

BEING FREEDOM FIGHTERS

The autobiography of
Morena Motaung



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*Dedicated to all my family and fellow comrades,
remembering those who passed away through struggle and
sickness and those reported missing but never found
during those dark days.*

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Prologue

I'm Morena Ashraf Motaung, born on 7 January 1976. I'm my parents' last surviving child, all my siblings having passed on. Married to Cynthia Nompumelelo Motaung, I know that in His safe hands Allah knew the purpose of my life even before I was born. Even though sometimes I do miss my brothers and sisters, I feel good that my creator and your creator has never forsaken me in times of need.

When I went through the history of South Africa and learnt politics, I was interested and keen to know more. It was from these stories of history, told by elders in my family and from what I learnt from my liberation movement, that I began my political activity. As a child at primary school in Katlehong and much later as an adult learner in prison, I took history and politics lessons. From these stories I learnt how masses of people, even from centuries ago, gained their freedom.

These great stories taught me that the Prophet, kings and political leaders all pass through struggles to liberate people from doing mischief, all trying to correct the minds of humankind not to do works of evil and to do good instead. Only in this way can people live free in their own lands. We have our political and spiritual leaders, and we try to respect and live according to what they are teaching and doing. But not all of us will see the truth. Only a little group sees this truth.

The African National Congress (ANC) is the oldest political party in Africa. Its early leaders were influenced by African kings and spiritual leaders who made sure that the organisation received the blessings from the Almighty. There is now no priest in the ANC 'Top Six'. I think they need such spiritual leaders there. Now, even most opposition African political leaders also originated in the ANC. But we see in our current

politics that most of these leaders have forgotten the spiritual powers which guided liberation politics.

Nowadays, most ANC leaders have forgotten where they come from. The ANC was never leading itself; it's the people's organisation leading communities that loved and respected it, making sure that it served them. ANC leaders used to be chosen on merit, not out of greed. Today's ANC members don't respect the community they claim to serve. We, as members of the ANC, need to use ANC resolutions as the basis to cleanse our organisation.

I started this book in 1998 and then continued remembering and writing from 2016 up until 2021. My purpose has always been to make it easy for all of us to understand our history and its deeper spiritual meanings. Sadly, many of the people I write about passed away without relating their stories. In this story I am remembering my experiences; what I did, witnessed, was involved in and things which happened to me. Relating the story based on true facts is difficult. Some information will remain untold because it is still secret and sensitive. It would be a mess if I told of these matters. Some things I will never go into detail about because there are things that need to be protected until I die. To be a soldier is not about yourself but the fellow members who have to be protected too.

From when we were children our elders told of traditions, of where we came from and stories of our great-grandparents and their families. We have kids who also need to know where their parents come from. But old people can keep secrets and no one knows, but themselves. I did try to find out about my mother and her family. I found that there are many things which can't be said, and some hearsay of which there is no proof.

I was raised by a lady called Anna Seipati Lehong or as she was called, Masipati. I still don't know if she is still alive or died and was properly buried. I'm scared to find out. Something is keeping me far from knowing the truth. Masipati was my brother's and sister's and my foster mother. We were raised by this giant of a lady. She has done wonders for us, some of which we didn't understand at the time. I called her Mme. She was loving and caring. There were times I needed to talk to Mme, but she was nowhere to be found. This means that issues of mine are unresolved for now, and it's disturbing to be in such a situation.

I have now come to know of many things which I did not know about previously. I have visited my father's younger brother who told me some of the things I didn't know about my father and mother and how they

met. When I enquired, I found that my mother was not traditionally washed by my family when she passed away. So I asked my now late uncle, Mbuti Masiteng, who arranged a ceremony for me, even though he was not in good health.

In the name of Allah Almighty, the most gracious, the most merciful,
This is my story.

Acknowledgements

I thank my family and all the people who stood by me and supported me during hard times. Firstly, thank you to my wife, Mrs Cynthia Nompumelelo Motaung, and Ms Trinity Mokoana. Thank you to my MK family who made me a disciplined soldier of the movement, and to comrade Oli Mohapo and his media office comrades at Luthuli House, who linked me up with the Department of Military Veterans. There I met Mr Mathole, Mrs Masupye and Dr Cyril Adonis from the Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC). They never let me relax, pushing me all the time. Thank you. Finally, thank you to my editor ‘General’ Dr Iain Edwards, who listened to me; he heard me, and polished my manuscript up to be the credible memoir it is.

Morena Motaung

22 February 2022

CHAPTER 1

Growing up: 1976–1994

Family matters

In early 2019 we, the Bataung family, were invited to the Kaizer Chiefs Village at Naturena by our Ntate Moholo Kaizer Motaung, the famous football player and founder and chairman of Kaizer Chiefs football club. We met and introduced ourselves. We are a big family. Morena Hlalele, the founder of the Bataung, had four wives and four sons: Halalele, Moletsane, Ramokgele and Sefatsa. This is why this *ya Hlalele Bataung* family is now so big.

Morena Hlalele was originally from Taung in the north-west part of South Africa. In the early nineteenth century this was lion country. Chief Hlalele hunted them for meat and clothing, so he was called *Tau ya Rora*, the Growling Lion. But while he was chief, trouble started. The trekboers had arrived, war began, and so Hlalele was forced to leave their birth land. He took his people south, settling into what is now the south-eastern Free State and the bordering mountains of Lesotho.

Then no one was living there. But it was a tumultuous time. This was the time of the Difaqane, Nongqawuse and the Xhosa cattle killing, and the arrival of the trekboers. Groups of wandering people, from all directions, began settling in the area. Running for safety, they found Chief Hlalele staying in the mountains. He offered them shelter and protection. Hlalele and his people spoke Setswana, a sound-alike of Sesotho. Soon there was a mixing of different languages and a new dialect of Sesotho developed. But there was much intrigue and plotting, even to kill Hlalele. And then war broke out between the Boers and Moshoeshoe, who rose to become king of his people. After Hlalele died his sons continued to live and lead their communities. Now they

were not under any king. Since they were living in the Boer Free State Republic, they became known as Basotho ba Free State. They continued to live there even during the Anglo Boer War of 1899 to 1902. This is the history of the Bataung and it remains that we are the Motaung family.

At the Kaizer Chiefs Village I represented the big Hlalele, speaking on behalf of all of us. It was a great day. I met my cousins, the Motaung brothers and sister, and Granny Mme MaMotaung. She welcomed us and gave us Ntate's apology for being absent. We'd waited for the old man but unfortunately he was caught up in a business meeting which ran late. As Bataung, we meet every year in January, bringing along our wives and kids. But in 2020 and 2021 this couldn't happen due to the Covid-19 pandemic. There is now a new generation of Bataung, led by our only Ntate Maru a Tau, Hector Motaung and our aunt Elizabeth Motaung.

I have a daughter, Lebone Khadija Mokoena, born on 2 January 2000, from my first wife, Virginia Nthabiseng Mokoena, who passed away in 2003. I'm now in a customary marriage to Cynthia Nompumelelo Motaung (née Sibeko). Together we have four children, two girls and two boys, all of whom are staying with us.

My family's direct lineage goes back to my grandmother, Sophie Madiema Motaung. She is from the Masiteng family and was married to Jan Sakhetoa Motaung. She gave birth to Hertzog Motaung. He became the leader of Bataung after our grandfather passed away in 1988. Since that time, he has stood firm, trying to ensure that our family stuck together. Within the family, people were blaming others for so many things that happened and it affected the family badly. There was no peace. Even when I was a child, we had members of the Masiteng family living under the same roof as my mother and father at 170 Masakhane Street, Monaheng Section in Katlehong.

It was Hertzog Motaung who tried to make us understand the importance of family. He was so down to earth. He was hurt by many of the things that were happening. He put these pains behind, carrying the family in his warm embrace. He was a door watcher at the Nederduitse Gereformeerde Kerk (NGK) Sendingskerk, the NGK church for Africans, to which all of our family belonged. I learnt so many things from him. At home we couldn't eat without first praying. Now my own children know how to pray too. His wish was to see the family united and at peace. Ntate represented me in court the day I was sentenced. When I became a Muslim, he didn't understand why but he allowed

me to choose. When my parents couldn't pay the loan on our house, which they'd extended, Ntate helped pay with money from his taxi. He protected the house when I was in prison, keeping the papers for the house after the government scrapped rentals for ownership. It was he who stopped neighbours from claiming the house for themselves. When I was released from prison he gave me the papers, telling me to keep them very safe. Now it's in my name. There was a lot of bad blood amongst my aunts and cousins about this. It was war. Ntate passed away with a sore heart. To this day the family is scattered.

Childhood memories

I am the last-born son of the late Simon Matala Motaung. While we honour our family ties, my own family background is complicated. My father didn't stay with us when I was a child. One day in the early 1980s he came home while I was outside playing. Next to him was another guy from Mamelodi, but of the family of Letsoalo who lived the next street from my home. When my father came home, he was always with this guy, known as Sun Sein because he was a kung fu black belt. When I saw him that day it was the first time I saw him in South African Defence Force (SADF) army browns and carrying a long gun, an R1 rifle. Father called me. He said he was going back to work, now in Matubatuba in KwaZulu, and that he will see me again. I must promise him I will not worry as he will always come and see me. I promised and I was given money, which I gave to my mother. Whenever they came to visit, after they left my mother they would go and talk to Manie Letsoalo. They both knew something. After talking my mother seemed at ease. But when my father was angry he would beat the hell out of us, even Mamoya. She was beaten up, and I know my father. I thought maybe he wasn't my father at all. That was my father, but he was a humble man.

My mother

My mother's mother and her husband lived in Katlehong and had nine children. My mother is Elsie Mamoya Masiteng. She and my father married sometime in the 1950s. We children are Thabo Marcus, Oupa, Jerminah, Mohau and me. From what I know my mother had a hard life. Living with my father could not have been easy. Mamoya was a hard-working mother to all of us. She worked as a teller at Checkers in

the Primrose side of Germiston, where she was retrenched. Then she worked at Knights, a paint manufacturing company.

She was a lovely mother and when she came home she would do what a mother needs to do. I remember every month she used to send me to buy her train ticket from our station, Lindela. I always asked for 'Lindela to Knights'. She was very active in the Bataung Burial Society, which still exists, and a stokvel and our Sendingskerk choir. She was so close to Ausi Tshidi, a child of my mother's elder sister, whom she let come and stay in our home. She also took in Nthabiseng, the child of my father's younger brother. She made the curtains in our house and had a small business baking fish, which she sold from the roadside. I would always be at her side helping. She loved herself and tried hard to make sure we children dressed nicely and had what we needed.

Marcus

Our family lost my elder brother Thabo Marcus in the 1970s. The family gave up looking for him. They knew he'd become an Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) cadre, going for months without coming home. I remember seeing him once, when I was little. He came home with this guy called Jerry. As he was washing dishes, he talked for a long time with my brother Mohau. I was too young to understand. I was told that Jerry was looking after him. I remember Mohau and our sister Jerminah both crying that day. They called him *Baba*. My father was at home but I don't recall the two of them talking.

Later all became clearer. Father was an official of the Katlehong Community Council. Politically he and our brother didn't see eye to eye. I think my father chased him away. I never saw my brother again. Later, Jerry became my mentor. I looked up to him, wanting to be like him. It was only in around 2009 or 2010 that I found out that my brother was one of the Moroka Three hanged in Pretoria Central in 1983.

Soon after the 1976 Soweto student revolt, Marcus fled to Swaziland as he was being sought by the police. He joined MK and was trained in Angola. He returned in 1979 as a cadre in the G5 Unit commanded by Solly Shoke, who much later became the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) Chief of Staff. The unit was responsible for setting up bases and hideouts for more cadres to be infiltrated into the country. Sometime in that year, he and Nicky Sangele and Thelle Mogoerane entered the Moroka Police Station and opened fire on police

officers. Then they attacked the Orlando Police Station. Two policemen were badly wounded and died later. They also attacked the Wonderboom Police Station in Pretoria, killing four policemen, and the police station in Kliptown. The cadres then went into hiding but the police tracked them down and they were arrested. Marcus was badly wounded during the arrest. They went to trial and were executed in June 1983. Much later President Zuma presided over the ceremony at Mamelodi Cemetery to honour him and unveil a tombstone over his grave. I can only imagine the anguish and trauma my parents and brothers and sister went through when I was just little.

Masipati

While my parents were working, they found us a foster mother, Anna Seipati Lehong, who was married to Albert Lehong. They stayed at 16 Binas Street, Motsamai Section, Katlehong. We called her Masipati. She was from Bloemfontein. I was then at the Leratong crèche in Tshwongwene Section next to Katlehong station. After crèche I stayed with Masipati at her home where she took care of Jerminah, Oupa, Mohau and me. Later after work one of our parents would fetch us.

Masipati loved Mohau with all her heart. Me, I was so quiet, they didn't understand me at home. Even my father. But Mm was Mm to us and she would do what she had to do. When I was fighting in the street, no one could make me stop fighting until they called her; she would call me once and I would end the fight. She played her role in our lives until we reached the stage to understand she was not our mother due to family politics and mistrust.

My mother died in 1988 while working at Knights. She had been sick for some while. I'm not sure of the cause of her death, but maybe it was from the paint chemicals. After she passed away, that's when all of them took their separate ways. I was left with my brother Mohau and our sister Jerminah and our father. I was so close to my mother and I knew that life would never be the same anymore. Our father was dating someone else. And a father will never treat you like your mother does.

My father took me to Ausi Ntshana at Mopedi Section where he was renting a room for her. She was his girlfriend. She was a domestic worker. He told me that if I wanted anything, I would get it from her. But it was not the same as having my mother. Sometimes when I went there on my way to school or after school, she wasn't there.

And Masipati was being called a witch by her husband. One day she found all her belongings thrown on the roadside outside their house. So my father took her in and she carried on looking after us. Her husband later sold the house. We lived with Masipati in our house until 1998, just when my sister passed away. There was lots of mistrust at home. Masipati and my sister quarrelled, with her accusing Masipati of bewitching her with tokoloshe. The day after one of these quarrels, Jerminah died. Masipati soon left, going back to her family in Bloemfontein.

Now that we are in the time of the Covid-19 pandemic I have thought back to all the stories about witches and tokoloshe when I was young. I wonder whether, with all those traditional beliefs about HIV/Aids, this had something to do with these stories of witches and evil spirits.

Jerminah

This sister of mine took responsibility for looking after me after my mother died. She'd set her mind on becoming a hairdresser and had attended a hair school in Germiston where she'd learnt to perm and do other styles. She'd opened her own salon where she'd do women's and men's hair. My sister was the only rose among us four boys. I liked being with her, and she'd do my hair for free. She was secure in herself, but to be honest, she was a hustler.

She was lucky in marriage. She met Percy Sebati, who was originally from Lesotho but who stayed with another lady, also from Lesotho, in the Phooko area of Katlehong. Percy and Jerminah would spend time together at Motsamai, where their first born, Tshepo, was born. But she was always fighting to keep her man for herself. Later she met Mario, a shoemaker from Mozambique. His business was doing very well. Every three months he'd take his hand-crafted work back to sell while visiting home. Jerminah and Mario ended up living together at Motsamai after she'd left Percy. But they were always fighting. I couldn't take sides. Mario was a father figure to me. He looked after me and my sister's kids, making sure we ate, that we dressed properly and went to school.

The most confusing thing for me was that while my sister was fighting with Percy and Mario, she was also visiting another old man at Moshoeshoe Section in Katlehong. She'd go and visit him for the day and return to Mario in the evening. I realised the old man was just in the picture for money. Sometimes I was sent to him to collect money. I still don't know who her son Mooya's father is. But I do know that Percy was

Mamoya's father, although Percy always denied it. Mario raised those kids like his own. I just relaxed, working hard in all my political and criminal activities. These kids, especially Malefu, knew all about me, especially the white box in the garage where I hid my guns.

Father and son

As a youngster, a little boy, I was frightened. Where is my mother, how am I going to eat today? You start panicking and getting angry and desperate. But being angry taught me important lessons. I could never again be a cry baby. I had to grow up quickly.

In around 1989 my father returned home. He had left the Community Council and had his own taxi. He and I shared a bedroom at home. We became close. He was like an elder brother. The first time I saw him crying was when his friend Bra Joe was killed. I could see he wasn't happy. I asked and he told me it was taxi issues. 'Son, don't be part of this industry. Your death is near you every day.' We went to bury his friend. My father was heartbroken. Later he asked me organise a gun for him. I did, getting my first gun, a Browning 9mm 'short nine', which he carried every day.

In early 1990 my father and his new girlfriend Pinkie got a stand in Zonkizizwe Extension 2 in Katlehong and he left us with our sister. Zonkizizwe had just opened. People were allowed to cut land for themselves and build a place to stay. Most of the people who were part of the taxi violence took refuge there. It was the only place where they could start again. Then in 1991 when Zulus and Xhosas were fighting my father and Pinkie abandoned their stand and he brought her to live at our home. It was a big mistake. I came in on behalf of my siblings. I said a lot of angry things, telling him that if he forced Pinkie to stay in our mother's house, I would definitely kill him. The next day he beat the hell out of my friend Malaza and me. Then he reported me to his brother and his family hated me from that day on. Ntate was the only one who didn't, advising my father to get a place of his own, which he did.

Schoolboy

My world opened up when I went to Morojaneng Primary School. Before I went, there had already been one school student protest, in 1984. While I was in Sub A (Grade 1) in 1985 there was a second uprising, leading

to a third in 1986. Students' and residents' associations organised this one in response to comrade Mac Maharaj's call to make South Africa ungovernable.¹ There were boycotts of white-owned companies, rent boycotts, and communities began fighting against poor services which they could not afford.

We saw that our elder bothers were throwing stones at the vans the white men were driving into the location, delivering things. These guys were wearing leather shoes that had soles made from car tyres. They were a fashion style called David Grammer shoes. We nicknamed them 'special branches'. If you wore 'special branches', we knew you were a comrade.

In 1987 we took the initiative to force the Department of Education to scrap the school uniform policy which forced us to wear short trousers, even in the cold Highveld winters. Even then there were already tracksuits in the shops. We won.

At that time our principal was Mme Matlala and she was succeeded by her deputy, Mrs Dikgale. Mrs Motaung taught us Afrikaans. She taught us to recite 'Moskito Jag' (literally, mosquito hunt), a poem by the Afrikaans poet AD Keet.² We always enjoyed that poem. We enjoyed our Afrikaans classes. The language is not difficult and she taught us well. The problem was that it was the language of the oppressor. The June 1976 students had taught us that. But as with Sotho and Zulu, which were the main languages in Katlehong, many people could also speak Afrikaans.

My mathematics teacher was Mrs Makoa. She was also my class teacher in standards 4 and 5. She used a *lesokoana*, a strong wooden stirring spoon, to beat us. We were scared of her. But she was my second mother. She made sure I survived my family difficulties. Often I had no money for lunch, so she provided me with a lunch box until I went to secondary school. And I could talk to her about things that were confusing to me.

This was the time I started making friends. Some of my friends were doing good things and others I knew were naughty. I began falling in with the naughty boys. Some left school early without finishing. I learnt many things with them, like staffriding and playing tennis on the carriage roof of moving trains. Thabo Goyane was my inspiration. One day in the winter of 1989 our teacher told Thabo and me to go and buy her a cold drink from one of the shops in the houses nearby. There were some *machikoko* (East Rand municipal policemen) sleeping on chairs outside. There was a rifle hanging from a branch near them. While

Thabo bought the drink, I took the gun and we went off. We hid the gun and gave our teacher her drink. Later we took our staffriding gang to the ash dumping site at Moloreng to test the gun. It worked. Afterwards we sat around smoking *maqhashqhash* (wild herbs). That is when our friendship became strong. Thabo took the gun with him.

The following Monday, Setjhaba was caught smoking in the boys' toilet. He had taught me to smoke Kent cigarettes, which I enjoyed as the ice coolness goes into your lungs. The teachers started rounding up the smokers, along with Setjhaba. A teacher pointed to me and said, 'Not him, he does not smoke.' All the teachers came to beat them like hell.

After lunch break the teachers would not give classes. They would be preparing lessons or marking our homework. We would sit in the classroom in groups doing our homework. Afterwards there was plenty of action in the township. And there were networks, through my cousin.

I joined Stefane washing taxis at the old Natalspuit Hospital rank. There were three of us and we got R15 to wash a taxi. This was good money. I was able to provide for the household. It meant a lot to me. There was an old man, Mr Msonto, from Mpumalanga, who was a tenant two houses from me. He sold traditional clothes at the rank. After I'm done washing the taxi I'd help him out. Even my father didn't have a problem with this. Then there was Lenkie who polished shoes and smoked Benzine. I took it, but it was so bad. I was at home in the kitchen and as I looked at a carton of eggs all I saw was a soccer game between Chiefs and Pirates. I was hallucinating.

