorised the establishment of self-defence units (SDUs).¹⁵⁰ The state intelligence interpreted the establishment of the SDUs as Gwala’s plan to ‘destabilise KwaZulu and the Inkatha Freedom Party, as well as the safety of Buthelezi.’¹⁵¹

State intelligence agents reported that Gwala and Lekota were the two key personalities involved in the training of SDUs in the Natal Midlands and Durban regions.¹⁵² Perhaps

¹⁴⁶ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹⁴⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹⁴⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹⁴⁹ Staff reporter, ‘assassins miss Gwala-twice’, *New Nation*, 8 March 1991, 3; Bongani Shoba, ‘Usinde enhlamvini uGwala we ANC’, *UmAfrika*, 9 March 1991.

¹⁵⁰ SASSA [South African State Security Archives], declassified secret report: Harry Gwala en Terror Lekota: Moontlike betrokkenheid by vestiging van selfverdedigingseenhede (SVE) in die Natal-Middellande, 1993.

¹⁵¹ SASSA, declassified report: African National Congress: Destabilisasie van KwaZulu en die Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), February 1993.

¹⁵² SASSA, declassified secret report - Harry Gwala en Terror Lekota: Moontlike betrokkenheid by vestiging van selfverdedigingseenhede (SVE) in die Natal-Middellande, 1993.

Gwala's level of involvement was at the point of instructing that they be established rather than being 'involved' in training. Training was undertaken by trained MK cadres who were under Gwala's leadership. There was no doubt that state intelligence intended to implicate Gwala in violence in order to discredit him and vilify the ANC in front of a growing number of supporters in Natal.¹⁵³ Gwala and Lekota mainly recruited youth for SDU training by an experienced MK cadre to provide protection to ANC supporters when they were attacked by IFP militias. In addition, SDUs were established to provide extra protection after the 1994 general elections as an increased violence was expected.¹⁵⁴ As Mamdani has pointed out, militias of this kind lack military discipline and are motivated by revenge.¹⁵⁵

State intelligence agents were aware that the decision to establish SDUs was never approved by the ANC's National Executive Committee (NEC). Based on this observation, they claimed that Gwala was 'operating independently in Natal and had established his private army.'¹⁵⁶ This claim was based on an illusion of homogeneity in the ANC. Ben Martins has argued that certain individuals within the national executive committee had supported the establishment of SDUs.¹⁵⁷ It was possible that Gwala leveraged his election to the NEC in July 1991 to lobby certain members to support the SDU project.

Prior to mid-1992, violence monitors and media commentators had consistently attributed violence to the IFP and its warlords such as David Ntombela, Mandla Shabalala, Psychology Ndlovu, Calalakubo Khawula, Wiseman Nkehli, and many others, and ANC supporters and its leaders were perceived to be victims of Inkatha's aggression. However, as Gwala's

¹⁵³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹⁵⁴ SASSA, declassified secret report - Harry Gwala en Terror Lekota: Moontlike betrokkenheid by vestiging van selfverdedigingseenhede (SVE) in die Natal-Middellande, 1993.

¹⁵⁵ M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996).

¹⁵⁶ SASSA, declassified confidential report, Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK): Harry Gwala: Moontlike skepping van 'n private leer, undated.

¹⁵⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

speeches became more ‘inflammatory’ and he consistently called on ANC supporters to retaliate, he was increasingly viewed as someone who was ‘fuelling the conflict and thwarting the peace initiative.’¹⁵⁸ By mid-1992 Gwala’s name was intrinsically associated with SDUs and violent activities that were taking place in Pietermaritzburg. As the violence intensified, Gwala became more militant. Oral interviews suggest that Gwala was responsible for facilitating the movement of large caches of arms from the Swaziland border into Natal.¹⁵⁹ Due to his militant rhetoric as well as his involvement in defending ANC supporters, the media began to label him as a warlord, with the London’s *Daily Telegraph* listing him as one of the world’s top 30 warlords.¹⁶⁰

There was no doubt that Gwala’s use of the phrase ‘*kuzokhala isigwagwa*’, his militant political stance in favour of violence, and his involvement in the shipment of caches of arms into Natal and their distribution to SDUs were the main reasons why he was labelled a warlord. However, as Haswell argues, Gwala was protecting ANC supporters and he did what any other leader in his position would have done in the context of the material conditions in Natal.¹⁶¹ It is not accurate to describe Gwala as a warlord. While his conduct was militant, it was a proportionate response to the attacks on ANC supporters by Inkatha. Intelligence reports that Gwala had, with support from Blade Nzimande, established a private military force in the Natal Midlands, which was not subject to the control of the ANC national leadership, were unfounded. Control over the SDUs was exerted by the collective leadership of the ANC region and branches.¹⁶² Andrew Ragavaloo, an ANC activist and a former mayor of Richmond, has argued that Sifiso Nkabinde, once Gwala’s trusted political friend and an

¹⁵⁸ SASSA, declassified secret report on Harry Gwala, 10 June 1992.

