

WOMEN IN THE ANC AND SWAPO

SEXUAL ABUSE OF YOUNG WOMEN IN THE ANC CAMPS

Olefile Samuel Mngqibisa

Editors: Olefile Samuel Mngqibisa, a former soldier in the ANC army Umkhonto we Sizwe, presented important new evidence to the Commission of inquiry into human rights abuses in ANC detention camps, chaired by Mr Sam Motsuenyane, on 1 June this year.¹ His ANC 'travelling name' in exile was Elty Mhlekezi.

A crucial part of Mr Mngqibisa's evidence concerned the sexual abuse of young women exiles by members of the ANC security department. We reprint the evidence, and call on women's organisations in South Africa and internationally to respond. We are interested to know what views they take on the events related by Mr Mngqibisa. Questions that arise from Mr Mngqibisa's evidence concern what further investigation the women's groups think should be made, what efforts should be made towards assisting the women who were abused, and what support should be given to older members of the ANC community in Tanzania who were victimised because of their stand against these abuses. Those who protested at these abuses were labelled 'enemy agents', expelled from the ANC (a serious matter in exile in Africa) and left to fend for themselves. One died, alone, in shameful circumstances.

This is particularly important at present in view of the eagerness of nationalist groupings and the left, both in South Africa and internationally, to bury an issue of child abuse of the most extreme kind: the issue of murder, kidnapping and beatings involving the former Mandela United Football Club in Soweto, run by Mrs Winnie Mandela. The relation of Mrs Mandela to the ANC Women's League is discussed elsewhere in this issue. The evidence of Mr Mngqibisa puts women's groupings in South Africa and elsewhere to a similar test of their convictions. It is the old issue of whether the rights of women are to be subordinate to nationalist political considerations, or whether they require to be defended unconditionally.

These events took place at a centre named after Ruth First, co-author of a biography of Olive Schreiner, and former leader of the South African Communist Party, who was killed in Maputo in 1981 by a parcel bomb sent by South African state security. It is an indication of the insensitivity of the ANC to women's issues that it constructed a prison for its own members and named it after Ruth First. She was imprisoned without trial in South Africa, an experience she described in her book *117 Days*, and loathed the atmosphere of prison. Her husband, Joe Slovo was MK chief of staff when the prison was constructed in her name, and was a member of the NEC whose

members — Stanley Mabizela and Robert Manci — carried out the repressions.

There is now a definite genre of literature concerning women's struggles and women's issues that has arisen in South Africa, or which relates to South Africa. It is associated mainly with the ANC. Writers include Hilda Bernstein, Joyce Sikakane, Julie Frederickse and also Gillian Slovo. The material printed here should become part of the record.

Sam Mngqibisa's account reveals once again how comprehensively any kind of democratic accountability was subverted in the ANC in exile. Identical repression of criticism by exiles took place again at Dakawa in 1989, causing two groups of exiles to flee from Tanzania, and again in 1991, when Mngqibisa was himself arrested. Further jailings of Zulu-speakers followed in 1991, including the teacher Bongani Ntshangase, who was murdered in May 1992 in Natal very shortly after returning to South Africa.² A representative of the British High Commissioner later visited the prison.

In his evidence, Mngqibisa explains that he was sent to the ANC camp at Dakawa in Tanzania in 1984, having previously helped ferry units of MK over the Zambezi river from Zambia into Botswana and Zimbabwe. 'The river was infested with crocodiles and hippopotamus, and this was to test if I was a loyal ANC cadre.' He then relates the story of his experiences at Dakawa, where he was elected by the exiles to the post of chief of the logistics department in the camp. His account focuses on the conduct of Imbokodo, the ANC security department. This political police force was then known in Tanzania under the sweet-smelling name of PRO — the 'Public Relations Office'.

He describes the attempts of an elected body, the Zonal Political Committee (ZPC), to protect the young women, who had only recently arrived in exile.

Making an Offer You Can't Refuse

... I was part of a group which exposed Imbokodo's sexual harassment of young girls fresh from SA. It was tradition in the ANC, especially in Imbokodo, to sexually abuse young girls and those who were desperately in need of scholarships. When they refused sexual intercourse with Imbokodo they were immediately detained and labelled agents of the SA government.

In 1987, ten to fifteen young girls fresh from home approached the Zonal Political Committee chairman Nhlanhla Masina (his real name), and complained of sexual harassment by Imbokodo at Plot 18, the Ruth First so-called Orientation Centre. The ZPC immediately convened a meeting, and a decision was taken that the girls be clandestinely interviewed and requested to write on paper their complaints. An elderly ZPC member was delegated to Ruth First [Centre] and he successfully interviewed the girls and later brought with him each girl's statement.