I was the only one in the family to bring in the money to look after the kids. And Malefu was in on my secrets and she wouldn't tell anybody. It was just the two of us, her and me.

I also used to help Doctor Makgasane, who was my homeboy but older than me, who was selling fruits near Makula Section. I would keep his stall while he went off in the afternoon with my elder brother, Nkosana, Ife, Pakistan, Mojalefa, Patrick, Thabo and others. Later he'd come back, bringing me food and taking the money I'd made. I didn't know until later that they were stealing cars and Thabo was robbing people. They were thugs. And they were known. They all had guns. I asked them where they got them from. They told me that I had shown them how to steal someone's gun. They started to disarm the *machikokos* in our area.

Some of my friends started a gang called the Sunday Four. We would play under the trees in the church yard. Mogibe, the pastor, didn't like us there and we'd have to run away if he spotted us. He thought we were stealing fruit. We were.

Staffriding

This was our test of bravery. Many of my friends died in the line of staffriding. I was so shocked the first time I saw a friend dying in front of me. Others fell from the carriages and the iron wheels butchered their arms and legs. Just the trauma of that moment can kill your heart.

Every day our group used to gather at around seven-thirty in the evening at our respective stations. We'd climb on the last train and meet at the last station, Khwesini in Ramokonopi West. We'd go to the last coach and then begin, sometimes going all the way to Wadeville or Germiston. Each of us knew exactly what we had to do. It was so dangerous at that high speed. There was plenty of action. Holding the rails between two carriages and swinging your legs out at speed, balancing on the roof and ducking the electricity lines, catching trains going at full speed, or jumping off trains as they came into stations and running off. And you did this together with your gang.

The last time I did staffriding was in 1995 just before I went into the South African Police Service (SAPS) integration course. My father had found out that I was doing this, and I found him there at Lindela Station waiting for me. He told me I'm now an adult and I had to behave like one. I quit. But actually, I hadn't done it for quite some while. I'm still not sure why I went out for that last ride before integration.

Sportsman

Most of my group of friends stayed in Mopedi or the surrounding sections in Katlehong. Our sports were soccer, staffriding and sometimes also roller skates and softball, which was the same as the *dibeke* we used to play when the schools closed for the day. This is what kept us active and together. Our soccer team was the Pups Football Club and our home ground was the Potsoto Ground in Mopedi Section. We were in the Chappies Little League, along with teams from Germiston Callies, Katlehong Callies, Katlehong Chiefs, Katlehong Young Pirates, Makula Sundowns, Old Nations and Skheshe Football Club. I learnt to roller-skate with guys at Monaheng Section. My friend Thumi taught me roller skating. It is exciting, but you need to be quick and fast.

After I left soccer, I joined the Tiggers Athletic Team. My brother's friend Sapole recruited me and most of the youth I grew up with

went along with me. I quickly realised the secret to my speed was my staffriding experience. But I came to prefer running, to be alone on the track and far from the things my friends were doing.

Our hero and inspiration was Michael Mpotwane, who we'd try spot on television running the Comrades Marathon. Lucky Star was his sponsor. His father worked at the Germiston Stadium where we usually went to practise track running.

Into exile

In 1989 my brother Mohau and his friend Mabago left the country for military training in Tanzania. They were away for around six months, and then returned as underground MK cadres. At the same time many of the most politically active students were recruited to go into exile and be trained as soldiers. Only much later, during the integration processes, did we meet up with some of these guys. They had sorry stories to tell. Some had disappeared en route. Others had troubles in the camps, and wanted to come home, but couldn't. And in the transit camps they were trained for guerrilla warfare, which they had not expected. I had been asked to leave. But it was comrade Buddy who discouraged me, saying that it's better to go to school for training than Uganda. 'Our war is not outside the country, it is inside,' he told me.

Armed

Plenty of people in the location had guns. We worked out the tactics needed to disarm someone and take their gun away. It needs teamwork. Sometimes it's a pistol or a revolver or a *qwasha* (homemade firearm). We recruited older, stronger guys from the Lindela Hostel in Motsamai Section. We trained them. We waited to meet them hiding in the veld on the other side of the small fence at the end of Akanyang Primary School. That is how my elders got guns. They were gangsters but MK cadres too. Sebanki Marumo was part of them. His 38 Special came from disarming someone in this way. My 9mm Baby Browning and my first pump gun came to me this way too. But the problem was that the hostel guys were disarming men from the other hostel, so we went our separate ways.

Amajoni Cultural Group

In 1989 I was recruited by Isaac Mokoena, comrade Mzeke to us, to be part of the Amajoni Cultural Group. He told me that nothing will bring freedom unless we fight for it ourselves. Amajoni is an old word from the Eastern Cape meaning soldiers. I had to dedicate my life to liberation. I was accepted as part of the group. It was very emotional.

We met at the Katlehong Arts Centre in Phooka Section. We practised our songs there and discussed our future activities. We sang at many events. But we were more political than social, and singing was our cover. We agreed that we had to keep together, and that any differences or difficulties would go to a disciplinary committee within ourselves. No one was allowed to report anything to outside people.

One of my elder comrades, comrade Motlalentwa, forced me to lend him my pump gun. He refused to tell me why and the next day he was found shot dead. I asked my father to come with me to the night vigil and I told him all about the group. He was very worried and went away. After the funeral I explained all this to my group leader. From the group my firm buddies became comrades Sugar, Bazuka, King Caruza, Mbambeni and Oupa Kilot. And comrade Monkie was Mohau's friend. Monkie became my mentor in the school Student Representative Council (SRC) and Congress of South African Students (COSAS) politics. In the group was also comrade Tei. He said I was too young. He was instructed to monitor me. He said he could see that I was not into girls, so he taught me how to propose to a girl.

It was comrade Malaza who encouraged me, and became my lifetime buddy. He made me chairperson of the Young Lions or Young Pioneers, the South African Communist Party (SACP) Youth League. It was because of the Amajoni Cultural Group and how my life changed from then onwards that I left my naughty group. They were now doing wrong things and my comrades had taken a decision to fight crime in the township. And they knew drastic action was needed. I saw quite a few naughty people burned alive. People were frightened and would talk quietly about the Kentucky Fries.

Mr Manana, an artist, stage actor and singer, and comrade Chalicks were our cultural instructors. I later found out that comrade Chalicks' real name was Johannes Ramaisa. Chalicks had a group of young boys and girls he was training to sing. One day I arrived early for our Amajoni meeting and Chalicks said I should join in. There I met this

most beautiful girl, Dieketseng Thulo, and her elder sisters, Disebo and Manini. Everyone called her Enkie. We became sweethearts. With my newly learnt skills, I proposed to her. But the skills didn't work. My problem was that I was so rough.

Joe Slovo High

In early 1990 I went to Mpontsheng Secondary School. We called it Joe Slovo High. Here I met different comrades. Most of us were very politically minded. We saw ourselves as being a branch of the African National Congress Youth League (ANCYL). I was just sorry that Mohau, who had just left for Tanzania, thought our youth politics immature. And I thought I was following in his footsteps. But, at the school one of the teachers, Danies Moloba, who was a leading figure in the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), taught us important principles about youth politics. He spoke of taking responsibility, thinking through decisions and how to speak and reason.

Our first task in that year was to go and recover the school furniture, which had been stolen during the holidays. Our desks and chairs were gone. Our school was between the Hlongwane and Ndlanzi Sections and gangsterism was rife in this area. So, thinking as Moloba had taught us, we went searching through all the neighbouring houses, beating gangsters up and taking back our furniture. After that we had a big problem from the gangsters who tried to beat us up on the way from school. So we began to discuss these issues with the other secondary schools and we developed warning signals so that we all knew when gangsters were around.

As COSAS we decided to establish our military base at the Dukathole Primary School at Monaheng. We used to stay there overnight at weekends, all gathered around a big fire, singing revolutionary songs and discussing pressing matters. And we'd send out night patrols to police the community and clear the areas of gangsters. We'd smear our faces with shoe polish as camouflage. When you woke up the next morning your whole face was just a big smudge. This was how we developed our ideas of how to operate street committees.

At the time my father was still supporting the Community Council people. This soon became a real problem. One of our activities as youth was to burn down councillors' houses. One day I came back from school to find my clothes and things thrown out in the street. Other pupils

had the same thing done to them. My father had already seen what had happened. We had been sent a warning.

But the main person who encouraged me was Mzeke. He gave me United Democratic Front (UDF) posters announcing rallies and meetings which we would paste onto lamp poles, walls and electric substation boxes in the section where our school was. For us this section was no longer Ndlanzi Section but Dulcie September Section. And we called our school COSAS group the Vuyisile Mini Unit. That same year, as a COSAS member, I was elected onto our school SRC executive. And, encouraged by Mzeke, we took the initiative. As the leader of the Young Pioneers, I formed the Katlehong Youth League (KYL) with Tshidi Mokoena, my deputy. The KYL later became part of the ANCYL and we chose our own people to be in the executive of the ANCYL in Katlehong.

On the East Rand the youth learnt to stand up for themselves and make themselves men. We were angry, and we wanted to fight. Our parents were giving us very little. Emotionally I didn't have parents, and we were desperate. That was why we threw ourselves into fighting the system, went into exile as teenagers, and became young freedom fighters. But because of this many of us didn't finish school, died or disappeared or ended up in jail. We were leaderless, so we formed the KYL, taking the name from the ANCYL, but without a single hardline political ideology.

The other important influence on me was comrade Steven Kwahela, a Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU) member and teacher at another secondary school. Since primary school I was in the Cubs and then Boy Scouts and he was our Scout Master. An elder in the location, he was so patient with us. It was through him that we gained experience of hiking, map reading, setting up camp in the veld and bushes, sleeping under the stars, and keeping night watch over our camp. And what Steve called bush craft. We learnt a lot. Sadly, during the violence of the 1990s we lost Steve. He just disappeared and no one knows how or why.

February 1990

At that time the biggest talking point was the unbanning of the liberation movements and the release of Nelson Mandela and all the other political prisoners. These issues were widely discussed, including secretly within our structures. Looking back, I am very clear on my

position. We were very happy when Mandela was released. I thought it would bring freedom nearer. But when they started the Convention for a Democratic South Africa (CODESA) negotiations, that is not what we thought would happen. They were making sacrifices. Mandela was compromising us. And we watched how Winnie was sidelined. She was the person who knew how much we sacrificed, every day. And we soldiers expected preferential treatment. Soldiers want the trophy for winning, and we were not receiving it. One flag did not come down and another raised. We heard of people sitting down and discussing things we never thought would be discussed. To be honest, in February 1990 I was expecting the full transfer of power without any conditions, and that it was our task to make this happen.

But what February 1990 did do was to make it easier for us to associate with each other. We could meet each other in the open. But it never changed what we had long been doing.

Katlehong youth in February 1990

By 1990 we youth had a culture that we knew was battle-proven. Every Sunday afternoon we met at a place we called Somafo (Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College). Anyone who was politically directed could attend – Pan Africanist Congress (PAC), Azanian People’s Organisation (AZAPO) and everybody. And this is why. We did not just discuss issues; we would also work out what plan we needed to implement decisions. So, take the Harare Declaration. For us it could not just be a resolution. When 16 of us were arrested we applied the Harare Declaration by doing things to force them to release us. If you want to negotiate with us, then you release us first. And that is how, by issue and action, we developed a way of implementing the ‘Make South Africa ungovernable’ resolution.

We had learnt these things from the unions, which were very strong in our townships. When they found out we were sleeping in the classrooms at night without food, they came and helped us with food and blankets and we formed alliances with them. My mother was supportive and also her sister, who was in a union. She’d come home and talk to my mother. My father tried to understand. I told him this is for all of us, even for you.

And some of our teachers were there for us. Like Isaac, who introduced me to politics. They taught us how to reason and explain and to present ourselves to others and we chose our leaders from those

who were good at presenting matters at meetings. Attendance at our meetings was regarded as very important. We would all have to meet at a certain place at a certain time. You could never come late because from that meeting place you were told where to go for the meeting. We gave ourselves names and titles. Some names were ‘chairman’ and ‘secretary’. And we’d abbreviate names, so Thomas becomes Tom and others are nicknames and combat names. Isaac was Mzeke, which means ‘someone who is everywhere’. There was King Caruzo. Victor was Sir Vic. So when the police came looking for Sir Vic it becomes confusing. They can’t find him. Then they became smart and started taking photographs all the time. So in all the marches, you could see them on the Casspir taking photos of us. So during the days we tried hiding ourselves. Soon it became known that I was called the Little General. But many didn’t know why.

‘Release our leaders’ march

Just after February 1990 we as the Kathorus COSAS decided to press our advantage with a programme of action demanding the release of all political prisoners, including our own comrades. As we were marching to the Department of Education in Alrode, the police stopped us in Phooko Section near the Keketso Primary School, giving us five minutes to disperse. We stopped and sang revolutionary songs and they shot teargas and rubber bullets at us. We scattered in all directions, leaving some wounded on the road. They didn’t know what awaited them. As we had planned, we went to our local MK commander asking for stones of steel – the F-1 grenade. He eventually agreed and about 25 of us got trained to use these stones of steel.

The next time we planned our march differently, dividing ourselves into two groups. As one group reached Peter Nchabeleng Secondary School, which was our name for the Lethukuthula Secondary School, the aim was to disrupt classes. The police were following in Casspirs. The other group went to Thokoza, also to disrupt classes.

The police came at one group with teargas and the students dispersed, some passing through Mandela squatter camp and Mpilisweni Station to get to Alrode. At Thokoza the other group confronted the police, who allowed us to pass. Some of us managed to get to the Department of Education and Training (DET), who received our demands which were for the release of all our leaders and free education for all.

As the marchers were returning, passing Mos Motors, the police began firing teargas into the crowds, which scattered everywhere. We decided to split from the crowds and attack without injuring any students. Each of us had two steel stones, and using houses as cover we split into pairs and tracked the police column. Some of us managed to throw our grenades. Those comrades did as they were trained to do, and kept the rings to prove that they'd actually thrown their grenades.

Bambatha Battalion

At around the same time reports came in that the Inkatha Freedom Party (IFP) was training Zulu hostel dwellers in Katlehong as the Bambatha Battalion. First they chased all non-Zulus from the hostels. Then they started attacking Xhosas living in the squatter camps in Katlehong. We accommodated the Xhosas in the location because they were refugees and had nowhere else to stay. But we soon realised that this was not ethnic fighting. The IFP was fighting the ANC. And that was why they were forming an *impi* called the Bambatha Battalion. Soon soldiers from that battalion were attacking and killing local residents all over the location. And we were receiving lots of reports about how the South African Police (SAP) were transporting *impis* across the location and dropping them off at train stations, taxi ranks and shopping centres to launch attacks.

Taxi violence

Taxi feuds were long-standing issues in township life. The founders of the Johannesburg Natalspruit District Taxi Association (JND) are the founders of the South African National Taxi Co-operative (SANTACO), like my father's father. Their taxis are mainly at Park Station rank in Johannesburg and coming from ranks in Germiston. They have always fought against taxis from the Katlehong Taxi Organisation (KATO) taking passengers to Johannesburg or Germiston. And it was a tribal issue as most JND people are from the hostels whereas KATO people are local township residents.

In 1990 a new taxi fight and violence broke out across Kathorus. In Katlehong there were two taxi associations, KATO and JND. For us as students we went with KATO because the owners were our parents and the drivers our neighbours and elder brothers, so they knew what

we wanted. JND belonged to hostel dwellers and other old local people. And JND owners used dirty old taxis with no sound systems. Then the council built a taxi rank next to Hunters Field Stadium – our Elias Motsoaledi Stadium. It was stressful and expensive for the community to pay two taxi fares; once from anywhere in the location to the new rank and again from there to town in Germiston. And JND said it was a one-sided deal because all the nice taxis were KATO ones.

Soon JND taxis were committing drive-by shootings across the township. The fight had become a community one as people were losing their lives and we couldn't get to school properly. Then came Bloody Monday when the JND taxis entered the location early in the morning and were shooting at students. Our parents didn't go to work because they were worried for their children. Then in the afternoon the JND taxis went to the train stations and attacked people coming home from the factories and towns. We reacted by petrol-bombing JND members' houses. I was in an unfortunate position. My father was in JND, but he told me that he never shot anybody. Fortunately, our house was not bombed, but all this violence; the JND drive-by shootings and our bombing affected our parents badly. Nothing like this had happened before and they were very anxious.

It was comrade Mzeke who realised that this was not a fight between taxi owners only. This was a match between community leaders siding with one or the other taxi association. So agreement was reached to form one taxi association, the Katlehong People's Taxi Association. But later in the year everything went back to normal and worse.

COSAS and PASO

Immediately after the taxi violence, the Pan Africanist Students Organisation (PASO) approached us. They said that our statements about the primary significance of the Freedom Charter were sectarian. The Freedom Charter, they told us, was the very reason why comrade Robert Mangaliso Sobukwe decided to move out of the ANC. The PAC was founded because of the Freedom Charter. They accused us of being deceitful, always saying in our Somafo Sunday meetings that it was for the whole community when we were actually pushing ANC lines.

Then violence broke out with PASO members, with Mugabe from Phadima Section leading them. They came to Ahmed Kathrada Secondary School and started shooting with Scorpion carbines, spraying

bullets all over the place. We fought back – as COSAS at school, after school as the ANCYL and at night as MK – and they soon scattered. That Sunday at Somaferco we discussed how to defend learners from getting injured in the crossfire. We attended to discuss PASO members. Some left the location, most going to Kwa Tema where they continued fighting with us and we lost a lot of comrades there, killed by PASO guys.

Abothwebula

Sometime towards the middle of the year comrade Isaac Mzeke came to see me. I was to become an ANC cadre, one of the *abothwebula*. I had proved myself. All was to be done in secret. Mzeke introduced me to Oupa Motaung, who taught Marxist-Leninist theory. I learnt about the means of production, surplus value, the Communist Manifesto and capitalism and imperialism. Oupa then took me to Fifi Bashama, who taught me the history of MK and introduced me to the strategy set out in *The Green Book*. This was something I'd heard about; comrades whispering about this secret plan and how everything we were doing fitted in with this plan. We also listened to Radio Freedom together. There was a marching chant which I've never forgotten: *Ezika mdala zihla emoyeni* (Those who are for Tambo are always roaming on air). And another which sang of soldiers 'bucking like dogs', meaning that one springs, then another does. Then I was transferred to comrade Ngwaza, who was in charge of SACP matters and working-class politics. Then I was transferred to Mbambene, who introduced me to different kinds of weapons. It was here that my boyish fascination with firearms became a professional one. So much so that I am now a qualified Range Marshall. Mbambene taught me to handle, maintain and hide pistols, the AK47, the long-barrelled Zastava G3 – a sniper's AK. I was the only one trained and using the G3. But it was too big for me and my hands were too small. Then Mbambene introduced me to Chalicks, who specialised in explosives. I was trained in limpet mines, the F1 fragmentation grenade; we called it the *granat*, avocado or steel stone. Not the *amapine*. Then I was taken to Bruce whose combat name was King D. He dealt with tactical movements, crawling, physical strength, obstacle crossing, advancing or retreating singly or in a unit, ambushes, patrols, and using terrain to set up observation posts. In our old 1960s location houses we had outside toilets near the back fence. So two back-to-back properties had toilets very close to each other. I learnt how to use these to move

quickly from one street to another, using the toilets as cover. All of these men lived in Katlehong. They were known and considered elders. I had just turned 14.

Formation of SDUs

As I became one of the *abothwebula* there was one pressing issue being discussed in two ways; as matters stood within Katlehong and then across the country. In Katlehong communities were in crisis. This was no hide and seek; it was serious. We had set up street committees so that matters could be resolved without including the SAP. These had been operating well. Residents were donating R20 per house for their street committees to protect them. The money was used to buy weapons and bullets, mostly *qwasha* guns, which were, anyway, rubbish. They could only work at very short ranges for one shot and you couldn't aim them properly. But, since February 1990 people were getting killed in increasing numbers. There was open violence on the streets and at bus and taxi ranks and train stations. Schools were not functioning properly. People were afraid to leave their homes. Families were losing their loved ones. And it was clear to us that this was happening across South Africa. This was not just a Katlehong issue. February 1990 had brought not peace but increasing bloodshed.

So we were very relieved when it was announced that Mandela and Chris Hani had instructed the movement to establish Self-Defence Units (SDUs) across the country. Kapeng Mokoko and comrade Molwedi, an MK commander based in the country, were to lead the central command of the Kathorus SDUs. With Hani in charge of the national operational structure, Ronnie Kasrils was instructed to draw up the overall national strategy, tactics and training programme. All of this was very good news. It meant more support from the SACP and MK. It meant contacts, guidance, training and networks, and supplies of weapons and ammunition. There were to be no more *qwasha* guns.