¹⁵⁹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous; SASSA, declassified confidential report, undated; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

¹⁶⁰ Political correspondent, ‘World’s Top 30 Warlords’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1991.

¹⁶¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

¹⁶² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

ANC leader in Richmond, took advantage of the SDU and ‘used these trained youths for his own nefarious activities.’¹⁶³

During the early 1990s Gwala’s politics were characterised by political ambiguity and he often disagreed with the conventional views of the leadership of the ANC, COSATU and Communist Party. One such ambiguity was displayed during the 48th conference of the ANC at the University of Durban-Westville from 4-7 July 1991. During the conference, Mandela was announced as the unopposed candidate for election as president of the ANC.¹⁶⁴ However, the position of deputy president was highly contested. Chris Hani and Thabo Mbeki were nominated, and both had similarly levels of delegate support. Because the Hani/Mbeki contest had the potential to split the ANC, the elders, including Gwala, requested the conference to adjourn. Walter Sisulu, who had already indicated that he wanted to spend his political time in his region, was persuaded to make himself available as a compromise candidate for the deputy presidency. Kgalema Motlanthe remembers that, even though Gwala had assisted in crafting the agreement to put Sisulu forward as the sole candidate for deputy president, Gwala decided to make himself available as a candidate for the post.¹⁶⁵ Motlanthe confronted Gwala about this as they walked to the conference venue. Gwala emphatically stated:

you know, 80% of the delegates to this conference have never attended an ANC conference. This is their very first conference of the ANC. And so, if we don't teach them by example that the constitution of the ANC, which says, every member has a right to nominate whomsoever and be nominated in any position...because if we don't teach them by example now, by the time we get to fourth, fifth congress after this one, leadership of the ANC would not be elected but arranged. That is what he said. So, he then crowned it all by saying, “in fact, I am going to vote for Walter Sisulu myself.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ A. Ragavaloo, *Richmond: Living in the Shadow of Death* (Johannesburg: STE publishers, 2008), 15.

¹⁶⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

¹⁶⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

¹⁶⁶ Kgalema Motlanthe, address at the inaugural Harry Gwala Memorial Lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013.

However, the media and certain leaders within the ANC misunderstood Gwala's political stance on this matter and created an impression that, by making himself available as a candidate, his intention was to refuse to defer to the decisions of the national leadership of the ANC.

Gwala's robust theoretical and intellectual debates became another source of contentious relations with the leadership of the ANC, especially Mandela. The media and state intelligence deliberately created false impressions that political differences had degenerated into personal hatred between Gwala and Mandela. While it was not unusual that the two leaders held divergent political views and disagreed with each other publicly, this did not necessarily manifest as personal animosity or divisive factionalism.¹⁶⁷ Intelligence agents reported that Mandela had requested Gwala to stand down as a regional leader of the ANC in the Natal Midlands since he had been elected to the NEC of the ANC in 1991. This was not necessarily a result of what was described as their reported 'frosty' relationship. It was based on the constitution of the ANC which required that members who had been elected to the NEC resign from other junior positions within the organisation.¹⁶⁸

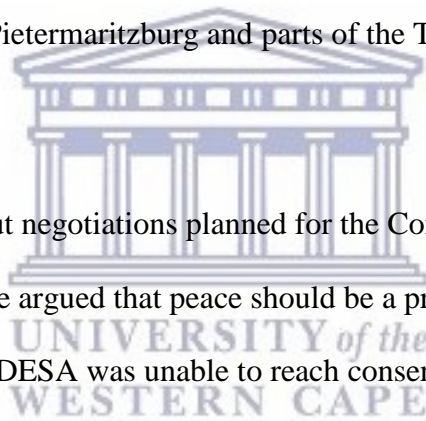
The modalities of political transition and negotiated settlement became another strongly contested matter within the ANC and Communist Party. Gwala claimed to have heard about the negotiations for the first time when he visited Mandela in prison on 5 May 1989.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, when he went to London to undergo a medical procedure, O. R. Tambo approached him to discuss the prospect of negotiations and Tambo asked him to comment on

¹⁶⁷ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

¹⁶⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

¹⁶⁹ UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5; staff reporter, 'Harry Gwala visit jailed Mandela', *City Press*, 7 May 1989; UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Baba [Nelson Mandela] to Linda Gwala, 10 May 1989. Although the author of this letter is referred to as 'Baba' it is in Nelson Mandela's handwriting.

the draft Harare Declaration before it was sent out for comment from a wider group.¹⁷⁰ After it had been considered by the ANC's National Working Committee (NWC), the Harare Declaration was adopted by the Organisation of African Unity's Ad Hoc Committee on Southern Africa on 21 August 1989. A revised version was later approved by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1989.¹⁷¹ Gwala said he was approached later in London by Thabo Mbeki who spoke of the approach to the ANC by the South African government and the pressure to produce a roadmap for negotiations. On his way back to South Africa he had been invited by the Zambian President and the ANC's National Executive Committee that was meeting in Lusaka to provide an overview of conditions in South Africa. Gwala used the platform to speak about the high levels of state-sponsored violence he had witnessed in Pietermaritzburg and parts of the Transvaal and the Western Cape.



