

















































































































































































































































































































































































































































































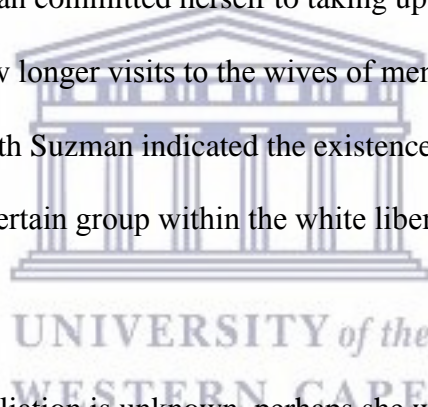




Branch.<sup>86</sup> The precarious financial and social circumstances of Gwala's family drew public sympathy from white liberals and other interest groups. In 1967, a certain Mary Corrigan of Alexandra Road in Pietermaritzburg wrote to Helen Suzman concerning Gwala's wife's visit to Robben Island.<sup>87</sup>

Corrigan lamented that 'Elda had visited Robben Island once since her husband was imprisoned in 1964 and a second visit was being arranged.'<sup>88</sup> 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.'<sup>89</sup> 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.'<sup>90</sup>

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.<sup>91</sup> Gwala's release in 1972 provided

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<sup>86</sup> 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.

<sup>87</sup> 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.

<sup>88</sup> UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1.1, letter from Mrs Mary Corrigan to Mrs Helen Suzman, 17 March 1967.

<sup>89</sup> UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1.1, letter from Mrs Mary Corrigan to Mrs Helen Suzman, 17 March 1967.

<sup>90</sup> UWL, HLP, Helen Suzman Papers, A2084, Ab1.1, letter from Mrs Helen Suzman to Mrs Mary Corrigan, 22 March 1967.

<sup>91</sup> 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 Caiphaz Bhukuda, were often followed by the Special Branch, and they were therefore reluctant to be associated with Elda and her children.<sup>92</sup> 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.’<sup>93</sup>

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.<sup>94</sup> 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

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<sup>92</sup> 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.

<sup>93</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu, 6 October 1984.

<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup>

Gwala had established cordial relations with Pietermaritzburg's white liberals due to his stance on non-racialism.<sup>96</sup> 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.<sup>97</sup> In January 1976, Elda asked Brown to assist the Xaba and the Nene families.<sup>98</sup>

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.'<sup>99</sup> 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.'<sup>100</sup> 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.'<sup>101</sup> 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.

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<sup>95</sup> 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).

<sup>96</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with John Aitchison.

<sup>97</sup> For a detailed biographical analysis of Peter Brown see, Cardo, *Opening Men's Eyes*.

<sup>98</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/9, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 29 January 1976.

<sup>99</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/9, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 29 January 1976.

<sup>100</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/10, correspondence from Mrs Pringle to Peter Brown, 6 February 1976.

<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> 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.'<sup>103</sup> 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.'<sup>104</sup>

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.<sup>105</sup> Among the initial donors was the *Sunday Tribune* which offered R10 to go to John Nene's family.<sup>106</sup> 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.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> 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.

<sup>103</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/11, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 15 February 1976.

<sup>104</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/11, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Pringle, 15 February 1976.

<sup>105</sup> 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.

<sup>106</sup> 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.

<sup>107</sup> 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.’<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup>

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.’<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup> Having been persuaded by Brown, Amnesty International agreed to offer support to the families of Magubane, Gwala, Meyiwa, Xaba, Nene and others.<sup>112</sup> In addition, Brown occasionally appealed to Pietermaritzburg liberals and local businesses to assist the wives of the detainees.

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<sup>108</sup> Cardo, ‘Opening Men’s Eyes’, 225.

<sup>109</sup> 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.

<sup>110</sup> 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.

<sup>111</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/31, correspondence from Peter Brown to Mrs Marianne Knappstein, 22 April 1976.

<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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.<sup>114</sup>

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.<sup>115</sup> 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.<sup>116</sup> 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

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<sup>113</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/102, correspondence from DM Craib to Peter Brown, 8 November 1976.

<sup>114</sup> APC, PC16/14/1/2/62, correspondence from Margrit Betke to Peter Brown, 7 July 1976.

<sup>115</sup> 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.

<sup>116</sup> 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.<sup>117</sup>

### **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.<sup>118</sup> 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.'<sup>119</sup> 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.'<sup>120</sup> 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

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<sup>117</sup> 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.

<sup>118</sup> Fran Buntman interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>119</sup> NAR, Department of Prisons (DOP) papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Commanding Officer, 4 November 1977.

<sup>120</sup> 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.<sup>121</sup>

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.<sup>122</sup> 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.<sup>123</sup> 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.<sup>124</sup> 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.'<sup>125</sup>

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.<sup>126</sup> Gwala

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<sup>121</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the prison censor, 31 January 1979.

<sup>122</sup> 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.

<sup>123</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 17 November 1981.

<sup>124</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 17 November 1981.

<sup>125</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Commanding Officer, 17 November 1981.

<sup>126</sup> 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.’<sup>127</sup> 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.’<sup>128</sup> 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.’<sup>129</sup>

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

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<sup>127</sup> 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.

<sup>128</sup> 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.

<sup>129</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from R. Vorster to L. Gwala, 11 July 1984.

support.<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup> 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.<sup>132</sup>

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.<sup>133</sup> As a result she 'found it difficult to find employment.'<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup> 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

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<sup>130</sup> 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

<sup>131</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

<sup>132</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

<sup>133</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip. APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Tom Montata, 26 February 1985.

<sup>134</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, RIM-HP, 2007/01, box 11, legal files, correspondence from Elda to Carruthers and Co., 17 April 1980.

<sup>135</sup> 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.<sup>136</sup> 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.<sup>137</sup> 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.’<sup>138</sup> Gwala had known Msimang from the 1940s and had regarded him as his ‘political elder’<sup>139</sup> 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.<sup>140</sup> 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.’<sup>141</sup> 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.<sup>142</sup>

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.<sup>143</sup> Since most of Gwala’s letters were written in Zulu, they

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<sup>136</sup> 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.