At the time I remember being struck by some peculiarities about 1990. The ANC in Katlehong was not an organic development. It was becoming powerful because it was being grafted onto existing structures from youth, unions, street committees and civic bodies from the UDF days. What really grew from 1990 onwards was the

force of the ties between the SACP, MK and the newly formed SDUs. This for me was the real meaning of 1990. And Hanani was key to this, and he lived in the East Rand, not far away from us. And there is more too. Ronnie Kasrils came to visit us some time in the middle of 1990. He was setting up the SDUs, but he came as much to learn and listen as to teach and instruct. Kasrils was to write the founding manual for the SDUs, called 'For the sake of our lives'. Much of what is in this wonderful manual we had been doing for a long time within our street committees. We had developed those tactics.

Make South Africa ungovernable

The decision to establish the SDUs and the nature of their envisaged strategy and tactics – not some airy-fairy guerrilla struggle, but township-rooted, street-fighting battles – was a source of much optimism for me. For here, I believed, was the final part of the puzzle that we had grappled with for many years. Here was the plan to make South Africa ungovernable. In late 1991 I was introduced to comrade Vusi Vilakazi. He was the commander of MK operations and units in the East Rand. Vusi was the founder of the Mayibuye Unit. He worked with comrade Robert McBride, moving in and out of the country and arming the SDUs. I was so impressed with him. He later became the bodyguard to Tokyo Sexwale, and died in 1995.

Katlehong Civic Association meets

In July 1990 the Katlehong Civic Association held a crisis meeting to discuss the escalating levels of violence and the affects it was having on our community. Matters had got so bad that there were protest marches about the violence almost every week. Comrades Motloung, Thibile and Sehloho, our executive committee, addressed the meeting. With the encouragement of the Katlehong Civic Association a street committee system was developed, very much like today's Neighborhood Watch system. They were elected respected elders of each street. If you have a complaint you speak to them and they try and resolve the matter. Usually it's small but difficult matters. But there are also big matters too. Like thieving. And for serious perpetrators there were beatings or the necklace.

These street committees also became the organising base for the SACP and MK and they were in place and operating long before 1990.

But before 1990 all of this was operating clandestinely. After February 1990 we could come out and the system operated in the open. When the troubles began it was the KCA who turned the street committees into armed militia or vigilante groups. These then became the SDUs on the East Rand.

When you went out on night patrols you'd be have firearms, battle axes and spears. And you'd be wearing your witdoeke. You would choose a number: '45' and a reply code. It could be '45' or something else. Then you patrol, each one following the other silently using hand signals. If you see another group you will watch them, then when they are close shout '45'. If they don't respond correctly you know they are the enemy. You attack immediately.

ANC Katlehong branch launches

The ANC launched its Katlehong branch in August 1990. The launch was on a Sunday, at the fancy Auditorium in Thokoza. It's the largest venue in the area, with a balcony seating many people. Women from Shell House came with their computers and registered hundreds and hundreds of people, handing out membership cards. They were small folded pieces of card in the ANC colors. Inside was your oath promising to support the goals of the Freedom Charter. You paid R12 membership for the year. I got my Youth League card. At that meeting we sat in our blocks. So the men from their unions came together and sat together. MAWU together here, chemical workers here and so on. And we from the Katlehong Civic Association also sat together. It was not an ANC thing, but it happened. Unfortunately at that time it was not so easy for women to attend; they were scared. School girls would attend mass meetings at Hunters Field. Women came too, mostly together as church or burial society or stokvel members. And all these groups had their own revolutionary songs and the women sang hymns and traditional songs.

COSAS and MK

At the beginning of the 1991 school year I was elected as secretary of COSAS at our school. As COSAS at Joe Slovo High we had a unit called the Untouchables. The now late Hintsu Buddy was the commander. I was the youngest in the unit. As secretary I saw my main task for this

year as being to link the Untouchables up with MK's Mayibuye Unit in Katlehong. That unit had the late Chalicks, Rikson and Mbambeni as cadres. So they knew me. They would meet secretly with us and teach us many things. They told our unit about The Green Book and what it required disciplined cadres to put into place. I kept quiet, never letting on that I had already studied The Green Book.

Sometime during 1991 sixteen of us ANCYL members were arrested for participating in an illegal mass gathering. We were charged with contempt of court and detained in Modderbee Prison in Benoni. There we reflected on the Harare Declaration and decided to follow its principles, so we embarked on a hunger strike. Mzeke and Mokoena led us in our discussions and in taking the decision. It was my first experience of being arrested and prison life.

Soon afterwards the Zone 3 comrades were active one night closing the location down. The police spotted us and chased us. We managed to give the police the run around and we all got to our homes in the early hours of the morning. But later some of the Zone 3 comrades were raided by the Special Branch. One was hiding with the lady who lived next door to his parent's house. But the Special Branch knew all about his hiding place and picked him up. Someone had sold him out. He served four years in prison. In prison he found time to study and got his matric and was teaching mathematics to other kids in prison. When he came out he asked us why we didn't finish the lady who made him go to prison. He said that when the Security Branch took him away she smiled and waved politely.

But we explained to him that when he was arrested we'd held a night vigil at his home and were going to get the lady next door. But a convoy of soldiers arrived so we couldn't complete our mission. He was angry and didn't want to understand. He even went to the guy who had been our commander, and he confirmed our story. Later he got a teaching post at Sijabulile Secondary School where he became a SADTU member and rose to become the Deputy Principal.

This was the time that Malaza became unpopular in the underground movement. He was a showing off what he can do and was jeopardising our security. Once it happened that we attended the memorial service at Kwa Dukathole for the late Dingane. Shots were fired. It was Malaza, and he wounded somebody. I managed to get him away from the scene. We escaped and I took him to Ntate Moroka and asked him to sort things out. That happened as the two families resolved to keep the

incident quiet and not to take matters any further. But Malaza wasn't paying enough attention. At a Freedom Fighter Cultural Group meeting he was showing off again about how comrade Obet, Buddy and Bazuka showed him how to use an AK 47. He just couldn't keep quiet. He didn't hide what had to be hidden. From that time on he was struck from the underground operations. Never again was he told of any new operations. Comrades wanted to deal with him. As it happened I was part of that meeting and I pleaded with them to just let him go. But it was decided that he should go into exile and be trained properly. I was asked to go with him. And Malaza asked that I accompany him. But my journey was cancelled because comrade Kenny convinced them that I should remain at school and that I had never shown signs of ill-discipline. Comrades Tei, Angola, Mosebetsi, and Mahlomola did go to Uganda for training. In the end comrade Humphrey took Malaza and I along with Obet and Bazuka for training in the Transkei because it was not as strict there as in our camps in the other countries. The Transkei Defence Force trained us, giving us a full basic combat training and, most importantly of all, actual experience on the weapons ranges. That was something we couldn't do in Katshehong. I was now ready for action. As I understand all the SDUs in Kathorus received such training with the TDF.

Train attacks

It was in 1992 that the train attacks began. Trains were vital for our working parents. They were the quickest and easiest transport for them. But mysterious groups of men started throwing our parents off fast moving trains. These were anti-struggle workers. It was horrendous. So we started placing units in the carriages to protect people. We worked well with the Federation of Rail Workers Union. When we were guarding the last train they'd give us accommodation at Delmore Hostel. There they would sit around in a circle and chat with us. They would bring a traditional doctor who would light traditional herbs, intelezi, to make us strong for the next day's train battles.

Then the JND members started shooting at trains and at people using the trains. They were not yet defeated and they were angry because people were not using their taxis in the family parts of the location. We decided to tear down their ranks in our location, which we did. That was when they started shooting at the trains. And we found out that they were working with a Third Force comprised of soldiers from Koevoet.

They spoke Portuguese and could not speak Zulu or Sesotho or English. This was during the time of the CODESA 1 talks.

Once when we were on the train from Wadeville station to Katlehong an *impi* started stabbing people and throwing them out of the open train doors. We managed to shoot some of the attackers. When the train reached Lindela station we took the driver off and tried to deal with the *impi*, but they ran away into Lindela station. From that day no train ever went into Katlehong station again.

It was decided to adopt a two-pronged approach. One night groups of us COSAS and MK cadres put rocks and tree stumps across the railway line to the Katlehong station. Then we ripped up the railway lines. And then MK and the Thokoza SDUs launched a huge night time operation. Lindela Hostel was vandalised and torn down, 'brick by brick' as it was reported in Kasrils' *For the sake of our lives* manual. Lindela Hostel was never rebuilt. It was a first degree operation. We helped too by also working with them in vandalising Mazibuko and other hostels in Vosloorus.

Zulu and Xhosa violence

In 1991 tribal violence between Xhosas and Zulus living in the hostels resumed. The Xhosas were killed and maimed and chased from the hostels. Most fled to Phola Park in Thokoza where they formed a force to strike at the IFP Buyafuthi and Mshayezafe Hostels in Thokoza. The violence then spread into the locations where the Xhosas were now living, either as tenants of residents or in shantytowns. The local community was now caught in the middle of a war they had not ever been involved in. And the amazing thing was that the police were taking sides, transporting Zulus at night into the locations.

At that time supplies of real weapons had not yet reached MK and the SDUs so we had little to defend ourselves with. So we had to organise ourselves into night patrols like we did with the taxi violence. One day a march was organised by the Thokoza Civic Association led by comrade Sam Ntuli to the Thokoza police station to protest about the hostel *impis*. But the hostel *impis* went for the marchers and many community resident were killed, including Sam Ntuli. I ran away because it was a mess. On that day Thokoza became a war zone. After 5pm the street was a no-go zone. And there was a very good sniper in Thokoza Hostel. There was a rumour that it was a woman.

War in daylight

We had been chasing SAP members living in the location away. Those who were supporting the people's movement we let stay but we wanted the others out. And this was when the Koevoet soldiers started patrolling our streets. They were heavily armed and aggressive. We kept them busy because we were mobile and on foot and they were in their Casspirs which are heavy vehicles. We also saw that Nyalas were dropping off IFP men from the hostels so as to come and fight us in the township. We also noticed that white policeman were painting their faces black so we would not recognise them. And they had a new tactic. They wanted to catch groups of us. When they did they'd take them to a police station, take photographs of them and take them to a room where they had masses of photographs of us on the walls. They forced the arrested comrades to identify us. Then they let the guys go. It was a difficult time and we were never sure why they let the guys go free. But we knew then that we leaders were on their hit list.

This was the time that we learnt that IFP community members, living alongside us, were passing on details of which street numbers we lived at. One day while we were at school we heard that our section was being raided by IFP impis. We rushed out of school to defend our houses. We found them and they were destroying every house they passed. It was broad daylight and they were being escorted by the police and Koevoet in their Casspirs. When they finished the Koevoet in their Casspirs escorted the impi back to Lindela Hostel just on the cross road next to Katlehong train station.

In Thokoza there was a priest named Babu Khumalo who was killing anyone wearing All Star running shoes. This was because the Bad Boys gang in Thokoza, led by Mugabe, tried to rob his church and they shot his child dead. After that he took revenge and shot anyone trying to attack him in revenge for his attacks. He didn't like school children who avoided walking in the street near his house. This priest was an IFP member. COSAS tried to defend school children by burning his house down but he defended himself and killed many COSAS comrades. I went to look at his house once but never returned.

This was the time when some SDU comrades dropped out of school. There was no time for school pupils having parties. But we didn't drop out; the girls were still attending and they had to be protected.

There was a Zulu squatter camp at the cross road, so they could attack

anyone coming or going. We had to remove them by force. It took days because so many of them were armed. Women and children were taken in by our local churches and the Red Cross provided food and medication.

During 1991 a long time comrade of mine from the Amajoni Cultural Group joined another group of comrades who were part of the gangsters in Thokoza. It was a disaster and he was reprimanded by old comrades. We became friends, but we are not on good terms because he sold me out when I went to prison. He turned state witness. Ntate Moroka was the one who told me to forgive him. But he continued to betray me. When I returned from prison and found work for myself with the MKMVA pall bearers he was angry with me. There's a lot that happened between us and it took me a long time to realise that he was not a good friend to me. But I'm a goodhearted person and I managed to forgive him and Mothibedi is now late. Peace Peter. He is the one who took me to comrade Mbambeni and ordered him to teach me how to use a rifle and because I was too young there was no small size for me. All our arms were under his care. But with my Transkei training I already knew. He shouldn't have known about this.

Fighting with comrade Gwala

Sometime in 1992 comrades Chalicks and Peter Mosia took me to a meeting with comrade Chris Hani at his home in Boksburg. There were eight of us at the meeting. MK had received intelligence from comrade Gwala that a meeting between the SADF, SAP and the IFP was to take place soon at Jozini, in northern Zululand. The meeting was to be protected by soldiers from the Jozini military base. The meeting was part of a plan to capture the East Rand locations. They knew that if they could manage this then MK was finished. Then they could pick off other townships. In response, Hani and Gwala had developed a counter-plan, to take the fight to the enemy. This was now more than ungovernability. Hani looked at me and said to my leaders, 'No, this one is too young,' but they replied quickly, 'You don't know this man.' I was in. There were some 30 of us on the mission. Fifteen of us from Kathorus went down to Pietermaritzburg and met with 15 of Gwala's men. It was an experience, fighting in the revolution to attain freedom. Our elder comrades were not willing to go, so they selected us. Morgan and Chalicks were there. In Pietermaritzburg we met comrades our same age. They called themselves *Ezika Harry Gwala* (We are yours, Harry Gwala).

We met with comrade Gwala and the mission plans were outlined. Comrade Gwala issued me with a small-sized AK47, the KBO, new in the box. It's a tactical weapon. A few nights later we attacked the meeting and the Jozini base. I was in the thick of a night-long firefight. We estimate that around 200 people were killed or injured. I also took a medal hanging around the neck of a high-ranking white officer. It is bronze, with the Republic of South Africa's coat of arms on the front. On the reverse side there is an outline of Van Riebeeck's five-pointed castle in Cape Town and inside the outline is a date: 31 May 1961. This is a very significant date. In 1902, the Treaty of Vereeniging was signed; in 1910, the Union of South Africa was declared; and, on the same date in 1961, the Republic of South Africa was constituted. I've still got it as a precious souvenir; my medal. That night I received my nickname, the Little General.

Impis, askaris and mysteries

It was around seven that night when Malaza, Ntjongo and I were patrolling the 'bond' houses at Ramokonopi West and Siluma View. There was an armed group wearing red belts on their heads and IFP t-shirts. There were about 20 of them. They vandalised and burnt some of the 'bond' houses. We fought them off until the SADF arrived. The next day we were back there protecting the other houses and fighting them off. Comrade McBride was there with us that day in battle. We drove them out of the area and we were advancing but then the police Casspirs arrived and the *impi* found protection behind the vehicles.

It was also in 1992 that comrade Sgomora was attacked by *askaris* who raided his house. His mother was killed when they threw a grenade into the house. The leading *askari* was Remo, who was well known in Vosloorus. Comrades were scared of him. It took comrade Zakeu to shoot him in daylight where everybody could see what had happened. For this he was arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment.

One of the most disturbing and perplexing stories is about how comrade Motlalentwa died. I still can't find a conclusion. He left a shotgun with me. The night he was going to die he was doing unusual things. He was angry with me and I left him. He came to my house to fight with me. He didn't give me the details of where he was going. I thought they were going to pull some operation, but no one went alone on an operation. He forced me to give him grenades and the pump gun and he left me. In the

morning I went to his house to check if he is okay. His mother cried when I entered the house. She told me he was shot dead but the people he went with were nowhere to be found. His mother said I should not do anything. There were many things happening like this. People were getting killed or disappearing without us knowing why. The problem was that newcomers were coming into the location. We didn't accept these newcomers because we couldn't afford to. Like *askaris*, we are going to find you and then you are for the necklance. That was the thing about Katlehong.

Raids on our commanders

On 26 October 1992 we were at the house of our commander, comrade Buddy Hintsu Hlope, studying for exams that were to begin the next day, Monday. Suddenly he says that he doesn't like to chase us but that we must all go home. Later that night the SADF and police attacked him. He was alone. They were hunting him down. They had already been to all his hiding places. We heard that the battle lasted some seven to eight hours and more than 40 soldiers died and that it was all covered up. He was found lying next to his rifle, shot by a policeman he thought was dead. The police put his body in a Shoprite Checkers trolley, which was not right.

Mourners came from all over the East Rand. There I met Zakeu and Tororo and since then I never slept at home and we supported each other. Such battles are not recorded anywhere and he was one of the people who deserved to be honoured.

One day we were at Katlehong High School at Kotopong, hiding. The SADF came into the building. We heard them and ran away. That was the last time we slept there. Obza was also sleeping there. At that time he was involved with comrade Beauty Dlamini. She is one of the ladies who went through integration with us. She served in the army, but sadly she died while I was still in prison. It was alleged she was killed by her brother Mohau. I met him in prison and he denied it. He might still be in prison, or passed away. Their brother married my cousin's sister. They are doing fine in business.

Battle of Khabanyane

In this action the kombi comrades escaped and we only lost comrade Thabiso from Hlahatsi. He died in front of me. We were running through

a school and as we struggled to climb the fence, I ran out of ammunition. He was shot in the back as he tried to climb the fence. I ran across the railway line and hid in a nearby house. I was injured. I thought I was dying. I passed out. The people in the house took a message to my house. I arrived home at around six that night. The weapon I was carrying was taken by another comrade. When I reached home, I found my family members outside and the people around my area were looking at me like they were so amazed how I was alive. That was the first sign that my father knew I was a real freedom fighter in war. They never asked me too many questions. I got into the house, changed my clothes and went looking for the guy who took my weapon. Fortunately, he gave it back to me.

During Thabiso's funeral the police searched all men. It was at Schoeman Cemetery. I was on operational duty so had my assault rifle. I gave it to one of the ladies in the group, Manyauza, and she hid it under her overcoat. I knew that no self-respecting black policeman would body search *uGoga*. But I knew it was going to be a tense day. The IFP and the police wanted to get even. I was waiting for my death. But we had a heavily armed unit already posted in the cemetery from early that morning. They must have realised this because when we fired our 24-gun salute to our fallen comrade they drove off in convoy. And watching this the IFP *impi* from Buyafuthi Hostel marched off. They knew their *intelezi* was not going to work. But later when we were returning to our sections, they did open fire from the hostel roof and there was someone taking photographs from a hostel window.

Mazibuko Hostel battle

In the time before the general election there were many times when we had to fight the IFP. When comrades Cyril Ramaphosa and Joe Slovo visited Kathorus, people began shooting from the windows of Mazibuko Hostel. Journalists were all around and one comrade was captured. We were returning fire. Later we learnt that our captured comrade was assassinated by police in a Casspir that had the number 2 written on it.

Zone 3 battle

The 1993 Zone 3 battle took place just after the assassination of comrade Mantwa Koape. We had to have peace and take on the IFP. They were marching to a rally at the Elias Motsoaledi Stadium. When they passed

by in the morning, they were threatening us. We knew there would be trouble after the rally. We soon found out that they had killed comrade Mantwa Koape. Some of our comrades were waiting at the crossing to Vosloorus and Emalangeneni. We hit them for hours, with so many of them dying that their escorts ran away. The next day the IFP leader Chief Mangosuthu Buthelezi talked on the national television saying '*lemigodoyi ya se Katlehong*', because it was a very bloody Sunday and we were retaliating from what they had just done to our comrade and it was a very sad time for us. To lose such a comrade like Mantwa Koape; she was one of a kind.

Losing comrade Oupa

While we were holding a vigil for comrade Fanyana Banda, we lost the president of COSAS in Katlehong, Oupa Moloji. A comrade was cleaning his rifle and pulled the trigger, shooting Oupa in the chest and killing him instantly. We lost a hero who was cleaning up the gangsters. Many of us wanted to kill the shooter.

Comrade Fanyana Banda had been killed in a shootout with police. They had put his body in a trailer towed by their Nyala, dropping him off at the mortuary in Germiston. We knew the police would be waiting for us at the funeral so we didn't go. Comrade Winnie did go while we watched from a distance. Then the police spotted us and we opened fire. We shot their captain dead. We had to escape by hiding in the crowd because they had their own photos of some comrades standing in front of Mama.

Massacre of the SDUs

Once we were arrested by Koevoet soldiers wearing balaclavas. They took us at night with their faces covered. They knew our names. Fortunately, community members heard them shouting out our names. They took us to a place in Katlehong next to the Old Natalspruit Hospital. We were promised it's our last time to see this world because we were going to die. They had got the Untouchable Unit of Katlehong. Fortunately, that night we managed to escape. We didn't sleep in Katlehong again until after the general elections. But I wasn't trusting anybody anymore.