Gwala had been sceptical about negotiations planned for the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA), as he argued that peace should be a prerequisite for any negotiations to take place. CODESA was unable to reach consensus by May 1992, despite having established working groups that met regularly. The escalating political tensions resulted in the Boipatong massacre on 17 June 1992 which claimed the lives of 45 people. This resulted in the formal suspension of talks. Gwala was present at the Bisho massacre in which 28 ANC members were shot dead on 7 September 1992. Perhaps his direct experience of the Bisho massacre made Gwala conclude that 'nothing good would come out of negotiations and they needed to use action not words to gain power that they rightly

¹⁷⁰ The Harare Declaration articulated proposals for a political settlement and for negotiation aimed at resolving the intractable conflict in South Africa, see H. Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years: The ANC in Exile in Zambia, 1963 to 1994*, (Johannesburg: Jacana2013), 221-231; UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

¹⁷¹ Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years*, 223.

deserve.¹⁷² After the CODESA negotiations had collapsed, the ANC NWC decided to establish a new mechanism for communicating with the government which was led by Cyril Ramaphosa and Roelf Meyer, representing the ANC and the National Party government respectively.¹⁷³ This resulted in the establishment of multiparty negotiations which eventually paved the way for a negotiated settlement. By this time, Gwala's politics seem to have undergone a metamorphosis as he began to agitate for peace while engaged in robust theoretical debates with the national leadership of the ANC, especially Mandela, and the Communist Party.

One such robust debate was his response to Joe Slovo's proposed 'sunset clauses' and the 'strategic perspective' document which was discussed in the September 1992 NWC meeting of the ANC. This also appeared in the *African Communist*, the Communist Party journal, at the end of September. Slovo argued that negotiations were imperative as neither the apartheid state nor the liberation movement could win on the battlefield. The two parties should find each other in order to build a new South Africa.¹⁷⁴ Gwala was critical of Slovo's sunset clauses. He emphasised that, instead of rushing to settle a constitutional framework, the immediate need was to address the question of economic redistribution.¹⁷⁵ Gwala's criticism of the debate initiated by Slovo was that these proposals were a 'top down approach' with no mandate since they had not been discussed in ANC branches.¹⁷⁶ Gwala was concerned that Slovo's proposals for power-sharing represented a shift in the philosophical and political values of the struggle for the liberation in South Africa.

¹⁷² SASSA, declassified Gwala's address during the memorial service for the Bisho massacre, held at the University of Natal, Pietermaritzburg campus, 9 September 1992; SACP Central Committee Statement on the Bisho massacre and the anti-Communist campaign, 13 September 1992; Gwala family papers.

¹⁷³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

¹⁷⁴ J. Slovo, 'Negotiations: What Room for Compromise?', *African Communist*, 3rd quarter, 1992, 37.

¹⁷⁵ Pdraig O'Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

¹⁷⁶ H. Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo: A Response', *African Communist*, 4th quarter, 1992, 26.

Gwala's response, rooted in the historical analysis of the ANC's liberation struggle since 1912, emphasised that, even though the peculiarities of South African colonialism had been taken into consideration, there was a need to spell out the meaning of power-sharing and how it would impact on economic and land redistribution. For Gwala, Slovo appeared to have abdicated his class interests and opted to 'trust the enemy', referring to the South African government.¹⁷⁷ Gwala warned Slovo, Mandela and the negotiating team of the ANC that 'they should not reconcile the oppressed to neo-apartheid dressed in the robes of a new constitution.'¹⁷⁸

Gwala stressed that the strength and the ability of the negotiators would determine the fate of South Africa. He warned against political expediency which, he said, would lead to disaster. He pleaded with the negotiators and Mandela not to lose sight of the importance of land redistribution as he emphatically stressed that unless the land question had been solved, nothing would have been settled.¹⁷⁹ Slovo's proposals were adopted by the ANC National Executive Committee in February 1993, while Gwala and the Natal Midlands ANC vehemently rejected them. Gwala, supported by Pierre Cronje, a member of the regional executive, labelled Slovo's proposals as a 'power sharing pact between the ANC and apartheid government' and urged the ANC to convene a national consultative conference to seek endorsement from the branches.¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, an enigmatic Gwala conceded that, although he considered the National Executive Committee's resolution to be unacceptable, he was bound by it. However, he committed himself to 'try to persuade the NEC to rethink its position.'¹⁸¹

¹⁷⁷ H. Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo: A Response', *African Communist*, 4th quarter, 1992, 28.