<sup>137</sup> APC, PC16/14/3/1/7, Minutes of the PCC/ DCC [Dependants’ Conference Committee] meeting, 30 March 1988.

<sup>138</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Themba Xulu, 25 September 1982.

<sup>139</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Themba Xulu, 25 September 1982.

<sup>140</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 6 August 1983.

<sup>141</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 6 August 1983.

<sup>142</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 6 August 1983.

<sup>143</sup> 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.<sup>144</sup> 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.'<sup>145</sup> During the month of May, Elda's asthma deteriorated and she had 'three attacks and nearly died on all these occasions.'<sup>146</sup> 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.'<sup>147</sup> Just before they were separated by a warder, Gwala asked Elda how she was coping.<sup>148</sup> Despite visible signs of weakening health, Elda insisted that she was not struggling as Gwala had prepared her before his imprisonment.<sup>149</sup> 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.<sup>150</sup> Perhaps Elda did not want Gwala to feel burdened by the

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<sup>144</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to the Head of Prison, 1 March 1984.

<sup>145</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Head of Prison to Elda Gwala, 20 March 1984.

<sup>146</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>147</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>148</sup> Ruth Lundie interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>149</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no. 1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 6 October 1984.

<sup>150</sup> 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.<sup>151</sup> Gwala described the death of Elda as 'sudden.'<sup>152</sup> 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.<sup>153</sup>

Gwala admitted that Elda's death upset him but that he was consoled by 'the sympathising telegraphs, letters and post cards' he received.<sup>154</sup> Among the people and organisations that sent letters and telegrams of condolences were MB Yengwa, the Natal Indian Congress and Victoria Mxenge.<sup>155</sup> Others preferred to visit Gwala on Robben Island just to 'console him, pass condolences and pledge their solidarity with his situation.'<sup>156</sup>

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<sup>151</sup> 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.

<sup>152</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>153</sup> 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.

<sup>154</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>155</sup> 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.

<sup>156</sup> 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.<sup>157</sup> 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.<sup>158</sup> 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.<sup>159</sup> This application was refused on the grounds that 'practical considerations' made it 'impossible' to accede to requests of this nature.<sup>160</sup> 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.'<sup>161</sup> 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.'<sup>162</sup> 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

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<sup>157</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified telegraph from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 30 June 1984.

<sup>158</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Makhosazana Gwala.

<sup>159</sup> 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.

<sup>160</sup> 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.

<sup>161</sup> Khaba Mkhize, 'Gwala won't be released', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 7 June 1984.

<sup>162</sup> 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.<sup>163</sup>

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.<sup>164</sup> 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.<sup>165</sup> 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.<sup>166</sup> 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.<sup>167</sup> 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

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<sup>163</sup> 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*.

<sup>164</sup> 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.

<sup>165</sup> Witness reporter, 'SB member attacked at Gwala funeral', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 14 June 1984, 3.

<sup>166</sup> Witness reporter, 'SB member attacked at Gwala funeral', *Echo*, a supplement to *The Natal Witness*, 14 June 1984, 3.

<sup>167</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

encouraged Lindiwe to ‘learn something from her mother and be inspired by her spirit.’<sup>168</sup>

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.’<sup>169</sup>

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.<sup>170</sup>

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

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<sup>168</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>169</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lindiwe Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>170</sup> 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.<sup>171</sup> 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.<sup>172</sup>

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.'<sup>173</sup> He cautioned her to ensure that debts were paid and never to forget 'that your mother did not want to stay with a debt.'<sup>174</sup> Gwala's belief in education as tool of emancipation was undiminished and he instructed Lulu to ensure that 'all children must be at school.'<sup>175</sup> 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.<sup>176</sup>

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.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from MB Yengwa to Harry Gwala, 7 June 1984.

<sup>172</sup> 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.

<sup>173</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>174</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>175</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>176</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>177</sup> 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.<sup>178</sup> He emphatically urged Lulu to tell the other children to 'get used to writing letters' to him.<sup>179</sup>

### **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.'<sup>180</sup> 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.

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<sup>178</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>179</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Lulu Gwala, 23 June 1984.

<sup>180</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

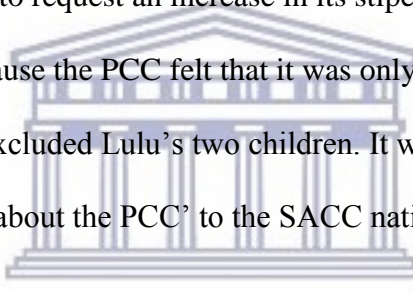
Lulu seems to have carefully selected those she recommended should be permitted to visit Gwala, mainly key family members, his children and relatives.<sup>181</sup>

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.<sup>182</sup>

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.<sup>183</sup>

Lulu had approached the PCC to request an increase in its stipend to the Gwala family.<sup>184</sup>

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.<sup>185</sup> 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.<sup>186</sup>

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

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<sup>181</sup> 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.

<sup>182</sup> 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.

<sup>183</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

<sup>184</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/2, minutes of the meeting of the Dependants' Conference Committee, 22 January 1985.

<sup>185</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

<sup>186</sup> 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.'<sup>187</sup> 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.'<sup>188</sup> 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.<sup>189</sup> Lulu had already been targeted by the Special Branch during its close surveillance of the Gwala family.<sup>190</sup> 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.<sup>191</sup> However, in January 1985, Brown reported to the PCC that Lulu 'was fired because she did not do her job.'<sup>192</sup> 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.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>187</sup> 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.

<sup>188</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/9, correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Mr Tom Montala, 26 February 1985.

<sup>189</sup> 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.