This incident happened after 14 SDU members staying at a house in Moleleki Extension 2 were ambushed and massacred. All were

killed by the co-called commanders, most of whom were Xhosas. The leaders wanted to disarm the SDU. We met at Ahmed Kathrada High, fully armed, and ready to take the commanders on. After discussion, Humphrey was sent to Shell House to stabilise the situation. He did, meeting the MK people on the seventh floor. But it was sad burying 14 soldiers, who were all ANCYL members and our school friends, not in combat but executed by what we thought were our own comrades. We were not satisfied by the decision, but due to discipline, we complied with the order from Shell House. I knew I had just escaped being killed along with the others. But we knew the Xhosa SDU leaders, the *abotata*, who were in cahoots with gangsters while we wanted to clean the township up.

During that time we lost focus and many people infiltrated our ranks. So our secret hideouts and movements were known. Comrade Bassie Tshasane Sera fell into the hands of gangsters who trapped him, and then took him to Tsakane where they killed him. I was a victim of that infiltration, on the same day that the 14 comrades were assassinated. I was in Skhosana Section wooing this young lady. But her elder sister was having a crush on me. Then I was shot by her boyfriend. The most hurtful thing was that he was the SDU commander at Makula Section. This was a comrade that I trusted. He came to hospital to see me. I was scared, thinking he was going to finish me off, but I think he wanted to make friends so I wouldn't tell on him. Which I wouldn't have done. After two days in hospital, I went to stay at my grandmother's house. She told me not to seek revenge and that I should stay out and let other people carry on fighting. But it hurt me. I assisted him, saving his life when PAC members attacked him. I was standing next to him and protected him and then he is the one who shoots me.

On the day of the funeral all kinds of police officers were there and soldiers too. They took photos of everybody. It was too emotional for all the comrades who were there. They took those 14, tied them with wire and shot them execution style in the back of the head. Our friends and comrades were killed like dogs.

All our local commanders were also not happy about the situation and all those killers were not present during the memorial service or the funeral. After the funeral comrades were detained by the police, photographed and then released. It was the same Casspir with number 2 painted on it.

Revenge

In October 1993 we were able to take the fight to the gangsters. One of our members was at a party where gangsters were. They recognised him and shot him. Thankfully, he was only injured and we managed to extract the bullet from his upper arm and bandage him up. But that night we got them in a house in Katlehong. There was a firefight and many died before the police arrived and we had to slink away. It was a tough time. The following day it was the same story. They came to our section, shooting every young man they saw. We retaliated. The situation was uncontrollable. They were using cars, coming into our area, shooting and speeding out. When we found their homes, we went for them. But we found that they had soldiers from Koevoet helping them. They just stood there in their Casspir looking at us. We left quickly.

In October 1993 our SDU members were at a festival at the Technical College Northern Transvaal in Pretoria. Gangsters were there too and an argument broke out. Shooting started and the police arrived. We all went home and the fight continued over the whole weekend. At Pigeons Tavern that night Totoro, one of our unit, was shot and fell into the sewer drain and had to be rescued. And we couldn't take him to hospital because then the police are called. Those were tough times. The unfortunate part of this is that we were from the same location and we were fighting one another.

Sometime in 1993 gangsters told the Internal Stability Unit police and soldiers we were in Motsamai Section. They came and arrested six of us that morning. It was 32 Battalion soldiers who found us. They beat us and looked for weapons. But in their excitement at having got the Dulcie September Unit members, they didn't look properly. In that house we had eight AK47s and 20 or so full magazines. We were handed over to the Internal Stability Unit next to the Germiston Civic Centre. There was someone inside a car calling our names. We were taken to the military camp at Mpilisweni and as we were made to lie down on our stomachs, they were stamping on us. Then we were taken to an upper room for interrogation. We always believed that it was these offices in which Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) people worked, conducting the interrogations. But quite soon they locked us in the room and they all went out. Soon we found out what had happened. Some of our parents and the community leaders had arrived and were demanding that they hand us over to our parents. And we were. Parents were so surprised to see us back before midday.

The police were using gangsters to spy on us and even assassinate us. By this time members of our SDU were on the streets all day and night on shifts. The gangsters had this arrangement with the police, who would look the other way at all of their crimes. After the Pigeons Tavern incident we took a resolution that enough was enough and we are not going to sleep without getting them. We looked for them but we couldn't find the ones we wanted. But we found other gangsters. It was a small battle but some of their members died that day. So the message was sent: You are not going to defeat us. Then their parents called on the community leaders, complaining and asking for peace. We didn't have any problem with peace, but due to their children's secret activities we continued to fight them. But our commanders did come to an agreement with the gangster families. If the gangsters would stop attacking us on our way to school and not enter the school grounds, then we would not attack them.

Affairs of the heart

In 1993 the Katlehong community was trying to have cultural fairs to make people happy and look forward to the coming elections. Staying in the same section as me was a lady called Khabo Monyela, whom I met at a fair. We started dating. Once her cousin visited me and I learnt that Khabo was having an affair with my cousin, Mokete Tsotetsi. I left them both.

One day I arranged with my girlfriend Thamsile that we would meet at home. But when I arrived, she left. When I asked her, she told me that my sister and my foster mother were fighting with her so she decided to leave. It was disturbing and I wasn't given a reason for the fighting. We did continue seeing one another, but then she was pregnant and, according to her, as she was not sure who the father was, she decided to abort. But according to her, she miscarried. I was so disappointed because I thought it was my baby and I forgave her for that.

MK cadres return

Comrades like Juke returned from camps and we were welcoming all of them. We honoured them, gave them guns and called them SDU commanders. Then we were amazed when we understood that they were involved in criminal activities, like cash-in-transit heists. They knew we were going to stop them from committing these evil deeds, so they recruited

comrades to become members of their gangs. We understood that many of the comrades who left for exile were gangsters; we fought them during our time in COSAS, and we joined them because we had no choice.

MK: The last parade

After the killing of the SDU comrades, comrade Winnie Mandela made a press statement that was so harsh. We had to disband and return our arms to the same people who had killed our comrades. I did not do this. By that stage I had a lot of firearms; probably ten or twelve. The majority were AK47s of different kinds. Then I had my G3 sniper's rifle, an R4 and R5, a Russian LMG and a shotgun. I also had lots of handguns and some M45 grenades. I stored them in various secret places as my own protection plan.

Then comrade Nelson Mandela visited Katlehong, calling for peace. It was the only time he visited Katlehong. He was guarded by the same enemy we were fighting against. The SADF was also there and we welcomed our leader with a gun salute that lasted for maybe 30 minutes, during which he didn't get out of his vehicle. Soon after this, on 16 December 1993, MK held its final standing down parades across the country.

This left us very confused.

On the run

We knew that we were losing comrades to unknown assassins. This had been happening since some time in 1992. For me, my first experience of this was when Buddy was murdered. It was on Sunday. The next morning, I was writing my first English exam paper. I didn't sleep at all. I went to school that morning. As I sat down in class our principal, Jeff Jekubeni, came into class. He tipped me off that I'd better leave the school premises as the soldiers were on their way. I quickly jumped out of the window, down from our first-floor classroom to the ground, and ran away as soldiers came up. They tried to shoot me but couldn't. I never went back to that school. And that was the day comrade Steven Kahlela was abducted. His remains have never been found. He is one of so many who just disappeared. We had serious discussions. Some comrades wanted to form a missing persons unit.

I refused to go into exile or leave Katlehong. My cousin, Lungile Majola, did join a group which was trying to get to Uganda. I was left

behind, having nowhere to go and was being hunted down. My father had chased me out of his house and it was known that the SADF was looking for me. They visited my father every day. I think it was difficult for him to understand what I had done to be wanted like that. They told him that I had killed soldiers. All my friends and neighbours were running away from me. They were scared to be with me. I had to have an option two. My home was being watched. I was then sleeping in the veld at Arwart, a municipal place at the end of Mopedi Section where they recycled faeces. It was tough for me. That day was the worst in my life. My pictures were on walls in police stations. My life changed. I thought I was going to die at any moment. I have never felt so hunted and scared. I was nearly 16 years old.

I went to Sam Sthaye Monyela, asking him to open the Telkom tower stormwater drain cover so that I could hide there. He agreed and I told him I would come and hide when it was safe for me to get there. I slept there for a few months. Then I got to the Johannesburg central business district (CBD) and became a street kid. I met up with a boy, Cleo, and we got involved in petty crime. Then I went to Vosloorus for a while, staying with some comrades. Then in late 1993 my father accepted me home. But I had to be so careful.

It was comrade Chalicks who had found me in Vosloorus, had spoken to my father and told me to go home, saying that the police would never arrest me now. It was too late now as elections were coming. But I must be careful because they could just try and kill me. He also told me of the integration process. Fighters of the Non-Statutory Forces were to be integrated into the new SANDF. They had chosen me to be part of the process. This was something to look forward to.

Defending Shell House

In March 1994 comrade Chalicks, my commander, contacted me. MK intelligence had information that the IFP was planning an attack on our ANC headquarters in Shell House in the Johannesburg CBD. MK commanders were tasked with assembling a unit to repel the attackers. I attended an early morning meeting on the seventh floor of Shell House. The ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) were all in the building, having meetings and supporting us. It was the first, and only, time I met comrade Walter Sisulu so close up. He was furious. Comrade Nelson Mandela gave us orders: there was no way the ANC has its soldiers and

the Head Office will not be defended. And he was the one who gave us amnesty for defending our headquarters. MK had done its preparations very well. They had assembled a real arsenal. I was handed a Zastava G3, the sniper rifle I knew well. The rest is history. Twenty thousand men attacked. We shot 19 dead. Not a single man from the IFP *impi* managed to get into our headquarters. And the SAP Internal Stability Unit men just watched from Joubert Park.

General election 1994

I voted using my newly issued ID book at the Keketso Primary School in Phooko Section of Katlehong. As we stood in the voting queues, we knew we were in the majority. This two-thirds majority will give us the right to change everything that needs to be changed. And this is the beginning, not the end, of the matter. This is what I thought lay ahead.

CHAPTER 2

The meaning of freedom: 1994 onwards

Liberation

In 1994 it was good for us all to have delivered our masses into the long-promised time. We all celebrated the coming of freedom. The goodness is that we had achieved our goal of victory over apartheid. Nelson Mandela, our president, was now sworn in as the first legitimate president of the republic. This was a moment we will never forget.

But amidst all the celebrations, we have forgotten to keep our guard up. For we have not yet liberated ourselves from the apartheid economic system. And there is no one else to be blamed for this but ourselves. After we gained political power, we haven't continued to fight the economic battle for the wealth of the people. Were we so tired that we decided to leave politics, knowing that comrades will remember us as brave young soldiers? As soldiers did, we sidelined ourselves from the political activities of our movement's leaders. Were we thinking they will remember us? Were we tired of hearing guns and explosives and gave up wanting anything more? Has a gap opened between our movement and its soldiers? This began right at the beginning when we were called to meetings where it was decided who was going to be part of the integration process.

SANDF integration

In 1994 we were told that the combatants of each of the liberation armies – MK, the Azanian People's Liberation Army (APLA) and the Azanian Liberation Army (AZANLA) – would be part of an integration process. This process would lead to the formation of the new SANDF.

The integration process took place at the army base at Wallmansthal near Tshwane.

Late in 1994 we of the Katlehong SDU were called to a meeting at the Katlehong High School. Comrades Nelson and Humphrey were the facilitators. We were told about the integration process and the formation of the SANDF. We were to go to an army base. We went to Johannesburg City Library bus rank. Buses took some of us to a holding place at Shaft 17 while others went straight to Wallmansthal. Waiting for the buses I met again with comrades Rambo and Spenza from Shell House. I knew them from when we used to go to the MK offices on floor seven. I was happy to see them. First the buses took us to Wallmansthal, where we were processed, and then off to a base camp to stay. Ours was Base 11 on the East Rand. We were with comrades from Kathorus and KwaDutsa. We sang revolutionary songs all the time, even when we went to the canteen. The other soldiers from the SADF and the homeland armies just looked on. We didn't care what they thought of us. Later comrades from exile joined us with some others coming from Uganda deployed to Base 15. These were guys who had recently left for exile and training. They were separated from the rest. There were so many things happening. Some comrades were bitten by snakes. We didn't know what was happening.

In the morning and afternoon we did physical fitness training. It was just fun for us. Comrade Kalneck used to remind me about this. I was young and naughty and I enjoyed everything I was doing. I loved to sing, and that kept me going so that I didn't remember home.

Until one day, drawn up in our ranks for morning roll call, we were surrounded by the SADF soldiers and homeland military. There was trouble. I was not there. The night before I hadn't eaten the meat they gave us for supper. It was dark like bush meat. I only ate pap and vegetables and then when I saw no one around I went out of the camp. I went to the spot where a comrade and I used to meet. I called him uncle because he was older than me. I found him there. During the day we'd meet at this place and go and hunt. After roll call, soldiers were sent to look for uncle and me. They found us. We decided to return to base. No comrades were singing that day. We were punished at PT (physical training).

Life in the Wallmansthal assembly area was so open and interesting. We met several comrades who'd left the country in the early 1990s. Some had trained in Angola and others in Uganda. Some came back

sick with malaria and needed treatment. I also met comrades from other provinces. I recognised one from KwaZulu-Natal who we'd worked with under comrade Harry Gwala. He was happy to see me after so long a time, asking why I didn't go into exile. I told him I was turned down by comrade Buddy who said I was too young and needed to go back to school. This was true. Comrade Buddy warned me that only a few comrades were being trained and sent back. MK was training cadres for the bush war in Angola. Others were being sent on advanced training in preparation for leadership in the regular army of the future.

The first part of the induction process was to pass a psychometrics test. Many of the comrades from the SDUs didn't pass the aptitude test, which meant they were excluded from integration into the SANDF. When you pass you have your picture taken, are registered as soldiers, and receive a force number. Mine was 94097508, with current personnel register number PR 705. But there was another problem. With so many other comrades from SDUs, we'd left school early to be activists fighting on the streets. We hadn't got matric.

At Wallmansthal it went well for MK soldiers. In MK they had ranks as soldiers. Some MK comrades received senior ranks in the SANDF and were sent on infantry commander courses in different countries. Our MK leaders, now generals in the SANDF, denied that SDU cadres were members of MK and had received military training and had recognised military ranks. We were betrayed. Members of the old SADF and soldiers from the homeland forces weren't treated like us. Their integration process was guaranteed.

Now, currently, the issue of having a force number and being integrated into the SANDF is causing many cadres problems. Without an active force number, they cannot receive benefits from the Department of Military Veterans (DMV). According to the Military Veterans Act of 2011, only those who successfully went through the integration process at Wallmansthal qualify as military veterans and are eligible for benefits. In life nothing is easy. Until now that Act has not been changed to allow those who never made it through integration to qualify for benefits. And those who accepted low military status and went into the army have resigned because they weren't being promoted properly.

In 1995 the government introduced a demobilisation process. This allowed ex-Non-Statutory Force soldiers to resign from the army and receive a discharge payout. But the money wasn't sufficient; comrades ate it and then they are suffering. When they die, they leave the world

like paupers, not even recognised by our MKMVA. We have our Heroes Acre, but you are not buried there unless you are from exile. We of the brave SDUs have been betrayed.

The government made a big mistake in allowing former apartheid soldiers to benefit more from integration than cadres from MK, APLA and AZANLA. I also believe that the cadres of the SDUs are of the best standard, irrespective of what label authorities wish to give to us.

Romances

In late 1993 I met Thamsile Khethweni Lushaba, from Leondale. She was my first love. She used to visit me in Katlehong. We loved each other so much, but there were complications. She was too clever and that caused us to fight.

Then I met another lady, Matshidiso ‘Tshidi’ Gladys Chere, who lived in Mopedi Section in Katlehong. At the time I met her she was 14 years old. I grew to love this lady from that day until she passed away in 2009. She was a collected and down to earth woman with dignity and respect. I met her at Lindela Station as we both came from shops in Makula Section. I was buying Simba chips at a stall on the platform. We met and she told me to come to her place. I went there several times, but she was scared to tell me that she loved me. At a cultural day at the Tshabalala Primary School in October 1993 she told me she loved me. But I respected her and her family even though her mother was so protective. But I was patient for everything. Her mother’s problem was that I was an SDU member and because of certain reports about me. Her father seemed to be understanding. I was frustrated because of her mother.

I had my friend Oupa help play a game. Thamsile, who Oupa pretended he was dating, hated Tshidi. Then, when Tshidi found out that I was having a side with Thamsile, it was all over. Until one day in 1995 I got arrested for attempted murder. Tshidi surprised me when she came to visit me at Boksburg Prison. That made me love her even more. And I left Thamsile because I didn’t know where she was living.

Tshidi was my darling. When I got shot only Tshidi was there visiting me in hospital. We separated in 1996 due to bad treatment from me. I had a new love, Phindile Sindane, who got pregnant and had an abortion. In 1998 I asked Oupa to talk to Tshidi to ask her to come back, but nothing happened. One day I went to Tshidi’s house and I met her

younger sister, Machere, who told me that Tshidi was getting married that afternoon. During Tshidi's absence I was involved with Nthabiseng. In 1999 Nthabiseng was pregnant. I was arrested that same year and spent seven months in prison before I was sentenced. In prison I wrote to her saying that I was coming back to her. She passed away in 2003. I nearly collapsed with sorry because I thought so many things about our child. The last time I saw Nthabiseng she was so skinny.

I was happy to see our baby. But I was angry with her mother. When I went to prison, I left her with a lot of money. She ate it, without buying our child a house. After she passed away, I went to social workers to make sure she is supported. My baby, Lebone Khadijah Motaung, grew up not knowing me until I came out of prison. We bonded. While I was in prison, she was taken care of by her grandmother, Ausi Tisetso, who is now deceased. Lebone completed her primary school at Morojaneng and then went to Bedfordview High with her sister Nthabiseng. Nthabi dropped out and that's when problems started. Lebone was staying with her great-grandmother at Mopedi and she didn't want to stay with my wife and me. She failed to get matric and was busy with her boyfriend, Lindo, who didn't care if Lebone went to school or not. I beat her so much that she thought I was not her father. She was scared of me. She had issues with my wife too. I couldn't accept her attitude. From that first romance, my life changed in so many ways.

SAPS integration

In January 1995 we returned from Wallmansthal on a weekend pass for my birthday. I decided to leave the army. There was no future for me in the SANDF because MK would not recognise us as SDU soldiers.

I joined the SAPS. We went for three weeks of basic training at Maleoskop SAP camp outside Groblersdal in Mpumalanga. Here there was also a written aptitude test we had to pass before we went on basic training. We also had our fingerprints taken. SAPS declined to accept comrades from SDUs or our opposition Self-Protection Units (SPUs) who had criminal records.

We were based at Foxtrot Camp. There was a special area for ladies as well, located right next to the camp office. We were told not to leave the camp without supervision because there were wild animals around. One day, bored after training, we from our SDUs did, climbing the mountain behind the camp. Here we saw so many graves. We learnt from locals

that this was where the SAP Internal Stability Unit trained during the apartheid times. We were soon spotted and called back. Members from the SPUs had reported us. We were punished.

There was tension between us and the SPU men. The camp policy was one of reconciliation. But, after rifle training as we marched back to camp, the SPU men and us SDU cadres always sang our own revolutionary and political songs. These were our fighting songs.

There was one of our cadres who tried to divide us, whatever we were doing. One day after shotgun shooting, he started his nonsense. We went and forcibly opened the arsenal, taking rifles. We tried to finish off the SPUs. They were living in a separate barrack, a *kaserne*, next to ours. We nearly finished them. We don't know where the instructors received the message that we were fighting. Some comrades were angry over this. The SPUs didn't want peace, but we were being violent. The instructors found it difficult to disarm us because it was not a matter they can just speak and it happens. They called our local SDU and SPU leaders to calm the situation down. So it was tense but our commander told us to return the firearms and then we discussed our concerns and pointed out the problematic people. It was solved and we stayed our remaining days at the camp and finished our course. It was also a good thing to learn the way SAPS were doing things. We were the second group at the camp. And the same problems happened with the next group too. But they were only fighting with stones, but the issues were the same as ours.

Our training at Maleoskop was a success. We had classes on professional conduct, policing regulations and other things. But the classes we really went in deep for were regarding firearms. We did handgun, shotgun and rifle lessons and training. When we completed the course, we were called community constables. It was a good experience for us to be in the service. Those of us from Kathorus were sent there. We worked wonders. We cleaned our community of firearms and illegal immigrants, who were responsible for motor vehicle thefts. We made sure most of them were arrested. Crime in our location and places like Thokoza and Vosloorus was reduced.