¹⁷⁸ H. Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo: A Response', *African Communist*, 4th quarter, 1992, 28.

¹⁷⁹ Video interview with Gwala, unrecognised interviewer, UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, INTV EP 1 & 5.

¹⁸⁰ L. Kaunda, 'Midlands ANC says no to power sharing', *The Natal Witness*, 16 March 1993, 1.

¹⁸¹ L. Kaunda, 'Midlands ANC says no to power sharing', *The Natal Witness*, 16 March 1993, 1.

The growing disconnect between Gwala and the national leadership of both the ANC and Communist Party regarding the ANC's position on negotiations seemed to have demoralised him to the extent that he contemplated retiring from politics at the end of 1993 in order to spend time with his grandchildren.¹⁸² It was his close friends, amongst them Robert Haswell, who urged Gwala to not to retire, arguing that 'it would be tragic if the parliament of the new South Africa never gets to hear Gwala'.¹⁸³ Haswell said:

Gwala we won't let you, we want you for the election, we want the whole country to hear you in the fullest. We want you to make the audience, as only you can, think seriously and constructively about their plight.¹⁸⁴

In the meantime, the intensification of violence in the Natal Midlands, especially the Mkhambathini area, including Maqongqo, seemed to have had an impact on Gwala's position on negotiations with the IFP as he observed extreme levels of brutality and devastation. He made a call to the IFP leadership to 'blaze a trail of peace through the Natal Midlands'.¹⁸⁵ This was after he had visited the war-torn Mkhambathini areas with Mandela, David Ntombela and other leaders of the National Party, IFP and ANC. After this visit, Gwala called for joint rallies between the ANC and IFP, a suggestion he had previously shot down in 1990. Nevertheless, Gwala's call to 'boys and girls to start taking shooting lessons' at Ixobho indicated the extent of his political ambiguity and militancy.¹⁸⁶ By June 1993, Mandela and Buthelezi had agreed to a meet and hold joint rallies. Notwithstanding the peace initiatives, Gwala emphatically stated that 'I am still a man of war, I am at war with apartheid'.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸² L. Kaunda, 'Gwala wants to step down', *The Natal Witness*, 31 March 1993, 2.

¹⁸³ Political reporter, 'Gwala, don't go - Haswell', *The Natal Witness*, 1 April 1993, 3.

¹⁸⁴ Political reporter, 'Gwala, don't go - Haswell', *The Natal Witness*, 1 April 1993, 3.

¹⁸⁵ L. Kaunda, 'Let's end the war, Gwala tells IFP', *The Natal Witness*, 17 March 1993, 1.

¹⁸⁶ Witness reporter, 'Gwala called on boys and girls to take shooting lessons', *The Natal Witness*, 18 May 1993, 5.

¹⁸⁷ SASSA, sasnews blurb, "lion of the Midlands"- or something, 26 March 1993.

The stance that Gwala had taken on violence and negotiated settlement became a subject of discussion at the ANC's National Working Committee meeting of 24 March 1993.¹⁸⁸

Mandela reported that he had a meeting with the Natal Midlands Regional Executive Committee (REC) about Gwala's utterances. He described Gwala's behaviour as 'improper and undesirable.'¹⁸⁹ He reported that he had appealed to Gwala to resign as chairperson and discussed the matter with other members of the REC who had given him an undertaking to encourage Gwala to resign or not to stand for re-election. However, during the regional elective conference in mid-April 1993, Gwala was re-elected as ANC Natal Midlands chairperson. This prompted the ANC leadership to request Gwala to choose between his position on the NEC and the region. Gwala, in pursuance of his politics of connectedness, chose to resign from the NEC to remain chairperson of the Natal Midlands ANC.

By late 1993 the relationship between Gwala and the national leadership of both the ANC and Communist Party had deteriorated to the extent that he had to be suspended from the Party. The ANC had established that Sifiso Nkabinde was an apartheid spy and had been linked to the assassination of key leaders of the ANC and Communist Party in Pietermaritzburg and Natal more broadly.¹⁹⁰ However, Gwala had a blind spot about Sifiso Nkabinde, despite warnings from his comrades. This created distance between Gwala and a number of senior members of the ANC and the Communist Party as they felt in danger of being killed by Nkabinde and his collaborators. It was in this context that the Central Committee of the Communist Party, of which Gwala was a member, decided to suspend him for six months in 1994, and which he accepted. Nevertheless, as the media was not privy to

¹⁸⁸ SASSA, declassified report of the African National Congress: National Working Committee, 24 March 1993.

¹⁸⁹ SASSA, declassified report of the African National Congress: National Working Committee, 24 March 1993.

