

I never knew it would be so hard to be an adult. I began to be aware of things at the age of seventeen, in 1959, when there was general talk in the countryside about the trials and tribulations of the African National Congress.

In 1960 there was a big meeting about the troubles that befell us with people from different regions in Pondoland. It was to take place on Nquza Hill. So many people attended that a loudhailer had to be used, I could not estimate the number. The Nationalist regime's soldiers were also present on that day. Helicopters, armoured cars, army trucks, fighter planes of all kinds were there too.

When the meeting was about to start the Boers called a big chief of the area. They asked him if he could see that his people were gathered for a meeting of the ANC. "What do you have to say?" they asked him "What should we do to them?" He took a rifle and shot a man dead. He shot this man from the air while sitting with the Boers in a stationary helicopter. This act triggered off a riot. It triggered off the Pondoland rebellion.

Smoke blackened the sky. Fire broke out. A stampede. Bombs ploughed the earth. You could hear people crying and screaming. Some of the crowd fled, some tried to thwart the attack using their sticks and stones. But this proved too little against the attackers.

The sorrow, the misery of that day is always remembered by those who were present and by those who were told by those who had been there. What followed thereafter was a life as cruel as that of beasts. Many women reported that they were raped by soldiers. The soldiers and their informers burnt houses. They plundered stock. They butchered it in front of their owners. When they came across a person they asked him, "ipi lokhongo" - "where is congress?" People were being beaten up. Some people died from the violence, beaten to death. We did our best with knobkerries, spears and stones to resist, but we were defeated.

People slept in the veld, in the forest, deserting their homes. I shall have occasion later to speak of the forest that gave me shelter and protection during those days of hardship.

The Boers divided the people in two: there were those who helped them burn the houses of Congress members. There were also those who had joined Congress and who burnt the houses of those who did not join. People brutally killed each other. Congress people gathered and attacked Botha Sigcawu's house. He ran away, hiding from place to place until he reached Lesotho.

The government sent protection for Sigcawu's place. They hired informers. There was a night and day patrol around the house. Many chiefs sought such protection. One of them was chief S. Ntabankulu in Flagstaff near where we lived. It was the first time in my life I had seen such a bad situation. For three years, 1960, '61 and '62 times were hard. Life became better in 1963 as bitter people returned to their fields.

But the issue of the Trust became the talk of the day in the Transkei. People had joined Congress because through it they wanted to unite, to have one voice to speak for them to the government who had bought over the chiefs. The chiefs had agreed to the Trust, a genocidal Trust which plagues the Transkei to this day. We were not prepared to move from our places, leaving the graves of our ancestors behind. The chiefs who did not agree to sell-out were persecuted. Some were or are exiled. They attempted to shoot the chief of the Mpondos. They finally gave him the slowest killing poison so that he died banished. His cattle and other possessions were stolen.

We left our homes and found new homes in the forests. During the daytime we always stayed in the forest until dark. Then we divided ourselves into two groups to patrol around our homes and to check if everything was still in order. There were comrades in the police force who used to inform us when there was going to be an attack. I remember three police who lost their job because they passed information to us.

The people would divide themselves into two groups, one group to face the attackers and the other group to go and burn the attackers' houses. That idea came after a long period of not paying revenge to the attackers and after many members' homes were destroyed by amajendevu (informers), the army or the police.

The locals sat down and debated the issue. They agreed that all the locals must use this strategy. People were elected who would try to get information about what was going to happen each day, and when the informers and the system were going to attack us.

For a time people were very active burning the amajendevu's houses and killing them. Then the amajendevu started to pull back and stay at their homes, trying to protect their belongings. Their things were taken as they had taken ours. When it became 50-50 they sent a delegation of six men to negotiate peace.

They were told that the people were not fighting with them but with the enemy who killed us, raped our women and destroyed our homes. They had pulled away from us and joined the enemy. They were the ones who made our lives so strange. Some of us had lost our homes through them. They were the people who informed the enemy about our strategy and they were the ones working with the white government to oppress our people.

Our demands to the government were: we should not be moved from where we were; they should not separate Transkei from South Africa as a puppet state; we did not want their 'betterment system'; South Africa is one and the government must not divide it into many weak states of puppets. If they wanted to free South Africa they must free South Africa as a whole, black and white. And we said we had the right way to control South Africa. We told the informants that they must not be a stumbling block on our way to freedom.

After that delegation meeting there were less attacks and violence, although there were still attacks by police and soldiers. I remember one occasion where one of the Zionist priests had a big rondavel which was waiting for the roof to be done. There was a helicopter which was used by the police and the army to trace the Congress people in the forests and over the mountains. This helicopter was a small little thing, its canopy like a bottle - in which you can see the people while it is moving high. I think it takes three to four people at a time.

As we used to go to our homes to check if things were still in order, the Zionist priest went to his home, also to change his clothes and get clean clothes. While he was changing the police came and arrested him. He was surprised to find that the half-done house for the church was the garage for the little helicopter. They arrested him and took him to prison. He was questioned and after six weeks they released him and told him to stay at home, not in the forest. They said he must pray for people to understand that the government was the way to civilise the Transkeians, and that he must preach this as well. He reported to us what had happened to him.

At that time things were impossible for us. We couldn't eat good food. Sometimes we ate fruit, some kind of roots or plain cooked mielies. Sometimes we ate stiffpapa. We drank water to survive. We would say: "Thank you God, I have eaten decent food today". It was difficult to grind mielies on the grinding stone or to make a fire because the enemy would have seen where we hid ourselves and attacked us.

At school it was difficult for boys of my age. I was 18 years old when it started and most boys my age were members of the ANC Youth League. We were very active in the movement at that time. It was very difficult for us to go back to school, although the teachers were activists of the ANC, as were most of the chiefs. In 1962 we returned back to school - but not everyday. When we were informed that the police were coming, we hid in the forests. There was a time when we took our lessons in the forest to prepare for the examinations.

We were told that all the Youth League members were going to be trained to use guns, inside the country, by the Russians. Then they told us that we have to leave the country for training. In our local not a single person was trained.

I think that is why the Pretoria government decided to send the army into the Transkei - to stop the Russians from coming into the land and spoiling their slaves to rebel against them. There were some people who told us that Russian submarines had been seen in the South Coast sea, in places like Lambasi, Mkambathi, Mbotyi and Port St Johns. I am not sure about this, although because of what I have said I think it did happen. If not, why did the Pretoria government send such a strong army? And why was the State of Emergency declared? That is why I believe that the Russians were around in the sea.

There were many things happening in the country which did not appear in the newspapers. The State of Emergency did not allow them to publish the reality. The formation of Umkhonto we Sizwe took place after the Pretoria government banned the people's movement, the ANC, and declared war against the people; after many shootings and killings; after much violence had taken place in the country.

I became an adult in these years of hardship, my soul awakening to a world cruel beyond belief.