As community constables we were given opportunities to further our careers. I was included in two courses provided by a service provider. The first was a life skills course. This course was prepared for us as so many of us were committing suicide. I can remember at least ten of us comrades from the SDUs from the area. And I remember how depressed and suicidal I was at the time. We were back in our old

locations. I was having nightmares and couldn't sleep properly. I had flashbacks remembering dead people, the shootings and firefights. I wanted to go to sleep and be alone, feeling sad and helpless. The second was on charge office procedures, occurrence registers and how to investigate a crime scene.

I remember my supervisor, Mrs Selloane, being very supportive of me. She knew I worked hard. It was through her that I passed my bridging course for a special task force in 1998. I was then meant to do my basic training course in June 1999.

After my special task force training I worked under my supervisor, Mr Mabunda, a very good guy, at the Ramokonopi West satellite mobile police station. These satellite police stations were so effective because matters were attended to immediately because we were just walking distance away from a problem. As we did foot patrols in the malls, crime was just so low. Thieves were scared of us. They knew we'd arrest them and recover firearms. It was real team work. It was so nice that time, enjoying the authority to become a police officer and to practise policing and do all forms of crime prevention. The community was so very trusting in us as their police. They knew that they are safe because they knew us as we grew up in their streets and we mastered the street.

At night we did foot patrols and we'd always be on a crime scene before the van arrived. In Mandela Section people were being killed at night from Friday to Sunday. There were five of us community constables deployed there at night and we found guns and forced the criminals away. We managed to put order in the community because we understood the way these people were operating. We used to hide and when they come closer to us, we come out and search them. That is how we managed to do our operations.

One night when I was not okay I went to a tavern in Kotopong Section. At the gate I saw one of my girlfriends talking to some other guy in a car. When I tried to enter through the gate, the guy who was driving the car came out and drew his firearm. So I drew my service pistol and shot him. The other guy then jumped out of the car and I shot him too. It was a very sad day. I went straight to the police station to report the matter. I was arrested for attempted murder and given bail. No one died. I was found not guilty. That was when Tshidi came to see me while I was awaiting trial. She supported me all the way.

Patrolling with a van made us a target during the night. And it was difficult to retreat from an attack if you were in a van. One day they

attacked the other shift, taking firearms from the police satellite. When we came on shift, we patrolled and got back all the firearms and made arrests. Captain Mokoena, who was a station commander, got awards for being the best station in Gauteng. But this man was not in favour of us community constables.

So, finally, it was sad to find out that after we had served five years in the police service, even though we didn't have matric, our service was terminated. As community constables we had no permanent appointment contract with SAPS. It was not fair after five years in service that we don't have matric so we are out. We received very small pay-outs, of about R13 000. This was during the time of comrades Steve Tshwete, Sydney Mufamadi and Dullah Omar. I think comrade Jessie Duarte was also involved.

Some of us have died; some are still working but not in the SAPS. Some are security guards at supermarkets, bottle stores and those types of places. It is very challenging. It was our wish to be part of the new SAPS.

During the integration process of SDU and SPU men into SAPS no good procedures were followed. Our own comrades, now as ministers of justice and police, failed us. Some are now dead. But during the 2008 ANC National Conference in Polokwane others showed us that they were not real members of the ANC. None of the resolutions taken to ensure the welfare of ex-combatants have ever been implemented. Especially in Gauteng. At least in KwaZulu-Natal they have done some things. Many SDU and MK cadres are unemployed; others have gone to prison all because of the failure of the SANDF and SAPS integration policies and processes. Some have died in prison, while others are still in prison. Others ended up as kingpins in bank robberies and cash-in-transit heists. Comrade Collins Chauke was an MK member and formed his team of guerrillas from other comrades. They were all complaining about how our generals failed the MK underground. I'm not surprised at what is happening now.

Formation of MKMVA

In 1996 the decision was taken to form our own organisation, the MKMVA. The organisation had to stand on its own, without political party affiliation, and fight for the rights of former freedom fighters. We had to ensure that we were allocated 30% of the value of all companies

which exist on South African soil. This should be a government decision and it is they who would inform investors of this. Here the government failed us in our quest for economic freedom.

Arrest

One day in March 1999 we robbed a liquor store in Germiston. There was a huge amount of money in their safe, because they were not depositing their money in a bank. I took the money and we went home to my place. When we arrived, there was this guy called Hipa Hipa. He is a relative to my friend Malaza. Malaza didn't have a firearm and he told me that he saw someone having a firearm in his possession and can I assist him to get it. I agreed to help so we went and robbed the guy of his firearm. It was an Astra 9mm 17 shooter. We also took his car as our getaway vehicle. I was known in that area so we had to move fast.

On 25 May 1999 I went to fetch my money from where I'd hidden it. I met several people that day and I gave them money and they were happy. I took that whole bag full of money and I gave it to my girlfriend Nthabiseng. She told me that she is coming and I must wait for her. While I was waiting, I decided to go and meet my friends at Anikie's Tavern. On my way I met a girl who stayed next to my uncle's house, so I went home with her. Afterwards, walking to the tavern, this guy Thabiso drove by. He offered me a lift and I climbed in, without asking if the vehicle was okay. When we reached the main road, we saw a convoy of police vehicles coming towards us. I asked Thabiso if the car was his. He said no. I told him I didn't want to be arrested so I rolled out of the moving car. The police started shooting as I ran away. As I entered Ausi Anikie's yard, I was arrested.

The police claimed that I had been shooting at them. But when arresting me they never found any firearm. I was taken to Natalspruit Hospital for a check-up and then transferred to Garden City private hospital. I was placed under police guard. Even then I knew I am going to suffer because these police had long been targeting me and my comrades. The day after my arrest, Ward Councillor Semoka gave a press conference saying the police must arrest people like me. Several police detectives came to look at me. I was being hidden by the police so that my friends would not know where to find me. I was there for a month and I never received any visits from my family. A nurse called Labohang Lepheme made a call for me to Ausi Nkele, our neighbours, telling them

where I was. A few days later my girlfriend Matshidiso Tjhere came with Mohau, bringing me clean clothes. The ones I had were full of blood. I had been shot in the groin and was full of scars from rolling out of the car. I was full of painkillers.

My ward mate was Mark Roberts, a gangster from Eldorado Park. He was cocky and asked if I wanted to escape because he had friends in Eldos who could help. High from drugs I fantasised about our escape. I watched the drunk security guards in the next room, crept in and stole their guns while they snored open-mouthed. But our attempted escape failed. The guys tried to use grenades to blow the windows out but it didn't work. I had another series of nightmares about the doctor who did the operation on my groin and the nurses who were looking after my stitches and bandages. In my nightmares I was being circumcised. And then Johannesburg Murder and Robbery policemen came in and I surrendered all my weapons. These were terrible nightmares.

Once I'd recovered from my injuries the investigating officers came with a different docket to charge me with attempted murder, armed robbery and possession of an unlicensed firearm and ammunition. That was on a Sunday.

Trial and sentencing

On the Monday I was given medicines, discharged from hospital and taken to the Katlehong Police Station and appeared in court the following day. I was remanded for the next seven days. I applied for bail, which was opposed by the investigating officer. So I was locked up in Boksburg Prison as an awaiting trial prisoner. There I met so many criminals. Some of them were arrested when I was a community constable. It wasn't easy. To keep stable I read the Holy Bible from cover to cover and I volunteered to be the cleaner, sorting out the awaiting trial prison cells each morning.

I was still having nightmares. This time it was about how all the police officers who were on my case were all being assassinated by my friends so the police came for me. I begged them, telling them I was innocent. I woke up screaming. This dream recurred often. I was in a mess.

At my trial the state said I was a gang leader and that witnesses were being threatened. I was kept in isolation and prevented from seeing anyone without a police officer present. Some of my friends from SDU days turned state witnesses against me too. Even my co-accused, Nkatlo

Motloun, who was a criminal his entire life, confessed and was given a conditional discharge.

On 2 January 2000 my first child, Lebone, was born. Five days later I turned 24 and on 24 January I was sentenced to 36 years imprisonment. I appealed for a reduction in sentence. I asked to be given a second chance and to complete my schooling while in prison. And I'd registered myself as an underage person, and they believed me because I looked so young. Later they found out my real age but the magistrate was considerate. The court considered my age at the time of committing the offences. I had just turned 21. So my sentence was reduced to 18 years. I was given a second chance in life. Thank you, Mr van Wyk, the magistrate of Regional 3 court. Later a parole board reduced my sentence and I served nine years and four months in prison for armed robbery and possession of an unlicensed firearm and ammunition. For me it was a set-up. The court was confused by the testimony of witnesses. I was shot and arrested without any firearm found in my possession and I was not pointed out in an identity parade. The court told me that I was a danger to society as the leader of a gang.

While I was in prison my friends killed and attempted to kill the police officers involved in sending me to prison. I never sent them. Some were sentenced to life imprisonment, the first being released in 2019 and another in 2020. One of them was disabled, and in prison people treated him so badly that when he came out, he was a very bitter and angry man. The communists were scared of him.

What also disturbed me was that I knew most of the investigating officers on my case had worked with me at the same police station. I even told one, who was seeing a girlfriend in my location, that he should be careful. I knew my friends were planning to shoot him. I understand that he listened to me.

While we were police officers from SDUs and SPUs we were treated badly by ex-SAP police officers. We understood that. But now the same things were happening in the new SAPS. But life goes on and I appreciate that I'm still alive. I bear no grudge against those in my own location who don't understand how I got released and got government work.

Reflection

I've now had the opportunity and maturity to reflect on what happened to me during 1998 and 1999. In July of 1998 my sister Jerminah died. On that day she had asked me to ask any adult in our family to come

urgently as she had things she needed to speak about. My father was visiting, but he went to look for car parts and was gone. So I went to Ntate Rammutla. When she was with us our father arrived. Jerminah told them that there were witnesses to attest that Mme Masipati makes zombies come through a hole in her bedroom floor at night. That night Jerminah died.

The same year was very difficult for me. I had become the foster parent to Malefu, Tshepo and Mamoya. Whatever I got in the street I used to support them. I tried all means to put food on the table. These are some of the reasons most of the SDUs went to prisons all over the country. We had nothing to do and we just knew how to use firearms. That was our skill. Criminals took advantage of our situation and we fell in their trap. And they used us against our own government. I regret being part of the criminals and my own comrades didn't understand our reasons. We thought that as our comrades took the front positions in negotiations they will recognise us as their freedom fighters. But their negotiating skills put us in a worse position than ever before in our lives. During negotiations comrades like Nelson Mandela didn't consider our welfare.

My second chance

After sentencing I was taken to the Boksburg Correctional Services B-Max prison. There I slept for the first seven days. When I woke up, a warder, comrade Chicken, asked if I was okay. I was okay but I didn't know what was happening to me. I remembered I was at court and sentenced to so many years. Most of the court hearing is a blur to me. I was taken to the juvenile section where I stayed for a month. My nightmares continued. Ausi Tshidi came to visit but she didn't see me. Later she told me I had not wanted to see her. I have no memory of this. After I was returned to B-Max, I stayed in cell 1; a non-smoking cell. There I met Tony Okungwa. He was serving 15 years for drug dealing. We became friends and one day he took me to meet his family. They were happy to meet me. There was also Thabo Binas in our cell. I had to wait until August 2000 when I was taken to Zonderwater Maximum Prison in Cullinan just outside Pretoria. Most of my home boys, including Bubezi, were already there. I was taken to E-section which was single cells. That's where I met Wessels, a police officer in Katlehong in the 1990s who was fighting us. He was transferred to the Kutama Sinthumule section. That is where the serial killer Moses Sithole and

Eugene de Kock were. In that year so many people passed away in prison because there was no treatment for HIV/Aids.

Inside I also met Battler who showed me Bucs. They were friends from Katlehong. Battler introduced me to robberies, car hijackings and cash-in-transit heists. From 1995 to 1999 I was not a good comrade. But I had no choice. My father was then staying in Bethlehem with Ausi Pinkie. He left us a minibus. Dannyboy, Malaza's elder brother, drove it and I accompanied him. But the money was not coming to us. According to my father's instruction it went to Ausi Madikeledi next door. It was they who were responsible for fixing the taxi. Later in 2003 it was sold to Doctor Makgasane who had such minibuses in partnership with his brother and sister. The problem was that the police were always waking them up because I was wanted. I was hiding on the opposite side of the road with Ntate Pex Mmethi, who was one of the soldiers who fought in the Second World War. He was on our street committee and was the one who named our SDU block Yasser Arafat block. In the evening I was busy with my criminal activities.

Educating myself

In the beginning, being in prison shocked me. I didn't even have toiletries and personal things of my own. I had no books, no money, nothing. It was other guys from Kathorus who helped me settle down. I knew some of them from the SDUs. And, as part of my introduction to prison life, I had to attend the Aggressive Programme course run by social workers to help me manage my anger. Then I realised I needed my matric as this would help me integrate into society. I began my studies in January 2001, receiving my senior certificate in 2003 even though the results were not what I was looking for. I began to reflect that prison is not a hellhole but my intellectual home.

I qualified in 2003. I registered for Adult Basic Education and Training (ABET). This was organised by Mary Metcalfe who is the champion of Outcomes Based Education and ABET. The programme was sponsored by the European Union. After receiving my ABET qualification I wanted to study for a law degree at the University of South Africa (UNISA). But I couldn't afford the fees. This was in the time comrade Duma Nkosi was heading the Ekurhuleni Metro, and Kathorus is part of this metro, so I approached him. He replied and the process began, but I didn't receive any further communication from them.

And I know of comrades who were helped by Mayor Nkosi. He gave bursaries to comrades so that they can become educated and then be fully integrated into the SAPS. Some of these comrades registered with Technicon SA and did policing studies. Comrade Themba was one, and he didn't finish it and now he is here with me. Others just ate the mayor's money.

Finding Islam

In prison I realised that I really needed to have a church because I had done a lot of wrong things in life that I needed to ask forgiveness for. While I was at Boksburg Correctional Service Centre, I met this guy named Chris. He was in for 12 years. We were both interested in embracing Islam as our religion. One Sunday when the pastor from outside came to our section for our church service, he told us that we as Christians are not better than Muslims. We asked why. He told us that Muslims pray five times a day and Christians don't. So Chris and I decided to pursue matters. One guy in our communal cell was Muslim, and he'd heard the pastor's comments and decided to help us. He gave us a book called *The God that never was*. The book explains that the Holy Quran says that Jesus (peace be upon him) was not crucified, but taken to the Third Heaven as it was promised that he will return. He then taught us how to cleanse ourselves after the call of nature. A Muslim must always be clean. According to Islam the process is called *Istinja*, meaning purification with water. Then he showed us how to bath as a Muslim, which is called *gusul*. He then gave me the Holy Quran, teaching us how to cleanse ourselves before we could hold the book. This was the first time in my life that I had an opportunity to really read, and I enjoyed it. After that I met one of the ex-community constables, Vuyane Hans, who was also serving his sentence in Boksburg. He was a Muslim and he gave me books, one of which was *The book of Imaan*, or belief. This book explains how Islamic belief is based only on worshipping the Almighty, without any intercessors with Him.

Then I met several other Muslims in my first week at Zonderwater. These were Titi, Ibrahim and Mncedisi, who we called Ansar, meaning the helper in Arabic. I told them I wanted to learn about Islam and he introduced me to others, including Abdul Malik, who was Thabang Zondo, and Hasan Maponya who is still my best friend, even though we hardly see each other because of worldly occupations.

On 23 September 2000, the birthday of Muhammed Tshwane, my teacher, I embraced Islam. It was he who went through the dos and don'ts of fasting, prepared me for my first month of Ramadan, and taught me how to read stories in the Quran. Reading these I began to understand how to tell a story. By accepting the Almighty Allah, I found inner peace. The social workers found that through me being a Muslim I was fine with no worries anymore.

In the same year during fasting Muhammad was diagnosed with diabetes. I was the one who was making sure his clothes were clean. Muhammad was so ill, as were other Muslims. We felt this was because our food was being transported in vehicles carrying pork. And at the beginning our food was not stored separately to non-halal food. At first the prison authorities refused to listen. We refused to eat any meat, only vegetables. We chose Abdul Malik as our leader. Eventually the Regional Commissioner agreed to separate our food. I was appointed by us as one of our cooks. I also had to monitor the storage of our food. That's how I got my Food Hygiene certificate. I began to think of opening my own food business once I was out. It was so interesting learning about the slaughtering of Muslim meat.

At Medium B there were two deep freezers, one of which was for Muslim meat, our Hafiz assured us. Most of the time we ate chicken and vegetables. The only meat that is halal is chicken. In the kitchen I worked with my brother Zahir Mpiyakhe Ntuli. But trouble came from Mr Ngetshane, the head of the prison, when it was found that we were taking food and storing it in our lockers. It was nice. He said we were selling it. We were. We were chased away from the kitchen. I went back to D section which was the school section. Then I went to B section where I did a trader test in carpentry. As my test was coming up violence broke out in the prison and all training stopped and we were made to go to work.

Then I was in a cell with Zair Ntuli, who was from Soweto and then Vosloorus. He was practising Satanism before he came to prison. He was not sleeping well at night and spoke about things beyond our control. He was also cutting himself and drinking his own blood. I was praying so hard for him. I was told that I should inform Muslims about this.

One year during Ramadan we had a big fight, Ahlus Sunnat Muslims and Shias. It was over their practices and beliefs. And they were planning to escape. They had asked their outside leader to smuggle in firearms. They did get one gun in and I was asked to help, considering

my knowledge of guns. But I told them I was near to going home, so they continued with their plans without me.

Every day we were searched like nobody's business. I couldn't say anything to the authority but it was going to be bad. Most of them were doing life sentences. On the day of their escape attempt they went as if they were going to the doctor at the hospital section. There they took hospital personnel as hostages. Their plan backfired. In came an armed task force and we watched from D section as if it was a movie. They got a minibus, loaded the hostages in, and drove off with some of them in a hijacked car. But before they even reached the rugby field they were ambushed. The driver of the minibus and everyone in the car was shot dead. Our fight with the Shias ended that day as the rest of the Shias were transferred out to a high-security prison.

Family matters

In 2000 my brother Mohau passed away and months later my father followed him. I was hurt and couldn't attend their burials. I was crying every day. I was alone. But Allah gave me good relatives and family in Hertzog and Nompie Motaung. It was they who encouraged me to go back to school. And my cousin Sekgametsi supported me with world call cards so I could make telephone calls. Anna Motaung was also there to support me through her letters. It was in 2003 that Lebone's mother passed away. Up till then, Nthabiseng was the only lady who visited frequently. Her death nearly broke me. I kept praying. I realised the many things that went wrong in my life that I had to correct when I went back home.

The future

I was fighting the prison system to get free. I continued with my appeal process against my sentence. They replied that they can't find the trial transcripts and evidence records. I was so disappointed because I had no money to follow this up. I told my buddies all about it.

There was much dissatisfaction among our SDU, MK, APLA and AZANLA comrades. They all felt bitterly angry with the government, feeling that they had been betrayed and that the path to revolution had been sidelined. There were many discussions about what we wanted to see happen and how to achieve this. They all felt that the National Democratic

Revolution (NDR) had to be restored to its place as the primary philosophy of the liberation movement. I spoke out about discussions on the Harare Declaration and how in our Somafco Sunday discussions we'd decided that these important statements must be put into action in our location. Which we did; when we were detained, we went on a hunger strike. So now we had the responsibility of making an action plan, because we are suffering and betrayed. And that is what happened. We in the MKMVA showed that the organisation wanted government to transfer 30% of company profits to us, through the MKMVA. This developed into long non-political discussions. We came together. Comrades became supporters of the MKMVA and so we found our unity again.

One day I was called by Nkululeko Saul. Usually we called him PA. He told me that Ms Nkambule, the lady running the ABET Centre at Modderbee, wanted to interview me to see if I was suitable to become an ABET teacher. I moved from B Max to C Section, which is the school section. I stayed in cell 6. There I found Linda, Ace, Thabo and other friends I met in prison. Comrade David from the location was also there. They all had cellphones. I was scared and at night it was busy. I met another guy called Mlenga, who was from the Congo. He used to smuggle large quantities of dagga into the prison using the warders. I was scared to stay there but he was well connected and was informed before any search.

But in C Section I gained a certificate in calligraphy and continued to study my criminal law course, where there were three phases. I was the second inmate to finish it. David was about to finish his LLB. We talked about prison laws and in particular the two-thirds clause. This stated that if an offender completed two-thirds of the sentence and all the rehabilitation process courses, he can be released on parole. We drafted a motion and I gave it to Mothibedi, who was working at the Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration in Johannesburg. Within a few weeks we were called to a parole board hearing. We qualified for release. They agreed to place us on parole. David was the first to be released.

Dignity and honour

The last four years of my sentence I served at Modderbee Prison in Benoni. During 2005 I was transferred to the Modderbee Correctional Service. There the prison environment was entirely different. On arrival we were told we had A status, which means contact visits. I was sent to

J Section where all the maximum prisoners were. I was in the communal cell for non-smokers. They knew that I was a Muslim. The head of the kitchen had arranged that my halal meat would be supplied by a butchery in Rynsward in Benoni.