¹⁹⁰ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mr X.

the underlying factors that had led to Gwala's suspension, it opted to concoct malicious reports that he had been suspended because of his militant views and stance on violence.¹⁹¹

After South Africa's first democratic elections on 27 April 1994, Gwala became a member of the provincial legislature in KwaZulu-Natal and served as a chief whip of the ANC.

Intelligence reports indicated that Gwala was disappointed with the ANC leadership in KwaZulu-Natal as he claimed it was too passive.¹⁹² Gwala's frustration was that the ANC members of the Executive Council (MECs) were not taking the trouble to organise ANC meetings and rallies. He was worried that the ANC would not be able to win the impending 1996 local government elections. Furthermore, intelligence reports suggested that Gwala was 'dissatisfied about the ANC leadership figures and the visible cordial relationship between the ANC and the National Party.' Gwala's concern was that the ANC leadership was preoccupied with reconciliation processes and was drifting away from pursuing economic redistribution and the land question.¹⁹³

Gwala's deteriorating health and death

Although medical practitioners at Groote Schuur Hospital and in Natal hospitals indicated that Gwala's disease was progressive, there was still hope that doctors outside South Africa might be able to cure him.¹⁹⁴ It was in this context that in 1989 Gwala went to Britain, East Germany and the Soviet Union in search of a cure. However, no medical facility in any of these centres was able to be of assistance.¹⁹⁵ Lubisi remembered that even when he came back to South Africa, he still believed that something could be done. There was a 'switch from Western to Eastern medicine' as Gwala consulted a practitioner of traditional Chinese

¹⁹¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

¹⁹² SASSA, declassified intelligence report on Harry Gwala, undated.

¹⁹³ SASSA, declassified intelligence report on Harry Gwala, undated.

¹⁹⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹⁹⁵ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

medicine based in Yeoville, Johannesburg. Initially, the Chinese medical practitioner seemed to help, as Gwala was able to control part of his right arm during treatment. However, there was no lasting effect.¹⁹⁶ By mid-1993 Gwala had lost hope and stopped attending sessions with the Chinese doctor. When the Cuban government asked Gwala to come to Havana so that medical specialists there could try to assist him, he reluctantly agreed. However, after a week, he ‘changed his mind insisting that he was too old and he would not use his arms anyway.’¹⁹⁷

By 1993, Gwala was under tremendous political pressure and impending isolation from both national and regional leadership of the ANC and the Communist Party.¹⁹⁸ In the meantime, his personal life was also crumbling as important people in his life had died under mysterious circumstances. Such loss made Gwala feel vulnerable. The sudden death of Lulu in June 1992 had a major impact on Gwala’s life.¹⁹⁹ Lulu had been a central figure in Gwala’s political and private life and he trusted her opinions. She had been the one responsible for maintaining Gwala’s home, controlled access to him, and guarded his privacy. After her death, Gwala became vulnerable in his personal life. It was in this context that the media published allegations that Gwala was sexually abusing young girls, including Makhosi Khoza.²⁰⁰

¹⁹⁶ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹⁹⁷ Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

¹⁹⁸ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mr X.

¹⁹⁹ Lulu ‘Mawele’ Gwala had been born 25 April 1951 in Ockertskraal. She attended the Ockertskraal Primary School and Kwa-Mpande High School. As an activist herself, she played a major role in the establishment of the ANC Women’s League (ANCWL) in the Natal Midlands, after which she was elected as a branch secretary of Dambuza ANCWL and regional secretary of the Natal Midlands Regional ANCWL. She died on 17 June 1992. There are two contested views of the cause of Lulu’s death. The family believed that she was poisoned by the enemies of Gwala, but another version of the story is that she was overexposed to dusty conditions in the Durban harbour where she had gone to collect clothes from a shipping container there to be distributed to victims of violence in the Natal Midlands. Her funeral was attended by over 2 000 mourners and the speakers were: Bathabile Dlamini, Thoko Nene, A. S. Chetty, Isaiah Ntshangase, Pat Bhengu, Blade Nzimande, Jeff Hadebe, Gertrude Shope, Happy Blose and Reggie Hadebe, see Gwala family papers, ‘Umlando kaLulu “Mawele” Gwala’, undated; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁰⁰ There were widespread allegations that Gwala had raped Makhosi Khoza. Makhosi said that these allegations were untrue and were engineered by state intelligence to discredit Gwala and the leadership of the ANC, see Ruth Lundie interview with Makhosi Khoza.