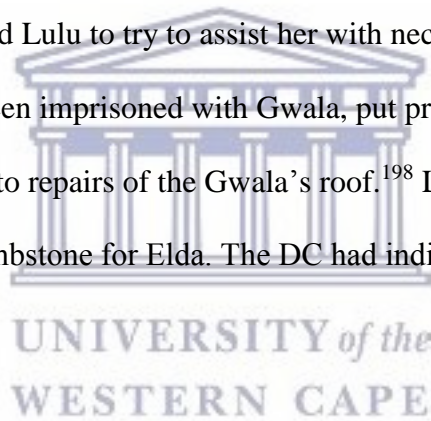
<sup>190</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>191</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 10 October 1984.

<sup>192</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/2, minutes of the meeting of the Dependants' Conference Committee, 22 January 1985.

<sup>193</sup> 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.<sup>194</sup> 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.'<sup>195</sup> 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.<sup>196</sup> 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.<sup>197</sup> Ndebele, previously having been imprisoned with Gwala, put pressure on the health inspector, Mr Ntuli, to look into repairs of the Gwala's roof.<sup>198</sup> Lulu also found herself under immense pressure to buy a tombstone for Elda. The DC had indicated that 'this was not their matter.'<sup>199</sup>



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.<sup>200</sup> At the same time, Lulu sought

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<sup>194</sup> 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.

<sup>195</sup> APC, PC14/2/3/26, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 20 June 1985.

<sup>196</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/4/15, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 21 January 1986.

<sup>197</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/4/7, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 18 February 1986.

<sup>198</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/4/14, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 18 March 1986.

<sup>199</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/4/14, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 18 March 1986.

<sup>200</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/5/1, appeal for funds documents, 20 March 1986. The following were recorded as donors in December 1986: Abraham & Sengham, 1<sup>st</sup> 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.<sup>201</sup> 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.<sup>202</sup>

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.<sup>203</sup> 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.<sup>204</sup> 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.'<sup>205</sup> The Trevitts also

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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.

<sup>201</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/58, correspondence from Mr Trevitt to Norman Abrahams, 5 September 1986.

<sup>202</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/3/6, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 27 February 1985.

<sup>203</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/5/1, correspondence from Mr Trevitt to Norman Abrahams, 21 January 1987.

<sup>204</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/4/32, minutes of the Dependants' Conference, 22 September 1986.

<sup>205</sup> 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.<sup>206</sup>

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.'<sup>207</sup> 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.<sup>208</sup> 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.

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<sup>206</sup> APC, PC16/14/2/4/32, minutes of the Dependents' Conference, 22 September 1986.

<sup>207</sup> 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.

<sup>208</sup> 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.<sup>209</sup> 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.<sup>210</sup> Lulu made her siblings her highest priority, becoming a mother and father to them under extremely difficult circumstances.<sup>211</sup> Despite these conflicted times, her relationship with white liberals, specifically Brown and Peter Kerchhoff, was able to transcend these difficulties.<sup>212</sup>

### **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.<sup>213</sup> 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.<sup>214</sup> 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.'<sup>215</sup> Perhaps Gwala and Elda spoke about their asthmatic conditions during visits. Motlanthe was among the few who knew that Gwala was asthmatic, saying:

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<sup>209</sup> Nomathemba was born on 31 August 1985 and Noluthando was born on 8 August 1987.

<sup>210</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>211</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>212</sup> Everatt, *The Origins of Non-Racialism*.

<sup>213</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>214</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, Harry Gwala's health records, 13 January 1977.

<sup>215</sup> 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.<sup>216</sup>

Motlanthe remembered that ‘Gwala was emotionally disturbed by Elda’s passing’ and he had to spend time with him trying to console him.<sup>217</sup> 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.<sup>218</sup> 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.<sup>219</sup>

Throughout 1985 Gwala’s health steadily deteriorated and he was an occasional patient at Groote Schuur Hospital.<sup>220</sup> 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.<sup>221</sup> 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

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<sup>216</sup> Kgalema Motlanthe, address to the inaugural Harry Gwala memorial lecture, Bulwer, 30 November 2013.

<sup>217</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe; Harvey, *Kgalema Motlanthe*.

<sup>218</sup> 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.

<sup>219</sup> 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.

<sup>220</sup> 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.

<sup>221</sup> 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.<sup>222</sup> From March 1987 it appeared that doctors had stopped trying to treat the disease, focusing instead on providing regular physiotherapy.<sup>223</sup>

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.<sup>224</sup> 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.<sup>225</sup> 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.<sup>226</sup> 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.<sup>227</sup> In line with his political viewpoints, Gwala registered for courses in ancient history, the theory of law and international politics in his first year.<sup>228</sup> The examination results of December 1985 indicated that Gwala failed ancient history dismally

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<sup>222</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified discharge report/letter of Harry Gwala from Groote Schuur Hospital, 3 February 1987.

<sup>223</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Dr Prinsloo, Groote Schuur Hospital, to the Medical Officer, Robben Island, 27 March 1987.

<sup>224</sup> 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).

<sup>225</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Harry Gwala, 26 January 1980.

<sup>226</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Elda Gwala to Harry Gwala, 26 January 1980; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>227</sup> 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.

<sup>228</sup> 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.<sup>229</sup>

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.<sup>230</sup>

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.<sup>231</sup> 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.'<sup>232</sup> 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.'<sup>233</sup>

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<sup>229</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified prisoner's statement of results, 20 December 1985.

<sup>230</sup> 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.

<sup>231</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Head of Prison, Robben Island, 18 March 1987.

<sup>232</sup> 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.

<sup>233</sup> 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.'<sup>234</sup> By May 1987 Gwala 'was virtually unable to hold a pen in his right hand.'<sup>235</sup> 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.<sup>236</sup> 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.'<sup>237</sup> 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.'<sup>238</sup>

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

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<sup>234</sup> 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.

<sup>235</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified medical certificate issued by Dr D. V. Philcox, Groote Schuur Hospital, 21 May 1987.

<sup>236</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified medical certificate issued by Dr D. V. Philcox, Groote Schuur Hospital, 21 May 1987.