My friends came to visit, including Teboho Mokubung, who never gave up on me. And so many of my previous ladies visited. Tshidi, Phindile, Dieketseng and Naniwe all came to visit me. All explained why they didn't visit me before. I informed each of them that I was a Muslim and can only be married to a Muslim. None of them agreed to be a Muslim.

At Modderbee I undertook several psychological programmes to prepare me for the outside world. I attended a course on HIV and Aids and was counselled in methods and processes of counselling, becoming a peer educator. I also did courses dealing with self-improvement, handling anti-social personality disorder, anger management and the Way to Happiness course. These are all courses for a person who wants to change his personality.

I was also called for an interview at the ABET Centre within the facility. I was taken on as a teacher and from 2005 to 2008 I was in a team of 12 offenders serving as a part-time teacher in Grades 10 to 12. Many of my students were MKMVA members. I taught courses on history for matrics and South Sotho and tourism at ABET Level 4. I also assisted learners with mathematics in Grade 12. Four of our students received distinctions. Our head, Nkambule, was very impressed. The following year, 2006, she allowed me to do my computer course, where I received 99%. She said she didn't believe my mind was so pure. This experience was so important. I regained my dignity and self-respect and created the basis for a post-release professional way of living.

In 2006 Mothibedi came to see me, accompanied by her younger sister. I was very much excited to see her. I asked her if she still loves me and she said yes. I asked her why she betrayed me. She told me that her parents compelled her to marry while she was still in love with me. She told them and him that when I come back she is coming back to me. I was angry to hear that among all the women I was involved with, she was the most honest person to me. She even told me that I will remain special to her life. She never cheated for me and she remained calm all the time. There are many things we shared in our life. But most of all things I loved her so much. I came out of prison; she came to see me but her weight was deteriorating.

We qualified for release after serving one-third of our sentence with good behaviour. At Modderbee I was called to the office where they took my fingerprints as part of the verification process before my release on parole. Ace Ntuli was the first of our group to be released. They gave us each our release dates which were very near. I called Morgan and made arrangements for him to collect me on the appointed date.

Polokwane conference, 2007

As comrades and members of the MKMVA we were all very pleased with the way in which events unfolded at the ANC's Polokwane conference that December. For us it was crucial that the NDR be restored to its rightful place at the centre of our strategies. And as the Eye of the Needle document³ makes clear, our cadres have to live lives not as labourers but as leaders in government institutions and business. Cadres must be full participants in political activities and structures of our movement. As soldiers we know well that the freedom we got has to be protected. That is why the MKMVA must ensure that all its members and their families have shelter and jobs for betterment of their living conditions. As members of MK who have trained in the country as the underground movement of the ANC, we have contributed to so many operations within the country. Some of the so-called MK exiles have a bad attitude towards those of us who were working hard in the country. They see themselves as better than those who were in the country and want to claim all the benefits. Our leaders have ignored this for too long. We did not think that our new president, comrade Zuma, would make this mistake.

Self-improvement

While in prison I noticed that prison can be a place for change. I have done many studies and have put into practice what I have learnt. This still motivates me to become a better person and to write this book to help other people. The people at Criminon SA have helped me a lot, particularly in dealing with bad behaviour. This is an international non-profit company started by L Ron Hubbard, dedicated to criminal rehabilitation, reform and improvement. Criminon means without crime. I have attended many courses offered by them. These have helped me improve my self-respect, establish better relationships with other

people and break destructive habits. It was only through this learning that I found the basic life skills that I never learnt as a young child.

From soldier to civilian

The last short course I attended was in early 2008 when I passed the Basic Business Management unit. After that course Nkabinde, who knew I was about to go home, told me that she wished she could take me with her as an ABET teacher when she left on transfer to Devon Prison. But I knew I had to focus on preparing my life in the outer world where I had left a child without a mother or father. But I am proud that through my courses in education and social psychology, I was able to help my fellow soldiers in prison. None of us had the chance to have a normal schooling and we all understand the need to empower ourselves. With this education I managed to change my attitude, from being a soldier to becoming a civilian. That is the most disturbing thing in the minds of many soldiers. They cannot make this change. I have managed to have inner peace. There are so many soldiers who have never found peace in their lives because of the traumas they suffer because of all the violence they were involved in. I'm appealing to our government to help these guys. They need help. Some of them are dying because they are sick of HIV and Aids. It is hard for them to even get food. South Africa was not South Africa without these comrades. They made it happen and we cannot shift the blame to apartheid.

Release

On Thursday 24 April 2008 I was released. I dressed in my Muslim clothes. After having breakfast, I went to the reception office and was given all my belongings which had been kept for me over all those years. Then I was taken to the Boksburg Parole Board offices in Commissioner Street. Morgan Mokena, Malaza Motloun and Teboho Mokubung 'Slovo' were waiting for me. They signed for me and I was released and they took me home. It was strange. I hadn't seen houses for years and the location had changed.

When I arrived at home it was a great feeling to see my child Khadijah. I had a bath and then went to see Ntate Moroka, who gave me medication. He was happy to see me, but laughed, reminding me that

he'd told me to stop all those crimes. We remembered how he'd said he wasn't going to associate himself with criminal minds even though we are his family. He told me that my brother Lephui was also in prison because he also didn't listen. He told me to behave and I agreed. I learnt that Sobie passed away while I was in prison but that his sisters are okay. I saw them and they were welcoming. I went back and later my cousin Mfo came round, bringing me a brand-new cellphone as a welcome home present. Lots of my old friends popped by to visit on that first day.

Romances

Later I met up with Naniwe who became so close to me until August that year when she told me that I was bewitching her as she is sick. She left me and I met Meisie Sibiloane and we dated. She started being a nice and friendly woman. But she was not sure what she wanted to do in her life. She was still in love with the father of her child. Both of them are in leadership positions in the Katlehong African National Congress Women's League (ANCWL) and ANC branches. I was friendly with this man's best friend, Phindile Sindane. And that is where she came to be distrustful and secretive. Then she disappeared and wasn't taking my calls. I was told that she was sick and had been taken to her brother's house at Spruitview. But I found out that she was with her child's father in Skosana Section.

Since I came back from prison it was my wish to have someone special in my life. So, I decided to leave her for another woman because she is a Muslim as I am. She is Fatima Violet Virginia Buys. My maternal aunt was so happy when I married Fatima. She loved Fatima so much. But my father's brother did not approve. I took her to Makoti's funeral service in Monaheng Section. She was in purda, the cloth used to protect the face of a Muslim woman, and they wanted her to remove her veil. She refused to open her face to them and they asked me her history. I told them how I met her, and all of them, including Ausi Dineo, said I needed to leave her. According to them she was married in Monaheng Section but could not fall pregnant and the family wanted kids. They put pressure on her until she decided to kill them all. She didn't succeed but left to stay in Phooko Section with the grandmother of the late comrade Mbambeni.

One day I was sick and Meisie accompanied me to the doctor in Alberton town. On the way back we went into an ice-cream and sweet

shop owned by Muslims. I saw a lady in purda. Her name was Shaida and she was engaged to a Muslim brother before he goes for 'forty days in the path of Allah' to revive his belief in Islam in a place that is not his own. I was very interested in Shaida.

ABET

I needed work, stable employment. I met Bushie Mofokeng who was an ABET teacher at Aaron Moeti ABET Satellite and asked for work. I told her how I taught ABET at Modderbee. I showed her and her principal the letter of recommendation Nkabinde had written for me and my Certificate of Merit from the Modderbee ABET School. The principal accepted me but they had a problem with my dress. I said I had no money to buy new clothes.

I was given a part-time post teaching Grade 12 South Sotho and history and levels 3 and 4 life orientation. I got paid and that's how I managed to survive. The home was not the way I had left it. My Aunt Elizabeth was staying, on the instructions of my late father. But many things needed fixing. With my pay I replaced the ceiling boards, which were falling in, and I bought material so Aunt Elizabeth could re-cover the couch and chairs.

Undercover agent

I was hired by Icon Security as an undercover agent. I was reporting to Bulelwa, Malaza's wife. They asked me to finalise a case that had been going on for three years without any resolution of the issues. They had a problem with a company, Benoni First National Batteries. I was to work there, reporting to Mr Nel the site supervisor. Over three months I managed to find out that the head of security surveillance and the lady in finance were stealing power-lifting batteries that are used in mines. They were arrested for fraud. They were using shelf companies for accounting purposes and hired trucks to collect the batteries. The security guards at the main gate didn't know anything was wrong.

I gave Bulelwa a report every Friday when I had to be paid. But Malaza didn't give me any money for two months. And it had been agreed that after I submitted my final report and the syndicate was arrested, I would be employed full-time by Malaza. But that never happened. But luck was always on my side.

Meeting comrades

Thabo Binas was out before me. We met and he told me that he has a gun. Then one day the people who gave the police information on me, which was used at my trial, gathered at my home, behaving all innocent. I was very angry and crossed the road to see Thabo. He gave me two guns which I was going to use to finish them off. Khadijah came running to me and hugged me, so I went back and gave Thabo his guns.

On that day I forgave them all, to this day. Comrades and criminals, they all came to see me. Some came with money because I was broke and I took it. Others came with different attitudes. The last one I saw was Tom, my school friend from Mpontsheng. He had a lot of money because he was involved in cash-in-transit operations. He came to me with two other guys I never knew and gave me a new AK47. I took it and hid it away from home.

I was released on a Thursday and by the following Monday Tom was back with two other guys. They had a job and wanted to know if I was interested. I listened to him, while the other two guys waited nearby. I told him that those two guys are undercover police. I said I will join him on the next heist and handed his AK47 back to him and wished him good luck.

Sure enough, later that morning there was a cash-in-transit heist on the R21 and all ten robbers were killed. This was my second chance in life. It was the same with Battler. He wanted my weapon experience for his criminal activities but I told him that I'm on parole and won't be doing crime again. Then I heard that Battler worked with Wonder to commit robbery from someone they knew. As they were taking the money, Wonder was shot dead. Battler survived but he was arrested and sentenced to 15 years in prison, first at Leeuwkop Maximum Prison and later he was transferred to Sun City Prison.

But I was struggling. I needed to get back to my old support system. I went to my parole officer, Mr Nyandeni, and talked to him. I told him about my gangster comrades. I told him they had given me a new cellphone and offered me guns. He knew exactly what was going on. He told me all about the gangsters' new modus operandi, which centred on the cellphone and how you could organise a heist using many people and vehicles and keep in control of the whole operation using cellphones. I told him I needed work. He asked me where and I suggested the municipality offices in Germiston. He told me to call him every time I

was being called out by my friends and he would help me by talking to me. He gave me his cellphone number. I did that.

I also met up with my old friend Fana Masuku. He was selling vegetables with his grandpa and we became friends again. He had been operating with comrades in the Nkahpo Section. For us it was easy to know each other. I also met comrade Calvin. Our political history goes back a very long time. No one can deny this. Many comrades died and some were assassinated during the times which Calvin and I shared. We talked a lot and he told me I should come to MKMVA meetings.

My first MKMVA meeting

In May I went to my first MKMVA meeting, at the Katlehong technical centre, to find out what was available. There I met Bruce and Lebohang Mohapi and Khethiwe, the wife of Gift Majivane. They were so happy to see me. I was wearing my kurta and toppie and they just looked and watched.

The MKMVA meeting I attended was a recruiting meeting chaired by comrade Mncedisi, who was a senior figure in the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Police Department (EMPD). The Iron Platoon needed new members to form the national pall bearer unit of the Iron Platoon. All volunteers had to be verified and active ANC members in good standing. The pall bearers were to be trained in all the ceremonial requirements for providing fallen comrades with dignified memorial and funeral services. While there were Heroes Acre burial sites, most fallen comrades were not being recognised. It was too sad to hear how many of our comrades were dying in poverty and distress. We were not to be paid, but promised that our services as pall bearers would be duly recognised and rewarded. I became a member of the Iron Platoon.

Comrade Meshack, with his brother comrade Jones, and comrade Johannes Bodibe are the founders of the Iron Platoon. This unit was established in 1996 at the meeting in Katlehong where the national MKMVA was launched. Meshack is a dedicated EMPD police officer and Jones and Johannes serve in the SANDF. I was accepted as a member of the unit. Bruce was in charge of our training in drill and physical fitness at Zimeleni School. Our first parade was the unveiling of comrade Vusi Buthelezi's tombstone.

In the beginning we wore any combat uniform we had. I had China combat gear that I'd kept safe for years. China combat is the style MK

used when training in Uganda; it's all light green with brown dashes. Cynthia had a three-colour winter combat outfit of a heavy material. It was decided that all the women must wear China combat so Cynthia and I swapped uniforms. Our first ceremony was at the unveiling of the gravestone to comrade Posh Thubela, an MK cadre trained in Uganda in 1992. We only received new uniforms for the 16 December MKMVA parade in 2012.

Lady of my dreams

It was at that MKMVA meeting where I saw this lady. She was with Khethiwe Motshabi and Gift Motshabi. We were talking and as the meeting ended, they offered me a lift home. I had walked to the meeting. On the way out I introduced myself and she said her name is Cynthia. She had also signed on as a pall bearer. I fell in love with her. She gave me her cellphone number. Quite soon we became friends, seeing each other at MKMVA and pall bearer ceremonies. I realised that she was involved with comrade Slender and she had a car. I had nothing. And I wasn't relaxed. I was still trying to find a job. I sent her an SMS saying that I loved her and proposing marriage. She never replied to me and I gave up on us. Some things just never work out right. But we continued to see each other and be friends.

Trouble soon came my way. When I returned from the meeting my Muslim wife, Violet Fatima Buys Motaung, was very angry about me joining the pall bearers. Why was I not looking for work? She had no guards to look after her and here I was going to work for nothing. I told her we were promised jobs at the meeting. I was not earning much at the satellite school. Then she became suspicious, searched my phone and read my SMS to Cynthia. I told her, honestly, that we were just good friends. Our marriage was not to last. Sadly, my first-born child with Fatima died soon after birth, and we separated. I divorced her according to Islamic laws, letting her stay on at my home until she moved to a house in Eden Park.

Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Council and the Iron Platoon

It was unfortunate that some of the leaders of the MKMVA were not on good terms with the then mayor of Ekurhuleni, comrade Ntombi Mkgwe. But it was very fortunate for us that comrade Ntombi had

excellent relations with the senior figures in the EMPD, all of whom were senior figures in the Iron Platoon. She was impressed by our performances during the 2009 commemorations for comrade Chris Hani and the way in which the Iron Platoon conducted parades at electioneering rallies and door-to-door canvassing, in our uniforms, across Ekurhuleni during the campaigning for the 2009 general election. The unit was a feature on TV news broadcasts. I remember a really successful parade we did as far away as Rathanda Mall in Heidelberg. We did all this willingly and without pay, just being provided with food and a cool drink. During a rally for comrade Hani, comrade Blade Nzimande asked us where we worked. We told him that we wanted work and he said that a plan must be worked out.

After the election was over the mayor called us all to a meeting. She was going to make a plan for us. We had to draw up CVs and hand them to Mncedisi. We had lunch in her dining room suite next to the council boardroom. It was a great time. A short while later we attended a COSATU meeting and a South African Municipal Workers Union (SAMWU) official told us that we were to be employed in the EMPD. We received dates for our interviews. After the interview some jealous comrades criticised Mncedisi at an MKMVA meeting, as if he was employing us. I saw Cynthia yawn. We worked hard as pall bearers, practising twice a week and keeping fit. The day before we had to report at the EMPD training college, Mncedisi was arrested. It was a plot by comrades who said Mncedisi was stopping them from going to college. And why are the pall bearers being given special treatment? He was supposed to be killed, just for nothing. That would have caused a great fight. Thankfully nothing came of it.

This was all plotted in our regional office of the MKMVA in Kempton Park. A list of comrades had been drawn up with false information saying they had their matric and driver's licence. Then the comrades on that list were placed on the mayoral project list and approved by the Road Traffic Management Corporation and SAPS. Our names were on the college list. So comrade Mohale borrowed a firearm from a security officer friend and with a police officer from Thokoza Police Station we went to the Kempton Park Police Station and Mncedisi was discharged that same day.

Cynthia did have a driving licence. I didn't. But the Office of the Mayor arranged for us to do our driving licences. But the company failed to deliver their services. So I went to comrade Jabulani Masondo

at the Katlehong one-stop service centre who assisted me. We hustled in getting what we wanted and we all eventually passed, except for one.

In 2010 when we were about to pass out, I was called by the acting chief superintendent who asked comrade Mpanyana to assist me with the criminal record clearance. I found I was not listed and received my clearance certificate. I don't know what happened. I think that when I was sentenced, they didn't take my fingerprints to the criminal record centre to be captured. Maybe they thought I was too young and didn't want to destroy me when I came out.

We were sent to study for the Metro Police Diploma at the college in Kwa Thema. Then the municipal human resources people wanted to switch everything around to make us traffic wardens instead. The mayor intervened and we platoon members formed a study group to ensure that we all graduated together with our diplomas. During college I had lunch with my friend Cynthia. We were so attached to each other, more than anything.

Rest in peace comrades

During that same year we buried many of our comrades. Comrade Msimango was still serving in the army when she died. It was a family-only funeral so as the national pall bearers all we did was to formally place the ANC flag over her coffin and march out of the hall and through the gate to the road while the family went to the cemetery.

The funeral of our comrade Mandla Matsane was a very sad moment. He was standing as the next councillor of Ward 49 in Ekurhuleni. I knew him and his brother at Joe Slovo High and we learnt our ANCYL and SACP politics together and then were in the same SDU unit. We then went to Wallmansthal together. The funeral was very much a comrades' reunion. We all chatted, agreeing that politics is just a dirty game where there are no permanent enemies. His funeral was followed by others for comrade Lekgetho, who was still serving in the army. Sadly, later the same month his mother passed away from Covid-related complications and then his father also died. I wasn't there but members of the platoon were. Then it was comrade Boya, who also tried to integrate into the SANDF. At camp he got angry, saying that how can General Sphiwe Nyanda, who was visiting, tell us we can't join the SANDF when he came from exile and the good life? We decided to burn the general's staff car. It was just a joke, but we were angry. Neither General Nyanda nor

his successor, General Ntate Ramano, understood that as SDUs we won the war against apartheid. We were treated like vigilantes claiming a victory which was not ours. These funerals became important moments where we would gather and remember past adventures as young freedom fighters.

Marriage

As Cynthia and I became close we spoke of many important matters. I told her of my Muslim wife and what had happened. I told her of my childhood and prison. Her thing with Slender was not going well. It was sad on both sides. We were at school one day when we organised a date for us to go out with Fana matched with Nomsa Madinane, and Collen with Bokiwe. The same day she told me that she loves me. We were swotting for exams so I left home to stay with her at her home. She informed her child, Nthabiseng, who accepted it. But it was not fine. But we dated and we stayed together. Our comrades at college were unaware of this until one day Gonya told me that 'the lady looks at you in a way that says I'll hate you if you don't like me'.

Then, in October 2009, Cynthia Nompumelelo Sibeko decided to take me as her man. By then I had told her that I had been married before and she had met my daughter and I had met her children. She also knew of my past life and difficulties. On 11 November 2009 we began living together. A year later I decided to marry her, and sent Hector, my father's younger brother, and Mr Lebelo, my brother-in-law, together to ask for the lady's hand in marriage. She was represented by the late Mr Gembe and her late aunt Ms Khuhle from the Sibeko family. Neither of us have parents. I arranged the bridal money. I do love my wife. She feels well for me. So I asked my crew, Gugu Zondo, for help. I told her I was to marry Cynthia, whom she knew well, and I wanted help in buying a ring to propose to her. She thought I was joking. She took me to Stern's jewellery shop at Golden Walk shopping centre. I bought the ring and went home.

When she arrived home from work, I took out the ring and proposed to her. She was very touched and happy, as she was expecting our child. Everything went well. There was a wallimah, a bridal ceremony, and on 27 November 2011 my wife and I were married in the marriage office at the Alberton Home Affairs branch. Then we had a 'white wedding' ceremony in accordance with her wishes. I would have preferred a traditional one, but she got her desires and that is right. To celebrate the first anniversary of our marriage, I took her on a steam train trip to the Magaliesberg.

Everything we have done we have done together. We have helped each other, even in difficult times. We were forced by circumstances to move out of the house she was staying in to the outside room. We then prepared to buy our own house, and the process went well and we have our own home.

On 26 April 2011 my wife bore our first child, Lehlohonolo Morena Motaung. From that time onwards we are making a family. What I can say to my wife: you're such a beautiful and caring wife and I'm happy to be your husband and I do love you with all my heart and I hope that we will be together until death do us part.