It was also after Lulu's death that Sifiso Nkabinde, a Richmond ANC leader, befriended Gwala. Gwala had been drawn to Nkabinde's militant charisma and saw him as a potential ally.²⁰¹ Nkabinde quickly rose to the leadership of the ANC regional secretariat and became very close to Gwala. By late 1993 it had become apparent that Nkabinde was a state collaborator. The death of Gwala's close confidante and trusted personal driver Thabo Nettie was another event that had a severe impact on Gwala. Nettie was mysteriously shot dead while outside a food store in the Pietermaritzburg city centre. It was possible that this sequence of events had such a cumulative impact on Gwala's persona that 'he started to give up' and his health deteriorated increasingly.²⁰²

Although by early 1995 Gwala's health had weakened, it was the death of Sibusiso Mavimbela, affectionately known as Ngwenya, that shattered his life. Mavimbela, a former MK member, had worked in the ANC security department in Pietermaritzburg after returning from exile in 1990, much of this time spent as Gwala's personal bodyguard.²⁰³ Early in June 1995, Nkabinde lured Mavimbela into becoming part of a cash-in-transit vehicle robbery in Howick. He told Mavimbela that 'cash in transit security [officers] were part of the scheme' thus there was no danger to their lives.²⁰⁴ When Mavimbela approached the vehicle, he was shot dead. Gwala had requested that the funeral entourage of Mavimbela pass by his home on the way to the cemetery so that he could pay his last respects.²⁰⁵ Lindiwe remembers that when Gwala saw Mavimbela in the coffin, the signs of devastation were visible on his face. During the evening of that Saturday his life 'took a turn and was admitted at

²⁰¹ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

²⁰² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

²⁰³ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

²⁰⁴ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

²⁰⁵ Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

Pietermaritzburg's Midlands Medical Centre the following Monday, 12 June.²⁰⁶ A week later, on Tuesday 20 June, Harry Gwala died of heart failure.

After receiving the news of Gwala's death, Mandela said that in Gwala's 'long struggle with progressive paralysis he demonstrated a rare courage and fortitude, KwaZulu-Natal is poorer without this senior leader.'²⁰⁷ The editor of *The Natal Mercury* said that 'with Gwala's passing, the lion will roar no more and the unguarded poor will need a new defender.' This indicated an understanding of Gwala's importance in politics during the 1990s.

The death of Gwala was reported in local, national and international newspapers. During the week of his death, obituaries became a contestation to redefine, re-arrange and re-interpret Gwala's life and his contribution to the evolution of political thought. On 21 June, M. W. Moosa, a member of the National Council of Provinces of Parliament, proposed a motion to acknowledge the death of Gwala. This was adopted by all members who stood for a minute to pay their respects to Gwala.²⁰⁸ The six memorial services held in KwaZulu-Natal, the funeral service in Pietermaritzburg, and the burial service in Swayimane became exhibitions of politics, power and militancy.²⁰⁹

On the eve of Gwala's funeral, Blade Nzimande predicted that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, established in 1994 to investigate cases of gross human rights violations, would reveal the truth of what really went on in Natal and Zululand.²¹⁰ Nzimande asserted that he

²⁰⁶ P. Naidoo, 'Gwala was shattered', *The Natal Witness*, 25 June 1995, 7.

²⁰⁷ Mercury reporter, 'Tributes pour in after Gwala's death', *The Natal Mercury*, 21 June 1995, 4.

²⁰⁸ Minutes of the Proceedings of Senate (National Council of Provinces), No. 40-1995, Second Session, First Parliament, 21 June 1995.

²⁰⁹ Gwala's funeral service was held in Jan Smuts Stadium (now Harry Gwala Stadium), with Jacob Zuma as the master of ceremonies. John Gomomo, Govan Mbeki and Nelson Mandela delivered speeches. Mzwakhe Mbuli performed a poem. Blade Nzimande read the obituary. Winnie Mandela delivered a keynote address at the burial site at Swayimane (Gwala family papers, programmes for the funeral service of comrade Harry Themba Gwala, 1 July 1995, document in author's possession.

²¹⁰ 'A lion who lived for the people' (transcript of an interview with Blade Nzimande conducted by Wyndham Hartley), *The Natal Witness*, 1 July 1995, 10.

was pleased that before Gwala died they had discussed the matter. Nevertheless, the TRC in an uninformed way found as follows:

Mr Harry Gwala, now deceased, functioned as a self-styled ANC warlord in the Greater Pietermaritzburg area, and that he established Self-Defence Units in the area under his control. Gwala's policies and public utterances actively facilitated a climate in which gross human rights violations could take place. The Commission finds that in calling for the killing of persons opposed to the ANC, Gwala incited his supporters to commit gross violations of human rights, including killing, attempted killing, severe ill-treatment and arson, for which he is held accountable. The ANC consistently failed to reproach, discipline or expel Gwala from its ranks, and thereby encouraged a climate to impunity within which Gwala continued to operate.²¹¹

Robert Haswell contested the findings of the TRC, arguing that:

Gwala protected the people of Edendale. He defended the people Edendale and elsewhere in Natal against the vicious attacks by Inkatha's *amabutho* (militias). Had it not been for Gwala's defence, the ANC would have been wiped out of Natal.²¹²

Haswell's articulation indicates the necessity for balanced political analysis of Gwala's role in the context of violence that prevailed in Pietermaritzburg and Natal more broadly. The TRC's findings failed to locate Gwala within the social and political milieu of violence that had degenerated into a low-intensity civil war in Natal and Zululand. For Nzimande, Gwala was 'a man of many qualities, many of them difficult to single out. He lived and died for the people.'²¹³

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated that material conditions of political violence in Natal and KwaZulu, the existence of a leadership vacuum, and a deeper theoretical understanding of violence were factors that were responsible for a shift in Gwala's political approach. These

²¹¹ Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Vol. 3, 1998, 214-215.