<sup>237</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

<sup>238</sup> 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.<sup>239</sup>

The process of transferring Gwala was ‘treated with the greatest sensitivity and confidentiality’ in order not to mitigate the risk of media attention.<sup>240</sup> Instructions were given that Gwala must be transported in a Kombi ‘as it makes it possible for the prisoners to be transferred lying down.’<sup>241</sup> 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.<sup>242</sup> 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

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<sup>239</sup> 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.

<sup>240</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

<sup>241</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from R. A. van Deventer to W. S. J. Coetzee, 17 July 1987.

<sup>242</sup> 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.<sup>243</sup> 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.<sup>244</sup>

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.<sup>245</sup> The second letter was addressed to the Registrar of UNISA, in which he notified UNISA about his new 'temporary address.'<sup>246</sup> 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.<sup>247</sup> 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.<sup>248</sup> 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.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>243</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 1 August 1987.

<sup>244</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified application by Harry Gwala to the Supreme Court, undated. This was probably written in August 1987.

<sup>245</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from the Commissioner of Prison to J. H. J. Vorstman, 25 August 1987.

<sup>246</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Registrar, UNISA, 1 August 1987.

<sup>247</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Lulu Gwala to Harry Gwala, 26 September 1886. letter).

<sup>248</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Registrar, UNISA, 1 August 1987.

<sup>249</sup> 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.<sup>250</sup> 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.<sup>251</sup> 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.<sup>252</sup> 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.'<sup>253</sup>

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.'<sup>254</sup> 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.<sup>255</sup> Gwala's attorneys were later given permission to consult with him after they had threatened to 'take the matter to the supreme court.'<sup>256</sup> In addition to

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<sup>250</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>251</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 3 July 1987.

<sup>252</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 3 July 1987.

<sup>253</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to Harry Gwala, 18 August 1987.

<sup>254</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to Harry Gwala, 9 October 1987.

<sup>255</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from the Head of Prison to Mlaba, Made and Partners, 2 October 1987.

<sup>256</sup> 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.<sup>257</sup>

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*.<sup>258</sup> 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.<sup>259</sup> 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.<sup>260</sup> 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.<sup>261</sup> 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

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<sup>257</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Mlaba, Made and Partners to Harry Gwala, 9 October 1987.

<sup>258</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to Navanethem Pillay and Co., 5 October 1985.

<sup>259</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Harry Gwala to the Commanding Officer, 7 September 1987.

<sup>260</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>261</sup> 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.<sup>262</sup> 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.'<sup>263</sup>

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.<sup>264</sup> 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.<sup>265</sup>

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.'<sup>266</sup> 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.<sup>267</sup> 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

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<sup>262</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Lieutenant-Colonel Van Vuuren to Major Anderson, 4 March 1988.

<sup>263</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the parliamentary office, 8 March 1988.

<sup>264</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified correspondence from Dr Ackermann to Major Anderson, 5 April 1988.

<sup>265</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

<sup>266</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

<sup>267</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

by motor neuron disease.<sup>268</sup> 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.’<sup>269</sup>

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.<sup>270</sup> 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.<sup>271</sup> He was finally transferred to Westville on 4 July 1988. While the state

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<sup>268</sup> 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.

<sup>269</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commissioner of Prisons to the Minister of Prisons, undated.

<sup>270</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from P. O. Gillingham to the Deputy Commandant Management Services, undated.

<sup>271</sup> 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.<sup>272</sup>

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.'<sup>273</sup> 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.'<sup>274</sup>

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

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<sup>272</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from the Commanding Officer to Deputy Director Detentions, 27 June 1988.

<sup>273</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified confidential memorandum from P. O. Gillingham to the Deputy Commandant Management Services, undated.

<sup>274</sup> 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.’<sup>275</sup> Suzman further committed herself to securing an ‘appointment with Minister Coetsee to see if [she] can get his release on compassionate grounds.’<sup>276</sup> 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’.<sup>277</sup> Brown undertook to inform the Gwala family about Suzman’s meeting with the Minister but to ‘tell them to expect nothing.’<sup>278</sup>

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.<sup>279</sup> 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.’<sup>280</sup> 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.’<sup>281</sup>

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

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<sup>275</sup> APC, PC16/14/3/1/18, in her response, Helen Suzman refers to Peter Brown’s letters dated 17 May 1988, 2 June 1988.

<sup>276</sup> APC, PC16/14/3/1/18, correspondence from Helen Suzman to Peter Brown, 2 June 1988.

<sup>277</sup> APC, PC16/14/3/1/18, correspondence from Helen Suzman to Peter Brown, 2 June 1988.

<sup>278</sup> APC, PC16/14/3/1/23, correspondence from Peter Brown to Helen Suzman, 3 July 1988.

<sup>279</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, petition from Mlaba, Made and Partners to the State President, 25 May 1988.

<sup>280</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, petition from Mlaba, Made and Partners to the State President, 25 May 1988.

<sup>281</sup> 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.<sup>282</sup> 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.'<sup>283</sup> 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.'<sup>284</sup>

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.'<sup>285</sup> Coetsee's response to SACC head, Reverend Frank Chikane, suggested ambivalence on the part of the state regarding the mounting pressure to release Gwala.<sup>286</sup> 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

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<sup>282</sup> *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.

<sup>283</sup> 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.

<sup>284</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, declassified letter from L. E Guffatho to the Prison authorities, 28 June 1988.

<sup>285</sup> 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.

<sup>286</sup> 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.<sup>287</sup> 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.'<sup>288</sup> 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.'<sup>289</sup> 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.<sup>290</sup> 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'.<sup>291</sup>

The RMC had been founded on 9 March 1980 when the *Sunday Post* of Johannesburg

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<sup>287</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from written for T. H. Gwala to the Head of Prison, 24 September 1988.

<sup>288</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence written for T. H. Gwala to the Head of Prison, 24 September 1988.

<sup>289</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, correspondence from Dr H. Staub to Dr J. D. Strydom, 3 October 1988.

<sup>290</sup> 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.