We two have had so many life challenges. Thankfully it was our families who intervened to save our marriage. If it wasn't for them, we wouldn't be under the same roof and that was going to affect our families and kids as well.

Iron Platoon

The Iron Platoon was meant for no one but the ANC, SACP and MKMVA. Every member must swear an oath of allegiance and commitment. But I have noticed that there are ANC and MKMVA comrades who don't appreciate our work. They are negative towards our responsibilities to our mother body and the veteran structure. They are easy about enjoying every moment when we are together celebrating our history. But they forget the discipline needed to keep us together. This is the discipline shown in the Iron Platoon. This platoon is so important to the MKMVA and the ANC. Really, we are very special. We are called on every time to perform our duty. The first time I flew on an aircraft was on Iron Platoon duty. We do it with pride and love it and we enjoy it. There are people who can say whatever with their mouth about us but in their hearts they know that we can do our thing. It is our calling.

One weekend the platoon went on pall bearer duty at Germiston Lake. I had to stay at home that weekend because my parole officers were coming to visit. They would interview me and I would sign the parole register. The comrades understood this. I waited for my parole officer at home at Mopedi but no one came. The lady who comes with Mr Ngobese came the next day and gave me a hard time, as she always did. And while my wife was doing pall bearing duty at the cemetery, she had an asthma attack and her chest closed up and I was not there for her. It was all a mess. I spoke to Mr Nyandeni about these difficulties but I had to be careful to keep to my parole conditions.

In the pall bearers there is a misunderstanding that arises between members. We don't tell each other face to face when one is having a problem with another member. This created difficult situations. But because of love we are learning to talk to each other so that we create peace around each other because being pall bearers is a lifetime commitment.

Graduation

Studying in groups is far more effective than alone. Being alone, you have only one view and no discussion. After our examinations, which we all passed, we only had a few things left to graduation. I did my shooting test in Boksburg while others did theirs at Kempton Park. In 2010 after completing all the practical subjects at the training academy, our passing out ceremony was held at the Kwa Thema Stadium. Mr Hofman, the firearm instructor, trained us hard in drill, preparing us for the parade. It was a great day. We took the oath and were police officers. The only trouble concerned our salaries. The Member of the Mayoral Committee (MMC) for Safety and Security was Councillor Sibozza, who promised to meet with us but he didn't come to our ANC political forum. We wanted him to meet us there to tell him that it is us who have deployed him and we need to approve the metro's plan for us.

EMPD service

In early 2010 we were deployed to the Germiston precinct under Senior Superintendent Barnard with superintendents Singh and Wargon, who was also my shift supervisor. The precinct didn't have cars and we patrolled on foot in the CBD. However, there was a SAMWU strike and we lost ten days without pay. The strike was all about wanting more pay because the Soccer World Cup was coming to South Africa. Comrades applied for precinct transfers. That was the time there was violence in the Zonkizwe and Katlehong precincts. It was a difficult beginning.

I was then deployed as part of the security detachment at OR Tambo International Airport. We remained there until the 2010 Soccer World Cup competition finished. Then I was seconded to Germiston South precinct, without a vehicle. I did foot patrols for almost two years. I crewed with Ndevu and Percy who had a vehicle so he used to fetch me for work. I couldn't yet afford a car. But Percy had personal problems and sometimes didn't fetch me. So I got comrade Jabu Masondo to help

me look for a car. We found a Corsa Lite. I saw it and loved it. He took me to my ABSA branch where I filled in a loan form. I got R40 000 from there and then we went to Capitec where I got the remaining R9 000. It was also Jabu who helped me get my temporary driving licence. That's how I drove my first car. It was black, ZHL 272 GP.

Soon I had a crew working for me. So I would collect Gugu Zondo and later also Lehlohonolo Shekeshe, who were both in my crew. What was amazing was comrade Castro who still used the trains as his means of transport to come to work.

When my wife fell pregnant, my friend comrade Jabu Mkhize helped my wife with her physical fitness. She also had problems getting to the clinic for check-ups when I wasn't available to drive her there and back. That is when we bought a second car, a Polo Classic, from a dealer in Benoni. The car had problems, but some comrades helped me sort them out.

Soon I was acquiring a range of professional policing experience. I worked in a task team dealing with fake driving licences. This team had problems, where comrade Siphon, originally from Zimbabwe, was caught faking and forging driving qualifications. He was dismissed and arrested for also having false qualifications.

Sabelo was another member of EMPD who was so dedicated; he worked to survey and check the people who were planning riots. He would inform the office of the chief of police. He was not a member of the ANC but was a hard-working colleague trained as a forensic investigator. He was later killed by a criminal.

Then a post was advertised for new instructors at the training academy. They needed more staff as the EMPD was taking in a large complement of new trainee traffic officers. From the crime task team it was me and Marlon and Portia Mogohle and from the Germiston precinct Bongani Zondo who applied. They needed 15 new officers.

EMPD academy

During our interview we were required to make a presentation. I managed to do it right and was selected to join the academy. That's where I met Ntaoleng Molefe, who has since passed away and was buried in the Nasrec Cemetery on 13 July 2021.

I called her 'mama' because she made sure that I got on every course available. She was an ANCWL member in Alexandra, together with her

mom. She was a business-minded person and a firearm instructor and a range officer in the EMPD. This lady made us feel welcome. We had no transport for all of us so she arranged for us to use a Quantum to bring us in on Mondays and take us home on Fridays. On Friday afternoons we'd go off to some place and enjoy ourselves and get to know each other. Becoming an officer in the academy transformed my career. As it is a training academy, I have passed so many professional courses in order to develop my ability to teach others.

Iron Platoon

The Iron Platoon is often referred to as the Glorious Platoon. We have marched and lit the Solitary Flame and laid comrades to rest at parades and all major events in the ongoing history of the movement throughout the country. We were there at the ANC's centenary celebrations, at all the Siyanqoba rallies from President Mandela's time to the present. The unit was there to escort, protect and support President Zuma during his trials. I have been an active member of the platoon in all these events, and have photographs of these times.

It is sad how many comrades are dying young when it should be their time for enjoying the fruits of our revolution. Comrade Castro made sure that pall bearing was extended when he called comrade Schoeman, the Tall Man, to open a baby of the Iron Platoon in the Vaal region. We as the Iron Platoon needed assistance because we were being forced to choose which funeral to attend; there have been so many deaths. So it was good that the baby was formed. Schoeman made sure that he commanded the unit and with comrade Leburu they recruited members according to their own specific needs and they were satisfied. Comrade Bronson, of the MKMVA Provincial Executive Committee (PEC), gave his support, which we didn't expect. It was he who made sure that all business men and women of the Vaal recognise and support the platoon. They helped us a lot in terms of funerals which we couldn't attend. And together we've been to several operations across the country. Most of the combatants saw the need to open platoons to do what we do. Realising this required military coordination, the Iron Platoon reported the matter to the NEC of the MKMVA and they appointed comrade Guerilla to become the coordinator of operations. That is when everything went wrong.

It was a mess. Comrade Guerilla started dividing us and made sure that the Vaal unit was disassociated from the Iron Platoon. The problem

escalated within the ANC and MKMVA, causing divisions and shaking some branches and provinces to the core. We reported the matter to our Regional Executive Committee (REC) in Ekurhuleni but because they belonged to a certain cause our matter was not heard.

The Iron Platoon was sidelined within ANC, SACP and MKMVA activities for almost three years. And there were big divisions between the MKMVA and the MK National Council (MKNC). And some were supporting the cause of Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma (NDZ), which was mainly the MKMVA, and others supported the cause of CR17 (Cyril Ramaphosa 2017), which the MKNC was. We were caught in the middle and tried not to be involved in such causes and political ploys that are used to divide and rule. Comrade Castro tried to make us aware all the time that we are the Iron Platoon that doesn't belong to any core within the ANC and that the MKMVA shouldn't use us to fight their own battles. Comrade Castro, his brother and comrade Johannes decided to leave the Iron Platoon. Then at the Nasrec conference, NDZ failed to win the conference vote and CR17 won. We still maintained our independence and we were not included at all in the plans of the MKMVA. We were sidelined by the ANC security office, which was led by comrade Langa and Bobo. They told us that comrade Guerilla hadn't submitted the names of us Iron Platoon members. The issue of causes has really destroyed our organisation. Most of the comrades have attended political school, at ANC expense, but they still lack a political understanding of the policies of the organisation.

Comrade Castro was determined to keep the Iron Platoon active and loyal to the movement. We supported him. But some comrades, including me, had problems attending Iron Platoon operations because of work challenges. There were six of us, including Cynthia Sibeko and me. But comrade Castro was rigid. We were suspended without our knowledge. Behind the scenes was jealousy and political mischief. It was claimed we got work from being Iron Platoon members and then when we had work, we failed to attend Iron Platoon operations. The worst part of this was that at the time comrade Castro and I were both working at the same precinct, the Crime Task Team in Germiston, but he never said anything.

Now he has deserted the Iron Platoon. I just wonder if we will be burying him as the Iron Platoon. Just like comrade Themba Dlamini, who was a platoon member, but we didn't bury him. The same with comrade Zoleka when she passed away. She was the last surviving founding woman in the unit.

Their decision was based on hatred, which is a bad emotion. They

forgot we were comrades. I was hurt, but life continues. And then later, I was invited back into the unit, and I accepted.

Office politics

In 2019 in around January comrade Mjepa passed away after a sudden illness. He was a manager in Mayor Massina's office. The mayor then created a post of coordinator to implement the decisions of the DMV and liaise with that department. I was interviewed and, as I heard later, came second. There was politics involved. The post was for a civilian; it was demilitarised. The person the director of that division wanted was already in the municipality but at a higher salary scale. Comrade Eugen Mokgatlane, who is my comrade in the Iron Platoon, also applied and was interviewed. My director at the training academy did not give me a favourable review.

Rest in peace comrades

In April 2019 comrade Oupa Ngwaza, Gwazito Motaung to his family, passed away three months after he was released from prison. He had served 19 years of his 28-year sentence. He loved to study, completing three degrees inside. Comrade Gonya used to visit him a lot, and I went once. It was a blow to us as Dulcie September Unit comrades. At the service, comrade Thoze gave the flag to comrade Stayaway of the Mayibuye Unit, who then presented it to the family. Just after the memorial service Ntate Moroka also passed on. Comrade Thози was then serving in the army, but was retrenched soon afterwards and has struggled to find employment since then.

Strife and trauma

In 2020 my wife was pregnant with twins but tragically she miscarried. It was just before the Covid lockdown in March. We were ordered to clean ourselves and we did. I was so upset because she didn't tell me she was having twins. She only told me one, not two. I heard at the hospital. We fought and one day I swore at her. I didn't understand why she could hide such a thing. It led to her calling a family meeting. Everyone was there, including her brothers, Mkhabela Sibeko and Lewy Sibeko, and from my family Hector Motaung, Joe Lebelo and Sakhetoa Motaung, who is like a brother to me. They were with us to listen to the problem.

We talked and I was not okay at all. I had nothing to do but ask for her forgiveness. I was so ashamed to be part of that conversation but I had to be there to solve the matter. I was willing to let it go, if she didn't want our marriage to continue. But we both wanted our marriage to continue. Her bigger sister was so arrogant, as if she is always there for her. I was so sorry that her sister, Ncane Sibeko, was not there when my wife needed assistance. She was supportive of us all the time.

I remember in 2014 when we went to Nqutu to fetch her even though she was not ready to leave the area. Most of the time she was sick while her family was far away. Fortunately, she listened to us. But I was so sorry that she had to listen to our problems. She was amazed when she found out. While staying at Nqutu I had flashbacks about our Jozini operations. I never told anybody.

Ausi Ntswaki was so surprised that we are fighting as she was one of the persons who always wished good for us. I do love my wife and this is part of life and we managed to resolve the matter and since then we live in peace. She is our sister because she is constantly checking on us, how is life; she sometimes comes and she will say she was passing while she is not, just wanted to surprise us.

Peace cops

The greatest employment problem in Ekurhuleni is that local children have few opportunities in life. Firms are hiring people from outside and not focusing on our kids. I and others at the training academy developed the idea of peace cops. During the first term of comrade Mzwandile Masina as the city mayor he continued with the programme and was assisted by the appointment as chief of police of comrade Bafana Lucas Mahlabe, who came and implemented a lot of changes in the department. He signed the conversion of peace cops' students to become traffic wardens. Then they came back to the training college to do the full course to become traffic wardens and are now on our database as permanent employees of the EMPD.

2016 Siyanqoba Rally

In May 2016 the Iron Platoon was one of the feature events and crowd pleasers at the ANC's giant Siyanqoba Rally at the FNB Stadium. This was just three days before the local government elections. With the rally

the ANC wanted to whip up excitement around its election campaign, create a public show of force to the opposition parties and give people good entertainment and spectacle. And the Iron Platoon certainly did that. The crowd screamed and shouted and clapped. The noise was wonderful.

Now the ANC always holds *Siyanoqoba* rallies before each election. *Siyanoqoba* means ‘joyous celebration’ and it was exactly that this time around. But there was a grudge match going on between the ANC and the Democratic Alliance (DA) and the Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF). The ANC had failed to fill the stadium in Nelson Mandela Bay during the launch of its election manifesto. A week later the DA filled the 15 000-seater Rand Stadium in Rosettenville. Then the EFF filled to capacity the 40 000 Orlando Stadium a week later. That was why the ANC was determined to fill the 95 000 FNB Stadium in Nasrec. Speaking at the rally, comrade Zuma said that in filling the stadium, ‘We must show people asibona abantu bokudlala thina’ (We do not play games) and that Gauteng, ‘our headquarters must be defended at all costs’. It was successful and the Iron Platoon was adored. It was comrade Jacob Zuma who signed the Military Veterans Act into law. And that rally was the last time Mama Winnie Mandela was seen in public, amidst black, green and gold banners.

2020 family matters

In 2020 we had a family gathering from my wife’s family. My wife and I initiated this because every January each year my family holds a family reunion. My wife’s family have promised to make this an annual event also. This is going to happen every 25 December in praise of the birthday of Sinenhlanhla Sibeko, the first-born of Phumzile Sibeko.

In our home, my wife and I celebrate the birthdays of each member of the family. It begins with Lebone Khadija Motaung on 2 January, and on 7 January it’s mine. On 27 April it’s Lehlohonolo and on 5 May it’s my wife’s, followed by Lerato’s on 18 June and Nthabi’s on 6 July. She wants to move out of our house next year and become a make-up artist. She will soon complete all her courses and has already worked at Moja Love Channel 157. She has been called for freelancing now by Netflix and I hope one day they will take her. Or that she has the courage to open her channel as she has a passion for make-up and she learns quickly.

Then it's Themba's birthday on 24 July. He is a very exciting young man. One day he will have his millions. He is the first one to pass his matric in my own family and he passed it very well. I applied to the DMV to assist me with the fees for him to study automobile engineering at Gauteng Engineering. They are taking their time in approving my request. With my salary I could not afford to pay without support. The academy is always threatening to throw him out because his fees are not fully paid. I'm negotiating with them and hope it will all come right.

This year my birthday was as boring as always, but I bought cake and cold drinks for Lebone Motaung's birthday. She is busy sorting her life out and has just started with her six-month catering course and wants to finish her matric next year.

In March 2021 we were visited by Ncane Sibeko. She is the one who loves us unconditionally. She just popped in without informing us. We just saw her coming in our house in Vosloorus. She is not well but still enjoys her drinks and was making herself strong with good food. After her visit she went to Botshelong Hospital Intensive Care Unit (ICU) and she was there and was discharged during lockdown level 3 when there was not alcohol for sale. She died soon thereafter. So her visit was her quiet way of saying goodbye to us. My wife and I had been paying into a burial society for her so we could afford to bury her the same week at Thomas Nkobi Cemetery and also repair one of our motor vehicles.

Ntate Moroka

In May 2019 we buried Ntate Moroka. He was my guide in life and politics and the wiser I became the more highly I regarded him. I looked on him as my father. He was in hospital that year and we had all gone to visit. He told us to prepare for his death as he was sick and getting weaker. We tried not to think about it. On the day he died he phoned my brother Ntjongo and we both made a rush to the hospital. He was sitting in a wheelchair, but he wasn't speaking. They left us with him and we spoke, but using signs. I realised that he was going and just wanted to say goodbye. The next day Ntjongo called to say he'd died. I was at work so I took emergency leave. I bathed him and said a quiet goodbye. It was the first time I'd bathed a dead person. Ntate was buried at Kromvlei Hero's Acre. Comrade Mondli Ngungubele attended the funeral because he knew Ntate and his contribution in the struggle against apartheid. I was supported by EMPD training academy learners from my class.

As we buried him in Motsamai Section we all realised that we had grown up. We shared tasks making sure the funeral went well. But it was not a happy day to bury someone who dedicated his life to free people who never recognised what you did for them. Comrade Bashana, Satan, Tororo were there looking good in their suits. As a combat man all my life, I wore my MKMVA national pall bearers' uniform. I know they weren't happy about this, having already tried to discourage me from wearing that uniform. They are not in favour of the association. But my presence made Ntate's funeral dignified.

We all donated money for the family. Bashana told me some interesting stories, remembering Ntate. One day I was fighting at home and there was no one to calm me down. Bashana and the others went to Ntate to inform him I'm not okay. Ntate was a traditional healer and he did some things. I fell quiet and went to sleep not remembering anything about what had happened. When Bashana went to prison in 1992 I was the one who carried on visiting Ntate. He advised me on things I didn't know how to handle well.

My new family

During 2020 I was very stressed out and couldn't find relief. I spoke to Mmeli Mdluli, a friend at work, and he told me about this shooting team. Most are Soweto guys and most are SAPS or Johannesburg Metropolitan Police Department. The group is called Boyz 'n the Hood and they agreed that I could join. They are a group of brothers. I wish I could be with them every week.

We go shooting at a ghost town called Edlozini, which is a shooting range situated inside the graveyard next to Eldorado Park. Every time we have a range day, we get another t-shirt made up. We all have our private firearms. There is mutual respect and if you talk about your worries and frustrations, they will go all out to give you moral support. Our range officer is excellent, making sure that all rules are in place and he takes control of the firing procedures. Afterwards there is a party where we all enjoy drinks and some food. There is wine, Tanqueray gin, Savanna ciders and the hookah pipe, which I take to. Many of the guys bring their wives or girlfriends along. They are part of my life and till today they are my therapy.

Comrade Castro and me

I remember comrade Castro, as he was called during the struggle. We were students together, he at Mosa Khumalo, Alafang, and I was at Joe Slovo, Mpontsheng. We led the COSAS campaign to end gangsterism in our location. First we started with the BMX that was based at Tshongweni and Nhlapo sections. We managed to finish them and their boss Hoshie off. Then we continued to Twala Section where there were the Home 7s, which we also finished off. Our biggest problem was in Thokoza, where there were the Bad Boys led by Mugabe. We killed them too. Then we went to Tembisa to sort out the Toaster Gang. They were fighting our comrades there, and chasing them away. When we came on the scene they fled, opening a base in Vusimuzi Hostel in Tembisa. They became part of the hostel dwellers who were problematic to the comrades' society in Tembisa. These comrades allowed us to assist. But there were some difficulties. They were then recruiting all over the locations around Tembisa and needed community support and financial contributions to the neighbourhood watch system. But we had a different way of working. It worked in Katlehong and so we put it into operation in the Tembisa area. We were not known in the area so could move easily and quickly. We went to Mthambeka location and finished off the gangsters there for once and for all.

That is where I met comrade Nico and his brother, Mveli. They were MK operatives in Tembisa. Comrade Vusi Vilakazi liked them. We continued helping our comrades, going as far as KwaThema making sure that all the locations were stable for MK. We had to clean the areas of PASO because they used to attack ANC members as well. Comrade Mesh was there alongside me during all these operations together with his brother. They were together by my side when we marched to Alrode as the Katlehong ANCYL. They also received training in how to handle the steel stones.

And when I refer to us finishing gangsters off, I do mean killing them. They were terrorising the community, they killed comrades, the police turned a blind eye to their crimes, the Special Branch used them to spy on us and Koevoet was protecting them.

There are many, many others who have passed away. Some of these I knew from school days and who later worked at the EMPD. I remember comrade Eddie Xobisa, who was sick for a long time, and who was crew to my wife; comrade Themba Dlamini from Makula

Section was like me, trained by Bruce and who also failed SAPS integration.

On 24 July 2021 the Iron Platoon buried comrade Castro, the second-in-command of the unit. He was shot while performing his duties as an EMPD officer. Tragically, he was buried along with his niece and then his uncle died shortly thereafter.

The ceremony began with the ward councillor welcoming Ntombie Mekgwe and Panyaza Lusufi from the Gauteng legislature. The platoon commander then presented the platoon. We sang, but it was very emotional for some of us who had been so close to Castro. We marched to the grave site.