²¹² Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

²¹³ 'A lion who lived for the people' (transcript of an interview with Blade Nzimande conducted by Wyndham Hartley), *The Natal Witness*, 1 July 1995, 10.

conditions lay behind Gwala's turn to a militant, protective and defensive stance towards attacks from Inkatha on ANC supporters. In the evolution of Gwala's political consciousness, he was often confronted by contradictions between initiatives for a peaceful settlement, which he supported, and the violent conditions in Pietermaritzburg which did not permit people to embark on such initiatives. Gwala epitomised how the art of defensive violence and the art of peace could coexist in one individual. Gwala's politics never embraced offensive violence.

The early 1990s were characterised by disenchantment between Gwala on the one hand and the leadership of both the ANC and the Communist Party on the other. In contrast to the national leadership, Gwala's political choices were based on his personal experience of violence and displacement, and his political approach that was based on the principles of economic freedom and land redistribution. Because of these beliefs Gwala engaged critically with the ANC's mandate on negotiations and how sunset clauses had potential to dislodge one of the crucial pillars of the ANC's struggle, the land question. The debates on Slovo's proposals illustrated Gwala's desire to dismantle the political compact that disabled the ANC from pursuing the project of land redistribution and economic transformation.

This chapter has shown how the apartheid government used its apparatus to reconstruct Gwala's identity as a warlord who was dangerous to the state as well as to his fellow comrades. This was in large measures because of fear of Gwala's political influence. Sifiso Nkabinde was part of the apparatus that sought to disconnect Gwala, by firstly planning to assassinate him, and later by implicating Gwala in a plot to assassinate key leaders of the ANC and Communist Party.

Gwala chose to oppose sunset clauses and peace unaccompanied by an end to IFP violence and destabilisation. In so doing, Gwala carried out the central defying feature of his political life right until the end. This was the effort to be connected to the struggles of the people and for the people to drive the political direction of the movement.



CONCLUSION

Since Gwala's passing in 1995, South Africa has been battling to define and settle his afterlife. His legacy of intellectualism, political activism, nonracialism and connectedness has been negotiated, mediated and reshaped by the state in order to fit its political agenda. But the complexity of Gwala's life history has not made it easier to fit his legacy into a teleological biographical system of memorialisation and a dominant state historical narrative. Gwala's life has been made to fit that of an exemplary life of service and a tool to understand notions of citizenship as well as historical and political inquiry.

Since the transition to democracy, South Africa has been battling to come into terms with its history, particularly to undo the legacy of racial discrimination, spatial apartheid, and dispossession. The process of writing new histories has highlighted the ANC's involvement in the liberation struggle, resulting in the exclusion of the role of other liberation movements and other modes of resistance that predated organised nationalism before 1912. In addition, it has also focused on celebrating key individuals to the exclusion of the broad mass of people who also played a pivotal role in the liberation struggle, leading to history seen as the stories of great men (and women). The post-1994 historical enterprise largely took the form of the imposition of an official narrative that often expressed a nationalistic view and undermined contributions made to national histories by people and political formations acting at the local level, especially in areas outside the major metropolitan cities. The focus has been on (re)constructing the history of the liberation struggle as homogenous, and incremented in teleological and celebratory histories that defined the story of South Africa. Little space was created to document histories of robust intellectual debate and to study contradictions within and between the liberation movements. It is because of such narratives that figures such as Harry Gwala have fell through the cracks of post-1994 South African historiography, or were

relegated to anecdotal mentions in the stories of others. The minimal presence that has been accorded to Gwala's political life was, in part, a result of desperate political manoeuvring shortly before elections and served as a tool of political affirmation by those whose struggle credentials have been put under scrutiny.