<sup>291</sup> 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.<sup>292</sup> 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.<sup>293</sup> 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.<sup>294</sup>

The election of Lubisi to the executive of the RMC in 1986 raised new prospects for the RMC in Natal.<sup>295</sup> 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

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<sup>292</sup> Ilanga reporter, 'UKaunda uthi iSA ayikhulule uMandela', *Ilanga lase Natali*, 11-13 June 1984, 7.

<sup>293</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/topic/nelson-mandela-timeline-1980-1989>, accessed 5 July 2016.

<sup>294</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>295</sup> 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.<sup>296</sup>

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.<sup>297</sup> 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.<sup>298</sup> 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.<sup>299</sup> 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.'<sup>300</sup> On the request of the RMC, Linda Zama, a prominent anti-apartheid lawyer, established the Harry

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<sup>296</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>297</sup> Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>298</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>299</sup> 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.

<sup>300</sup> 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.<sup>301</sup>

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.'<sup>302</sup> 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.'<sup>303</sup> 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.<sup>304</sup> 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.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>301</sup> 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.

<sup>302</sup> NAR, DOP papers, file no.1238, release certificate, 26 November 1988.

<sup>303</sup> Video interview with Gwala, unrecognised interviewer, UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, INTV EP 1 & 5.

<sup>304</sup> 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.

<sup>305</sup> 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.<sup>306</sup> 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.<sup>307</sup> 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

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<sup>306</sup> 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.

<sup>307</sup> 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.<sup>308</sup> 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.

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<sup>308</sup> 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.<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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

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<sup>1</sup> 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

<sup>2</sup> 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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.'<sup>5</sup>

Recent studies by David Welsh, Mac Maharaj and Mxolisi Mchunu have characterised Gwala as an ANC warlord.<sup>6</sup> 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.'<sup>7</sup> Welsh further argues that Gwala was linked to the violence that

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<sup>3</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with John Aitchison.

<sup>4</sup> 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.

<sup>5</sup> This is a Zulu expression that refers to the rattle of a machine gun.

<sup>6</sup> 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).

<sup>7</sup> 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.’<sup>8</sup> 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.<sup>9</sup>

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.<sup>10</sup> 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

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<sup>8</sup> Welsh, *The Rise and Fall of Apartheid*, 576.

<sup>9</sup> Mchunu, ‘A History of Political Violence in KwaShange’; O’Malley, *Shades of Difference*.

<sup>10</sup> 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.’<sup>11</sup> 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.<sup>12</sup>

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.<sup>13</sup> This degenerated into violence which Anthea Jeffery has referred to as a low-intensity civil war.<sup>14</sup> 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

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<sup>11</sup> Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>12</sup> 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.

<sup>13</sup> M. Butler, *Natal, Violence and the Elections* (Pietermaritzburg: Centre for Adult Education, University of Natal, 1994), 3-4.

<sup>14</sup> 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).

Hammarisdale, 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.<sup>15</sup>

Kentridge has attributed the emergence of violence to Inkatha as it tried to ‘invade non-Inkatha territories’ to redraw the political geography of Natal.<sup>16</sup> 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.<sup>17</sup> 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.’<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> 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.

<sup>16</sup> Kentridge, *An Unofficial War*, 1.

<sup>17</sup> APC, PC189/7/1/1, ‘The Warlord and the Police’, affidavit of Father Timothy Smith, undated; Kentridge, ‘An Unofficial War’, 211.

<sup>18</sup> 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.<sup>19</sup> Gwala became the embodiment and symbol of a political moment that connected the UDF and COSATU to broader sense of comradeship.<sup>20</sup>

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.<sup>21</sup> 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.<sup>22</sup> After having facilitated a visit by the local leadership of Inkatha, Buthelezi wrote a letter to Gwala on 2 December 1989. In the letter

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<sup>19</sup> 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.

<sup>20</sup> For a detailed discussion on comrades see Sitas, 'The Making of the Comrades', 629-641.

<sup>21</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>22</sup> 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.<sup>23</sup>

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.’<sup>24</sup> 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.<sup>25</sup> 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.’<sup>26</sup> 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

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<sup>23</sup> 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.

<sup>24</sup> 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.

<sup>25</sup> 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).

<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup>

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.'<sup>28</sup> 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.'<sup>29</sup> 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.'<sup>30</sup>

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.<sup>31</sup> 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

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<sup>27</sup> 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.

<sup>28</sup> 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).

<sup>29</sup> 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.

<sup>30</sup> 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.

<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.'<sup>33</sup> 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.'<sup>34</sup>

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.<sup>35</sup> 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.<sup>36</sup>

### **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

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<sup>32</sup> 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.

<sup>33</sup> 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.

<sup>34</sup> 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.

<sup>35</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

<sup>36</sup> 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.’<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.<sup>39</sup> 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.’<sup>40</sup>

Gumede was pessimistic about areas of convergence since Buthelezi insisted on ‘Black unity’ while the UDF called for a ‘non-racial unity.’<sup>41</sup> Moreover, Gumede had demanded that the

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<sup>37</sup> 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.

<sup>38</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence between A. Gumede and M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987, 9 February 1988.

<sup>39</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

<sup>40</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup>

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.'<sup>44</sup> 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.'<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup>

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

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<sup>42</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

<sup>43</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, correspondence from A. Gumede to M. G. Buthelezi, 19 November 1987.

<sup>44</sup> 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.

<sup>45</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, Joint Declaration adopted by Congress of South African Trade Unions and Inkatha, undated.

<sup>46</sup> 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.'<sup>47</sup> 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.<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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.'<sup>50</sup> 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.'<sup>51</sup> 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

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<sup>47</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, address by M. G. Buthelezi during the King Shaka Day commemoration, Taylor's Halt, 25 September 1988.

<sup>48</sup> 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.

<sup>49</sup> 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.

<sup>50</sup> SAHA, AL2431, UDF Collection, box 29, VIOLENCE IN PMB: A memorandum by COSATU and UDF, 4 November 1987.