Comrade Castro was recruited by the South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) and then received his training under MK. And that is how he got his name, something that very few comrades know. This was a moment of truth for the unit. Comrade Ntombie had made the necessary changes and order was restored to the unit. She is the mother of the Iron Platoon. The Vaal Platoon did not attend.

When the flag was removed from the coffin it was handed to comrade Bafana Mahlabe, the deputy chair of the MKMVA. The chair, comrade Craig Thulare, was nowhere to be seen. Bafana then handed the folded flag to Ntombie and comrade Sky handed a token gift for her to give to the family. It was the first time I saw two coffins from one family on the same day. It was so sad. The Iron Platoon had given comrade Castro a last salute.

We then went back to his family home and enjoyed the drinks they had arranged. Cynthia and I then left, taking Ausi Tshidi, who had represented our family so eloquently, back to Ramokonopi East. Everyone was there. I was happy. Some family members wanted to meet me for the first time. I don't know how it is, but every time we come together, I see new family faces. And these were from my dear mother's side.

Conclusion

South Africa is a country of many secrets, still. In this memoir I have tried to remember and tell of things that happened that nobody has yet really written of. I'm writing as a once active participant; a foot soldier veteran of combat struggles in my township. I've long wanted to write my memoir offering an understanding of, as the title says, being freedom fighters.

In writing I struggled to remember many events, how they happened, who was involved and how they relate to each other. And I just can't really remember what my feelings were then. I have forgotten many painful things. I know I was angry, violent and wasn't scared of dying. Our struggle meant that much to me, as it still does. I do remember specific moments. They come back quickly as in a pulse. Like seeing my brother for what was to be the last time before his execution, and how my mother and father must have felt. My mother dying and leaving me. Just thinking of Masipati brings a clear vision, in an instant. Of combat firefights too. But these are all flashing images, not really stories. I have to feel my way into memories. I have consciously tried to suppress some images, like those of necklacing, which I tried not to mention here. I know South Africa's history and that of our time in Katlehong from the SACP teachers, but I have to be reminded of important details. That is when conversations and looking at the photographs you see in this book were so helpful. Discussion jogged my memory. But, in discussion these photographs prompted a question I have long been avoiding asking myself. How many people did I kill, wound and maim? And my first response is an honest one. At the time we never thought to count. We just went forward. Over the years these memories and now this question hangs over me, like shadows. I've tried to estimate, but it's difficult, for

many reasons. It was dark when we were in action. But the next day there were bodies that people could see and news travels. Whatever the sum, it'll be in the hundreds, certainly two and perhaps three.

Comrade Ronnie Kasrils bravely went to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) amnesty hearings. He accepted responsibility for MK leadership, including assassinated comrade Hani, for setting up, training and arming SDUs. Many SDU leaders and cadres from Katlehong also sought amnesty. I never went. I was a minor during those battles. I never found freedom and liberation in 1994 or even soon afterwards either. I was in prison for a very long time. There I did meet many men, often serving life sentences for things done during that period. Many were angry, as I was too, feeling betrayed. I found peace of mind with spiritual strength in Islam and bettering myself, qualifying as a teacher. Here was my liberating meaning of freedom. Now, as this is my life history, I must bravely address this long shadow. Who was I during those times? So here in answer is the last vignette of my memoir:

Enkie was my first love, my sweetheart. She was the most beautiful lady. She'd come to all-night vigils at the church and we'd share time just to sit quietly close together and whisper to each other, holding hands. She came to see me in prison, just before I was released. She had a child by then, married and living in Mpumalanga. I couldn't say anything but accept her progress in life. Both her sisters died whilst I was in prison. After her father died she'd come back to Katlehong to visit her mother. She was keen to stay but I encouraged her to return to her three kids and husband. Finally she heard me, and returned and they are happy. When we were sweethearts I was rough and impatient. I used to abuse her. She had another guy whom I fought with several times. One day she was wearing my jersey and he tore it off her and I had to protect her, aggressively. At the time I was 14 years old, learning the tactics of war to make the country ungovernable. I was too rough to her.

We didn't have time to attend school lessons properly because we were busy fighting. We were too young, life was changing quickly, and we were left behind without any therapy or counselling for all the trauma we had experienced during the struggle. I hope I have been bravely liberated in offering you this memoir.

Editorial note

Iain Edwards

In this memoir Morena Motaung provides the first extensive first-hand account of the vortex of politics and violence which wracked the East Rand region of the Witwatersrand from the late 1980s through to the South African general election of March 1994 and the inauguration of President Mandela and the ANC-led Government of National Unity later that same year. Although rarely publicly admitted, as it disrupts the New South Africa 'miracle' progress narrative, this was the most systemically violent period of political contestation in South African history. This was the period where peaceful political negotiations were by no means the only strategy adopted by major political forces. Estimates place the number of violent deaths in the East Rand alone in this brief period at approximately 4 700, with an undisclosed number of others who disappeared, unaccounted for. However, as with the rest of the country, the human costs of conflict in the area, in terms of suffering, dislocation and death, are surely inestimable. Ruined and burnt buildings and abandoned houses and a hostel, demolished brick by brick, remained features of this shattered post-war zone landscape for many, many years afterwards. As Motaung graphically recounts, Katlehong was a war zone. Yet it is from his accounts of these terrifically violent times, when he was but a youngster, that Motaung then develops his post-1994 story. Its overall theme is a powerful counter-narrative of a betrayed pursuit of progress; violent personal anger, defiance and waywardness; prison as spiritual redemption and educational growth and qualification; and then, on release, the beginnings of his own liberation from the shadows of his past. This is a journey which will remain with him for the rest of his life.

Authorial status and editorial scope

Motaung and my mutually agreed aim was to produce an accessible, fast-paced episodic memoir. We sought intertwined narrative storylines and reflections to offer local texture and dynamic resonance; thoughts on wider critical issues of the post-1990 and -1994 transitions; and the existential issues of spirituality, morality and humanity in contemporary South Africa. These are issues many times told and analysed, but never before linked to life history accounts of the war-zone dynamics. These were so fundamental to the birth of South African constitutional democracy.

Motaung commenced writing this memoir privately on release from prison. Much later, from 2016 onwards, the South African Department of Military Veterans organised life history writing courses and guided workshops during and from which he completed a basic manuscript. My role has been primarily threefold. First, reading the basic manuscript and consulting key primary and secondary sources, including locating suitable visual material to accompany Motaung's own personal photographs. Second, copy editing, reordering and rewriting a much-reduced text to ensure reflective accuracy and emotion and also readability. Motaung and I have spent months, in one-to-one personal meetings and WhatsApp communication, discussing and responding to my copy-editing mark-up queries and concerns. Third, confidential oral interviews, which are a crucial means of discussing personal life history, trauma, forgetting and remembering. These interviews were not recorded. Notes from these interviews are incorporated into the text and as quotes to photographs, which were essential elements in the oral interviewing process. Motaung approved the final text of his memoirs.

Sources

Primary sources

Six sources are critically important and have all been consulted. First, Gail Gerhart and Clive Glaser's volume 5 in the authoritative *From protest to challenge* series.⁴ For vitally important oral interviews concerning the period, including coverage and analysis of the East Rand and Katlehong Township during the 1980s to 1994, Padraig O'Malley's collection is unsurpassed and is available online via the Nelson Mandela Foundation Centre for Memory website.⁵ Third, an Independent Board of Enquiry (IBI) investigated violence on the East Rand over the period 1989 to 1996. The archives of the IBI are held at the University of the Witwatersrand's Historical Papers section.⁶ Fourth, the South African Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) online archives. The TRC held specific hearings on violence and atrocities on the East Rand and made clear findings on these issues, including requests for amnesty.⁷ Fifth, the University of the Witwatersrand Historical Papers section holds Ronnie Kasrils' voluminous personal papers. Considering Kasrils' leading role in motivating for, conceptualising and establishing the ANC's SDUs, including his direct role in the East Rand SDUs and his appearance at the TRC amnesty hearings for leaders of these units on the East Rand, this collection is of fundamental importance (see particularly A3345: B 2.2 (1f); B 3.2 (1f) and B 3.9).⁸ Finally, the same archive holds William Matlala's photographic collection.⁹ Known specifically as a trade union and worker-focused photographer, Matlala was familiar with Katlehong, with his first employment being in nearby Wadeville. And Matlala was in Katlehong often, at union meetings, on Katlehong Station during the 1990 union stayaway, for civic and political meetings, and providing on-

the-spot photographic evidence of the terrifying violence which gripped the township from 1990 onwards.

My thanks are to Gabriele Mohale, Acting Head of Historical Papers at the University of the Witwatersrand, for her support and guidance, and Ronnie Kasrils for permission to access his critically important private papers at this same archive.

Public heritage

The Freedom Park Museum and Heritage Site on Salvokop in Pretoria and the Boksburg Civic Library on the East Rand both have permanent public exhibitions covering the history of this period. Readers are strongly advised to also visit the emotionally moving Wall of Remembrance at Freedom Park, which includes a listing of the dead from Katlehong and the East Rand more widely from the period covered in Motaung's memoirs.

Secondary sources

For readers wishing to consult further on the life histories and abundant scholarly analyses of both the period and the many issues covered in Motaung's memoirs, such secondary sources can easily be identified through web searches.

Glossary

Throughout this memoir are the names of objects, people and places and words and phrases with distinct meanings as they developed in South Africa's multilingual and colloquial political lexicons. While it is assumed that readers will have a general informed understanding of the major issues, some terms and phrases require special listing.

- Abotata** Township colloquial to describe Xhosa residents, and most likely specifically refugees, in East Rand townships. Intended as a word of respect, from the word *tata* or 'father', this meaning soon degenerated into a slur.
- Abothwebula** isiZulu word for liberation cadre, but also used pejoratively as 'terrorist'. This word was extensively used by cadres in the East Rand region.
- Amajoni** amaXhosa and isiZulu word originally describing British soldiers derived from the nickname for British troops, 'Johnnie', and later a colloquial term for a soldier in general.
- Askari** Swahili from Arabic (*askariyy*) for an African who becomes a colonial soldier or police officer. Through the ANC's camps in East Africa the term became used in South Africa from the 1980s onwards to refer to an ANC cadre who changed sides, joining the South African security forces and active in secret operations against the liberation movements.

Amapine	From pineapple; a colloquial liberation movement term, used in KwaZulu and the Transkei areas for the F1 fragmentary grenade as its outward appearance and shape resembled the fruit.
Baba	isiZulu and other African languages, father and respectful term meaning elder for others, even unrelated to speaker.
Bush meat	Generic term for the meat of wild animals, but also used specifically for illegally hunted and rotting meat of wild animals.
Casspir	Based on the much-redesigned chassis of the three-ton Bedford truck, a four-wheel drive mine-resistant armoured personnel carrier developed primarily for use in South Africa's military operations in Namibia and Angola from the 1970s onwards. Commissioned by the SAP, the vehicle was first used by the SAP's Koevoet unit in Namibia. Holding a crew of two and twelve additional personnel, the vehicle was later used extensively by the SAP's Internal Stability Unit in black township areas throughout the country during the 1980s and 1990s. The name is an acronym derived from the SAP and the Council for Scientific and Industrial Research, the designers. See Pintfresh.
Community Council	In terms of the Community Councils Act of 1977 a new tier of elected municipal councils, under the authority of the Bantu Affairs Administration Boards, was established. It was the first attempt to transfer authority to financially self-supporting elected local authorities with real executive powers in black urban residential areas. The legal status of the Community Councils was later incorporated into the Black Local Authorities Act of 1982. The Community Councils replaced the long-discredited Urban Bantu Councils.

CR17	The electoral campaign of Cyril Ramaphosa in his successful bid to be elected as the president of the ANC in 2017.
Dibeke	An indigenous game akin to softball.
East Rand	The eastern part of the Witwatersrand now falling under the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Council. Its densely settled urban form began with the discovery of gold-bearing rock reefs. From the 1920s onwards the area became the primary site of South Africa's heavy engineering industry and the epicentre of the country's secondary industrial revolution. From the mid-1940s, the Witwatersrand East Rand and its gold-mining and heavy industries were the powerhouse of the South African economy. See map on in colour insert.
'For the sake of our lives'	The primary title of the 32-page booklet written by Ronnie Kasrils while in hiding in South Africa and published in the name of Umkhonto we Sizwe (n.d [late 1990]), setting out the guidelines for the creation of self-defence units.
Fanagalo	South African spoken pidgin language, comprising largely isiZulu and English words and sayings. Originally the language of communication between white supervisors and black men on the Witwatersrand gold mines, the word's literal meaning is 'Do it like this'. Fanagalo quickly spread, being a <i>lingua franca</i> throughout the black African township and hostel areas of the Witwatersrand and further afield.
Granat Hostel	From the Afrikaans <i>granaat</i> , grenade. In terms of the Urban Areas Act, single-sex, very largely male, legal urban residential accommodation. Used primarily by male migrant labourers.
Impi	isiZulu, army or regiment.
Impimpi	Township slang, informer or sell-out.

Intelezi isiZulu, literally ‘slipperiness’, referring to the ability of traditional herbal medicines to make one slippery, as in get out of trouble, or be immune from harmful effects of enemy weapons.

Katlehong Katlehong (Sesotho for ‘Place of Success’) is a township on the East Rand, some 35 kilometres from Johannesburg. Together with the neighbouring townships of Thokoza and Vosloorus, they are collectively referred to as Kathorus, being the second largest black township on the Witwatersrand after Soweto, and form part of the Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Municipality.

Following the massive influx of Africans into the Johannesburg region during the 1940s, the apartheid government commenced with ‘black spot’ removals and relocations from the 1950s onwards. Thousands of people were taken from the mixed-race Dukathole location to the new Natalspruit formal township, renamed Katlehong in the 1970s. Five distinctive features of its life were residents’ multi-ethnic backgrounds; the combination of migrant male hostels and residential family units; a long-standing tradition of ANC- and SACP-supporting trade union membership; the large number of burial societies, cultural and recreational clubs, church and welfare bodies; and by the 1970s when half the population were younger than 16, vibrant male and female youth cultures. By the early 1980s Katlehong was a cauldron of activism, struggles for urban modernity, discontent and stress.

Kentucky Fry Township colloquial for the charred corpse of a necklaced person.

Koevoet Derived from the Afrikaans *kufut* (crowbar) this was an elite South West African police

	<p>counter-insurgency unit. With white officers, the unit rank and file were mainly volunteers from Ovamboland. The unit's aggressive tactics were controversial, with the South African TRC conducting hearings into atrocities committed by this unit. Disbanded in 1989, battle-hardened officers and troops of the unit then served in the South African Police's Internal Stability Unit active in black African township areas.</p>
Location	<p>In terms of the Urban Areas Act, an urban area legally set aside for accommodation for black South Africans. The word 'location' has been appropriated by residents as their own.</p>
Necklacing	<p>Summary execution by mob rule where a rubber tyre drenched in petrol is forced over a person's shoulders, arms and chest and set alight. Used in black townships during the 1980s and early 1990s against suspected informers, government collaborators and opponents of liberation movement power. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sktm_awi8rw for footage of the dead bodies of two IFP supporters after having been necklaced on the road near the Kwesini Hostel, Katlehong, 5 April 1994.</p>
Non-Statutory Forces	<p>The mutually agreed term describing the respective members of the liberation armies of the African National Congress (MK), the Pan Africanist Congress (APLA) and the Azanian People's Organisation (Azanian Liberation Army).</p>
Nyala	<p>From the isiZulu word for a southern African medium-sized antelope, with the word also describing the antelope's primary behavioural trait of stealthily appearing and disappearing. An armoured four-by-four vehicle with a crew of two plus six additional personnel, designed for the South African Police's</p>

Pintfresh	Special Weapons and Tactics operations, mainly but not exclusively in black African townships from the 1980s onwards. Colloquial term used by Katlehong youth for a Casspir. Derived from Pintfresh, a commercially sold milk. This may have a historical context and reference point. In the 1950s and 1960s the three-ton trucks used in influx control and pass raids were colloquially referred to as <i>Meleko</i> , so likening them to the large milk delivery trucks operating early each morning.
Pump gun	A pump or slide action repeating shotgun as used extensively by the South African Police in operations during the 1980s and early 1990s.
Rooidoeke	IFP vigilante groups from the hostels wore red bandanna-type headdress as a means of self-recognition when going into war.
Somafco	The place in Katlehong where the township youth would meet each Sunday to discuss the pressing issues of the moment. Named after the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College. Established by the ANC in 1978 in Tanzania, its purpose was to provide a progressive education to the children of exiles and the post-1976 youth who had left South Africa and joined the liberation movement. The college was officially opened by then ANC president Oliver Tambo in 1985. The college closed in 1992.
Staffriding	South African slang for train surfing. The highly dangerous act is a crucial element in black African male youths' township culture, being acts of self-assertive bravado against the political and social ravages of township life.
Stokvel	South African colloquial; a cooperative investment and savings club, largely a feature in African urban and rural settings with members largely of modest means.

The Green Book	<p><i>Report of the Politico-Military Strategy Commission to the ANC NEC, August 1979.</i></p> <p>The fundamental ANC document setting out the main strategic political and military philosophy underpinning the creation of a national liberation army under the direction of the political revolutionary vanguard.</p>
Township	<p>In terms of the Urban Areas Act, a residential area developed specifically for black South Africans, which may comprise both family housing and single-sex hostel accommodation.</p>
Trekboers	<p>Groups of Dutch-speaking largely white pastoralists, who began spreading throughout the interior of southern Africa from the late eighteenth century onwards, literally ‘moving farmers’, culminating in the establishment of Boer republics, including the Free State and Transvaal.</p>
Tokoloshe	<p>In Zulu and Xhosa mythology an invisible, mischievous and evil creature called up by malevolent people to cause bad luck, harm, illness and even death to others.</p>
Veld	<p>Afrikaans, field, hunting ground, open countryside.</p>

Acronyms and abbreviations

ABET	Adult Basic Education and Training
ANC	African National Congress
ANCYL	African National Congress Youth League
ANCWL	African National Congress Women's League
APLA	Azanian People's Liberation Army
AZANLA	Azanian Liberation Army
CBD	Central Business District
COSAS	Congress of South African Students
COSATU	Congress of South African Trade Unions
DMV	Department of Military Veterans
EMPD	Ekurhuleni Metropolitan Police Department
HIV/Aids	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome
IFP	Inkatha Freedom Party
JND	Johannesburg Natalspruit District Taxi Association
KATO	Katlehong Taxi Organisation
MK	Umkhonto we Sizwe
MKNC	Umkhonto we Sizwe National Council
MKMVA	Umkhonto we Sizwe Military Veterans Association
Nasrec	National Recreation Centre
PASO	Pan Africanist Students Organisation
SACP	South African Communist Party
SADF	South African Defence Force
SAMWU	South African Municipal Workers Union
SANDEF	South African National Defence Force
SAP	South African Police
SAPS	South African Police Service

SANTACO	South African National Taxi Co-operative
SDU	Self-Defence Unit
SPU	Self-Protection Unit
Somafco	Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College
SRC	Student Representative Council

Endnotes

- 1 Maharaj, M. (2008). The ANC and South Africa's negotiated transition to democracy and peace. Berghof Transitions Series No. 2, p.24, <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/71733083.pdf>
- 2 <https://maroelamedia.co.za/afrikaans/gedigte/gedig-muskietejag/>
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- 4 Gerhart, G. and Glaser, D. (eds.) (2003). *From protest to challenge: Challenge and victory, 1980-1990*. Johannesburg: Jacana
- 5 <https://omalley.nelsonmandela.org/omalley/>
- 6 <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory/U/Photos&c=AG2543/P>
- 7 See the South African Department of Justice website for the well-referenced TRC archive, including special hearings and findings and final reports. <https://www.justice.gov.za/trc/>
- 8 <http://www.historicalpapers.wits.ac.za/?inventory/U/collections&c=A3345/R/9113>
- 9 <http://historicalpapers-atom.wits.ac.za/downloads/william-matlala-photographic-collection.pdf>

Morena Motaung was born in 1976 in the East Rand township of Katlehong. He became politically involved as a ten year old during the student protests of 1985–1986. He was a founding member of the Katlehong Youth League.

He joined the African National Congress Youth League and was recruited into the uMkhonto we Sizwe (MK) underground movement in 1990 while in high school. In 1990, he became part of a Self-Defence Unit (SDU) in Katlehong after the late Oliver Tambo had issued a directive for MK soldiers to train SDUs in townships.

In 1994, he joined the South African National Defence Force following the integration of the statutory and non-statutory forces into a single army that would serve the new democracy. His story details his upbringing, his influences and his experiences. It is one of sacrifice, pain, sadness and, most importantly, family.



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