This dissertation was written at a time when debates about the need for accelerated restorative and economic justice for the African people, and for victims of the crime of apartheid, were re-emerging. New political paths within the legislative and political landscape were being considered. The meanings of the democratic state and the extent to which the previously oppressed and disposed were able to regain their rights and dignity were being scrutinised. The extent to which the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa could be said to stifle economic and land redistribution was being debated with some questioning Joe Slovo's proposals during the CODESA process that led to the negotiated settlement and that paved the way for South Africa to become a democracy. These debates invoked Gwala's responses to Slovo published in *African Communist* in September 1992 and the political discussion it stimulated within the ranks of the ANC and the Communist Party.¹

Gwala argued that the struggle for the liberation of South Africa, as envisaged by the ANC, was based on meaningfully addressing the land question, and that the proposed inclusion of a clause in the Constitution that protected property rights would limit the state's ability to redistribute land. Gwala emphasised that if the land question was left unresolved, nothing would be solved. Thus the liberation project has remained unfinished. Gwala questioned the need to make the writing of the Constitution a higher priority than economic redistribution. Gwala also argued that people living in deplorable conditions of poverty had put their trust in the ANC because it had promised them that it would provide employment, houses and access

¹ Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo'.

to the economy. He proposed that the negotiating team should first develop a conceptual framework for economic redistribution, after which the Constitution could be written.

Gwala's strong views led to acrimonious relations between him and those supporting Slovo's proposal. Nevertheless, Gwala's warnings have come back to haunt South Africa. Less than 10% of land claims have been successfully settled and there has been a growing outcry about the law not permitting claims for land that was taken before the passage of the Land Act in 1913.

As the history of South Africa is being rewritten, there has been a tendency to overlook contentious aspects that might undermine the ANC's image. Among these is the involvement of the ANC in the smuggling of arms into Natal and KwaZulu during the early 1990s. Gwala, as a leader of the ANC in a region that was worst affected by violence, facilitated the purchase of arms and their distribution to key personnel, mainly trained MK members who had been deployed in the Natal Midlands. This biography of Gwala enables readers to understand that this was necessary to defend people against Inkatha's aggression.

The unprecedented crisis in the mid-2010's in the Tripartite Alliance - the political pact between COSATU, the ANC and the Communist Party - was, in part, a signal that these partners had not been able to establish collective grassroots-based identities. This crisis was an indication of an absence of a connector whose life was an embodiment of various identities. Throughout his political life Gwala became a connector between disjointed sectors of struggle and disaggregated organisations in South Africa. As a deputy provincial president of the Natal branch of the ANC Youth League in the late 1940s, he became a key agent in ensuring that the views of communists and trade unions were clearly represented and articulated within ANC structures. He also supported the Youth League to become a vanguard of the socialist agenda.

In addition, Gwala succeeded in translating rural, urban and migrant experiences into a political platform that became the basis for harnessing of political consciousness and a bridge to unite diverse identities that coexisted in Pietermaritzburg and greater Natal Midlands. When the liberation movements were unbanned in 1990, it was Gwala who played a pivotal role in establishing ANC branches throughout Natal and Zululand, thus reconnecting the ANC with its grassroots constituencies. Gwala's struggle entailed the entanglement of class, nationalism and politics. In 1992, he was awarded the highest ANC honour: Isithwalandwe-Seaparankoe. He was also made an honorary life president of the National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa.

Through this dissertation, I have sought to produce a historical narrative that examines the individual, the nature of class formation and political movements in the greater Pietermaritzburg area. Through analytical biographical theory, I have argued that Harry Gwala was a pragmatic leader who reacted proactively to societal challenges and class struggles in different ways. Gwala's dynamism and his ability to remain rooted in the masses enabled him to become strongly influential in South African society. This biography has extended Ciraj Rassool's understanding of biography as reciprocal construction through which relations between individuals and society are produced. Through telling Gwala's life story, this dissertation has interrogated the construction of meanings and how the state apparatus forged political identities for its own political ends that remain entrenched and associated with specific individuals, even in the post-apartheid period.

During the course of writing this dissertation there has been growing public interest in Gwala. In addition to being commemorated in the naming of streets, informal settlements, a stadium, and a school in Cape Town, Sisonke District Municipality was renamed in his honour. A number of opinion articles in newspapers written about Gwala have focused mainly on his

role during the 1990s, thus perpetuating a view of Gwala that has become a stereotype of a specific period in his life and the politics of South Africa, at a time when there was a low-intensity war in Natal and KwaZulu. This biography clearly identifies Gwala as an important member of a group of leaders who played a pivotal role in the political developments in Pietermaritzburg between the 1940s and the 1990s. This close examination of Gwala's life provides an opportunity for readers to grasp how class unity can transcend racial division.



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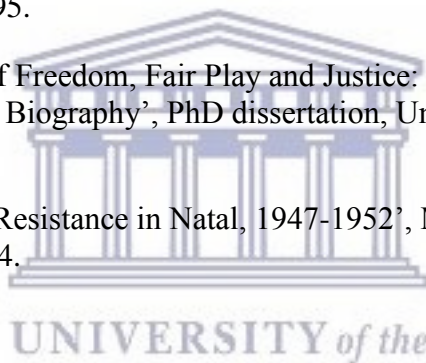
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