<sup>51</sup> 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.<sup>52</sup> 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.<sup>53</sup> 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.<sup>54</sup> 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.'<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> G. Woods, 'A position paper on research findings into black township violence in Natal/KwaZulu', Inkatha Institute for South Africa, 1989.

<sup>53</sup> 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'.

<sup>54</sup> Beinart, 'Political and Collective Violence'.

<sup>55</sup> Nkosinathi Gwala, 'Political Violence and the Struggle for Control', 514.

<sup>56</sup> 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.<sup>57</sup> In addition, Gwala's militant approach of the 1960s had become more moderate and he was optimistic that a peaceful solution was possible.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup>

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.<sup>60</sup> 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.<sup>61</sup> 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.'<sup>62</sup> Gwala maintained that an organisation like Inkatha was

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<sup>57</sup> Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>58</sup> Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>59</sup> Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>60</sup> RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

<sup>61</sup> RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

<sup>62</sup> 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.’<sup>63</sup> Two days after his release, Gwala emphasised that the killings were an ‘ugly aspect of the revolution’ and that talks were vital.<sup>64</sup>

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.<sup>65</sup> 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.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup>

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.’<sup>68</sup> Furthermore, he rejected the argument that characterised violence as ‘black on black’ as ‘racist to the core.’<sup>69</sup> Lubisi argues that Gwala ‘did not subscribe to the notion of the third force.’<sup>70</sup> Instead, Gwala’s view was that there

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<sup>63</sup> 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.

<sup>64</sup> APC, PC 11/2/5/6/63, ‘Natal killings ugly aspect of revolution’, an opinion letter by Harry Gwala, 29 November 1988.

<sup>65</sup> APC, PC 186/9/1/1/, statement by Pierre Cronje, 26 March 1989.

<sup>66</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>67</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with M. G. Buthelezi.

<sup>68</sup> Pdraig O’Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993; Jeffery, ‘The Natal Story’, 225.

<sup>69</sup> Mzala, ‘The violence in Natal’, *The Natal Witness*, 3 May 1990, 10.

<sup>70</sup> 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.<sup>71</sup>

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.<sup>72</sup> Mzala (as Jabulani Nxumalo was known) argued that Gwala 'saw violence in Natal as an expression of the problems in South Africa.'<sup>73</sup> 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.'<sup>74</sup> 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.<sup>75</sup> 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

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<sup>71</sup> <http://www.anc.org.za/content/second-national-consultative-conference-report-main-decisions-and-recommendations>, accessed 13 August 2016.

<sup>72</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka Interview with Robert Haswell.

<sup>73</sup> Mzala, 'The violence in Natal', *The Natal Witness*, 3 May 1990, 10.

<sup>74</sup> F. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth* (translated by Constance Farrington) (London: Penguin, 1963), 25.

<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup>

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.'<sup>78</sup> 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.<sup>79</sup> 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.'<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>77</sup> Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>78</sup> 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.

<sup>79</sup> Thomas Karis interview with Harry Gwala.

<sup>80</sup> 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.'<sup>81</sup> Gwala, accompanied by Linda Zama and Lulu, undertook the visit on 5 May 1989.<sup>82</sup> 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.<sup>83</sup> 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.<sup>84</sup> 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.<sup>85</sup>

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].'<sup>86</sup> The prospects of establishing a peace settlement and negotiations

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<sup>81</sup> RIM-UWC Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 374, correspondence from Nelson Mandela to Harry Gwala, 18 April 1989.

<sup>82</sup> 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.

<sup>83</sup> Fran Buntman Interview with Kobie Coetsee.

<sup>84</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

<sup>85</sup> 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.

<sup>86</sup> 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.<sup>87</sup> 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.<sup>88</sup> 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.<sup>89</sup> 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.<sup>90</sup>

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.<sup>91</sup> 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.<sup>92</sup> In an attempt to vilify the state and to garner public sympathy, Gwala called a media meeting and explained how he had been

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<sup>87</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, Harry Gwala interview, EP 1 & 5.

<sup>88</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worship.

<sup>89</sup> 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.

<sup>90</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with John Aitchison.

<sup>91</sup> Witness reporter, 'Crowds of mourners whipped outside cemetery', *The Natal Witness*, 13 June 1989.

<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup>

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.<sup>96</sup> 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,

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<sup>93</sup> Mercury reporter, 'Gwala is to take action after funeral', *Natal Mercury*, 14 June 1989.

<sup>94</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Linda Zama to the Commissioner of Police, 4 October 1989.

<sup>95</sup> UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, MCH 31, IDAF collection, box 734, correspondence from Linda Zama to Mrs Birkbeck Montagu, 20 July 1990.

<sup>96</sup> 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.'<sup>97</sup> 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.<sup>98</sup> 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.<sup>99</sup> 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.'<sup>100</sup>

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

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<sup>97</sup> Nelson Mandela, speech delivered at King's Park stadium, 25 February 1990.

<sup>98</sup> Strini Moodley, 'Throw away your weapons - Mandela', *The Natal Witness*, 26 February 1990, 1.

<sup>99</sup> Padraig O'Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 10 November 1993.

<sup>100</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.



and his visit would be natural expression of that friendship.’<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup>

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.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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.’<sup>106</sup> By the seventh day, 31 March, about 100 people had been killed and over 20 000 people were seeking refuge in

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<sup>101</sup> 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.

<sup>102</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>103</sup> Pdraig O’Malley interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

<sup>104</sup> 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).

<sup>105</sup> Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>106</sup> 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.'<sup>107</sup>

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.'<sup>108</sup>

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.'<sup>109</sup> 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.'<sup>110</sup> 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.<sup>111</sup>

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

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<sup>107</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>108</sup> Stephen Coan interview with Harry Gwala published as 'A veteran of Natal politics' *The Natal Witness*, 5 May 1990.

<sup>109</sup> Echo reporter, 'Gwala says hit squad is after him', *The Natal Witness*, 15 July 1990.

<sup>110</sup> Echo reporter, 'Gwala says hit squad is after him', *The Natal Witness*, 15 July 1990.

<sup>111</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

apartheid regime.’<sup>112</sup> 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.<sup>113</sup> 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 Nkadimeng, whose task was to ‘work towards finding a solution to the violence in Natal.’<sup>114</sup> Nkadimeng’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

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<sup>112</sup> ‘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](http://www.sahistory.org.za/sites/default/files/dc/sta19900628.043.027/pdf), accessed 27 August 2016.

<sup>113</sup> Witness reporter, ‘Thousands join in marches for peace in Natal’, *The Natal Witness*, 9 July 1990, 1.

<sup>114</sup> 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).<sup>115</sup>

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.<sup>116</sup> 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.’<sup>117</sup> 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.<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> It was the brutal assassination of Chief Mhlabunzima 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 (CONTRALESAs) 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.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> See Christina Scott, ‘Ivulwe ngesasasa Inkatha Entsha’, *UmAfrika*, 21 July 1990, 3.

<sup>116</sup> 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.

<sup>117</sup> APC, PC 129/1/7/332, joint statement of the IFP/ANC meeting held at the Royal Hotel, Durban, 29 January 1991.

<sup>118</sup> APC, PC 129/1/7/332, joint declaration of the ANC and IFP, 29 January 1991.

<sup>119</sup> T. H. Gwala papers, affidavits of Wilford Mncwabe, Gugu Ndlovu, Mlindeli Zondi, William Nguni, Donatus Nyide, Nhlalayenza Khowane, 21 November 1992.

<sup>120</sup> 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.<sup>121</sup> 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*<sup>122</sup> attacks on his homestead.<sup>123</sup>

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.<sup>124</sup>

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.<sup>125</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> J. E. Kelly, "Only the Fourth chief": Conflict, Land, and Chiefly Authority in 20<sup>th</sup> Century KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa', PhD dissertation, Michigan State University, 2012, 310.

<sup>122</sup> *Kitskonstabel* is an Afrikaans expression which means 'instant constable'. The *kitskonstabels* were poorly trained and rapidly integrated into state police forces.

<sup>123</sup> Kelly, 'Only the Fourth Chief', 310.

<sup>124</sup> T. H. Gwala papers, affidavit of Wilford Mncwabe, 21 November 1992.

<sup>125</sup> 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.<sup>126</sup> 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.<sup>127</sup> 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.'<sup>128</sup>

The paradox of increasing violence while peace negotiations were taking place demonstrated 'elite coalescence' of the peace processes.<sup>129</sup> 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

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<sup>126</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>127</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>128</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mangosuthu Buthelezi.

<sup>129</sup> T. D. Sisk, *Democratisation in South Africa: The Elusive Social Contract* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 29.



convenor for the Natal Midlands.<sup>130</sup> 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.<sup>131</sup> The committee had to deal with specific issues such as political education, finance and recruitment of new members to the ANC.<sup>132</sup> 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.<sup>133</sup> 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.<sup>134</sup> 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.<sup>135</sup> The money was

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<sup>130</sup> 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.

<sup>131</sup> Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>132</sup> 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.

<sup>133</sup> 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.

<sup>134</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

<sup>135</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

used by Gwala to buy weapons from Mozambique and sometimes Swaziland.<sup>136</sup> 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.<sup>137</sup>

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.<sup>138</sup> 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.'<sup>139</sup> 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.<sup>140</sup> For Martins, the reportage about the deteriorating relations between Gwala and Mandela was intended to divide the ANC and misdirect the liberation struggle.

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<sup>136</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

<sup>137</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

<sup>138</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>139</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>140</sup> 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.<sup>141</sup> 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.<sup>142</sup> 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.<sup>143</sup> Gwala was, however, 'taken back by the ANC's decision to suspend the armed struggle.'<sup>144</sup> 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.<sup>145</sup> Gwala strongly believed that Mandela, including the national leadership, did not understand the objective conditions on the

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<sup>141</sup> 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.

<sup>142</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

<sup>143</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>144</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>145</sup> 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.<sup>146</sup>

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.<sup>147</sup> 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.’<sup>148</sup>

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.<sup>149</sup> 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).<sup>150</sup> 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.’<sup>151</sup>

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.<sup>152</sup> Perhaps

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<sup>146</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>147</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>148</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>149</sup> Staff reporter, ‘assassins miss Gwala-twice’, *New Nation*, 8 March 1991, 3; Bongani Shoba, ‘Usinde enhlamvini uGwala we ANC’, *UmAfrika*, 9 March 1991.

<sup>150</sup> 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.

<sup>151</sup> SASSA, declassified report: African National Congress: Destabilisasie van KwaZulu en die Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP), February 1993.

<sup>152</sup> 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.<sup>153</sup> 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.<sup>154</sup> As Mamdani has pointed out, militias of this kind lack military discipline and are motivated by revenge.<sup>155</sup>

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.'<sup>156</sup> 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.<sup>157</sup> 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

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<sup>153</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>154</sup> SASSA, declassified secret report - Harry Gwala en Terror Lekota: Moontlike betrokkenheid by vestiging van selfverdedigingseenhede (SVE) in die Natal-Middellande, 1993.

<sup>155</sup> M. Mamdani, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1996).

<sup>156</sup> SASSA, declassified confidential report, Umkhonto We Sizwe (MK): Harry Gwala: Moontlike skepping van 'n private leer, undated.

<sup>157</sup> 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.’<sup>158</sup> 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.<sup>159</sup> 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.<sup>160</sup>

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.<sup>161</sup> 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.<sup>162</sup> Andrew Ragavaloo, an ANC activist and a former mayor of Richmond, has argued that Sifiso Nkabinde, once Gwala’s trusted political friend and an

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<sup>158</sup> SASSA, declassified secret report on Harry Gwala, 10 June 1992.

<sup>159</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous; SASSA, declassified confidential report, undated; Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Michael Worsnip.

<sup>160</sup> Political correspondent, ‘World’s Top 30 Warlords’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 20 November 1991.

<sup>161</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

<sup>162</sup> 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.’<sup>163</sup>

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 48<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>164</sup> 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.<sup>165</sup> 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.”<sup>166</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> A. Ragavaloo, *Richmond: Living in the Shadow of Death* (Johannesburg: STE publishers, 2008), 15.

<sup>164</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

<sup>165</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Kgalema Motlanthe.

<sup>166</sup> 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.<sup>167</sup> 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.<sup>168</sup>

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.<sup>169</sup> 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

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<sup>167</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Ben Martins.

<sup>168</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>169</sup> 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.<sup>170</sup> 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.<sup>171</sup> 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

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<sup>170</sup> 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.

<sup>171</sup> Macmillan, *The Lusaka Years*, 223.

deserve.<sup>172</sup> 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.<sup>173</sup> 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.<sup>174</sup> 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.<sup>175</sup> 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.<sup>176</sup> 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.

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<sup>172</sup> 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.

<sup>173</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>174</sup> J. Slovo, 'Negotiations: What Room for Compromise?', *African Communist*, 3<sup>rd</sup> quarter, 1992, 37.

<sup>175</sup> Pdraig O'Malley, interview with Harry Gwala, 8 January 1993.

<sup>176</sup> H. Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo: A Response', *African Communist*, 4<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>177</sup> 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.'<sup>178</sup>

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.<sup>179</sup> 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.<sup>180</sup> 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.'<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> H. Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo: A Response', *African Communist*, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, 1992, 28.

<sup>178</sup> H. Gwala, 'Negotiations as Presented by Joe Slovo: A Response', *African Communist*, 4<sup>th</sup> quarter, 1992, 28.

<sup>179</sup> Video interview with Gwala, unrecognised interviewer, UWC-RIM Mayibuye Archives, INTV EP 1 & 5.

<sup>180</sup> L. Kaunda, 'Midlands ANC says no to power sharing', *The Natal Witness*, 16 March 1993, 1.

<sup>181</sup> 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.<sup>182</sup> 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'.<sup>183</sup> 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.<sup>184</sup>

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'.<sup>185</sup> 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.<sup>186</sup> 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'.<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> L. Kaunda, 'Gwala wants to step down', *The Natal Witness*, 31 March 1993, 2.

<sup>183</sup> Political reporter, 'Gwala, don't go - Haswell', *The Natal Witness*, 1 April 1993, 3.

<sup>184</sup> Political reporter, 'Gwala, don't go - Haswell', *The Natal Witness*, 1 April 1993, 3.

<sup>185</sup> L. Kaunda, 'Let's end the war, Gwala tells IFP', *The Natal Witness*, 17 March 1993, 1.

<sup>186</sup> Witness reporter, 'Gwala called on boys and girls to take shooting lessons', *The Natal Witness*, 18 May 1993, 5.

<sup>187</sup> 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.<sup>188</sup>

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.'<sup>189</sup> 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.<sup>190</sup> 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

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<sup>188</sup> SASSA, declassified report of the African National Congress: National Working Committee, 24 March 1993.

<sup>189</sup> SASSA, declassified report of the African National Congress: National Working Committee, 24 March 1993.

<sup>190</sup> 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.<sup>191</sup>

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.<sup>192</sup> 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.<sup>193</sup>

### **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.<sup>194</sup> 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.<sup>195</sup> 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

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<sup>191</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with a person who wished to remain anonymous.

<sup>192</sup> SASSA, declassified intelligence report on Harry Gwala, undated.

<sup>193</sup> SASSA, declassified intelligence report on Harry Gwala, undated.

<sup>194</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>195</sup> 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.<sup>196</sup> 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.’<sup>197</sup>

By 1993, Gwala was under tremendous political pressure and impending isolation from both national and regional leadership of the ANC and the Communist Party.<sup>198</sup> 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.<sup>199</sup> 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.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>196</sup> Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>197</sup> Ruth Lundie interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>198</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Mr X.

<sup>199</sup> 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.

<sup>200</sup> 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.<sup>201</sup> 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.<sup>202</sup>

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.<sup>203</sup> 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.<sup>204</sup> 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.<sup>205</sup> 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

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<sup>201</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>202</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Cassius Lubisi.

<sup>203</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>204</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.

<sup>205</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Lindiwe Gwala.



Pietermaritzburg's Midlands Medical Centre the following Monday, 12 June.<sup>206</sup> 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.'<sup>207</sup> 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.<sup>208</sup> 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.<sup>209</sup>

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.<sup>210</sup> Nzimande asserted that he

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<sup>206</sup> P. Naidoo, 'Gwala was shattered', *The Natal Witness*, 25 June 1995, 7.

<sup>207</sup> Mercury reporter, 'Tributes pour in after Gwala's death', *The Natal Mercury*, 21 June 1995, 4.

<sup>208</sup> Minutes of the Proceedings of Senate (National Council of Provinces), No. 40-1995, Second Session, First Parliament, 21 June 1995.

<sup>209</sup> 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.

<sup>210</sup> '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 of impunity within which Gwala continued to operate.<sup>211</sup>

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.<sup>212</sup>

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.'<sup>213</sup>

## 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

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<sup>211</sup> Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Vol. 3, 1998, 214-215.

<sup>212</sup> Mxolisi Dlamuka interview with Robert Haswell.

<sup>213</sup> '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.<sup>1</sup>

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

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<sup>1</sup> 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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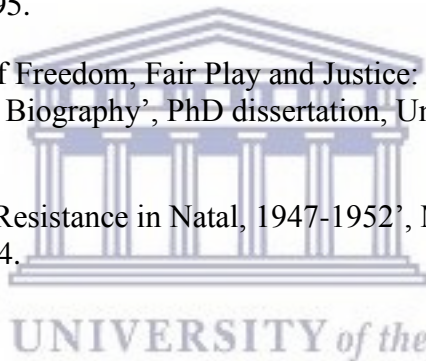
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