The Zonal chief of Imbokodo — Socks — was informed about the developments. He met his colleagues and afterwards demanded the return

of the statements from the ZPC chairman. He got a negative response, and left and came back fuming, demanding the documents now. The ZPC refused with the documents, which were in safe hands.

This was a serious scandal on the part of Imbokodo. Theoretically, the ZPC had the right to report anything directly to the ANC headquarters in Lusaka through the Regional Political Committee, or RPC [a superior elected body, representing all the exiles in a region: in this case, Tanzania as a whole]. The ZPC was said to be the highest body in the zone [Dakawa], the RPC in the region. But when the RPC wanted to report something to headquarters, permission was to be sought from Imbokodo. Socks failed to pressurise the ZPC to hand over the papers and he reported the matter to the ANC chief representative in Tanzania at that time, Stanley Mabizela, and Robert Mancini [a member of the National Executive Committee of the ANC, based in Tanzania]. He is believed to have been a member of the Politburo of the SACP.

Suddenly an emergency community meeting was announced [on instruction of the ANC leaders, Mabizela and Mancini]. Everybody assembled at Plot 16, where the meeting was held. Before the meeting the ZPC was invited to a private meeting at the Vocational Training Centre in Dakawa by Mancini, Mabizela and Tim Maseko, the then administrator of the Solomon Mahlangu Freedom College [Somafco, based nearby at Mazimbu]. Four cars consisting of Dakawa, Dar es Salaam and Mazimbu Imbokodo plus Mancini and Mabizela approached. The scene reflected a typical South African situation, where the masses are brutally suppressed.

'Provocateurs'

After the singing of *Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika* (the national anthem), Mabizela took the floor with a harsh and swearing address. He announced the expulsion from the ANC of three elderly ANC members. They were Cecil Nduli, Jimmy Moore and the late Professor. He accused them of being enemy provocateurs. Mancini followed angrily and endorsed the expulsion, which was totally in violation of the ANC Code of Conduct. Mancini bravely said: 'We've removed the upper body of enemy agents'. He pointed a finger at me and said: 'We are also coming back to you, Elty'. I never bothered about that threat. There was tension in Dakawa and every ANC member was shocked about the expulsion.

Cecil was an active member of the ZPC and Jimmy was his closest friend. Professor was an open critic and he also criticised members of the ANC-NEC without fear. The three joined the ANC in the 1960s. Jimmy was also an open critic who was hated by both Mancini and Mabizela. I had observer status in the ZPC to report daily developments and problems in the logistics department. The ZPC handed the girls' statements to me with the hope that I was going to box the Imbokodo guys when trying to take the statements from me by force. [Mngqibisa was then in his early 30s, and is tall and powerfully built].

I helped Jimmy pack his clothes under the watchful eye of Sizwe Mkhonto, then the regional Imbokodo commander. The brutal action of Mancini and Mabizela was to rub-off [ie, rub out] Imbokodo's sex scandal. Sidwell was one of the Imbokodo members accused by the girls. The three men who had been expelled were handed over to the office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees in Dar es Salaam. Professor developed a mental disorder and got very sick. I and other ANC members tried to locate him in Dar, but all in vain. We later learned that he died pathetically somewhere in Dar es Salaam. Mancini must account.

The girls' documents were forcefully taken from me by Tim Maseko and I was kept under more and stronger surveillance, which had prevailed since 1978.³ I later resigned from being chief of logistics as relations between me, Jackie Morake [coordinator at Dakawa] and Mancini continued deteriorating. Some sympathetic comrades always warned me to be careful with critical politics . . .

Further Evidence of Abuse

Editors: In his statement, Mngqibisa goes on to describe his work as a plumber in Dakawa, leading to his arrest and imprisonment in the prison at Ruth First Centre in January 1991. This and his escape the following February are described in SSA No 7. Mngqibisa read this passage from SSA No 7 into his evidence before the commission.

He states that the prison at Ruth First Centre at Dakawa was constructed out of the girls' dormitories, on the instruction of the Umkhonto commander, Joe Modise. From many years' acquaintance at first hand, he describes Modise as the 'architect' of the ANC prison system.

Mngqibisa made a serious allegation against another important official in exile: **Andrew Masondo**, former national commissar of the ANC, who was later director of the ANC school, Somafo, from 1985-89. As director of Somafo, Masondo was responsible for the education and the welfare of teenage refugees from South Africa during the latter period of the 1984-86 townships revolt, when education for black children came to a halt inside the country on the basis of the slogan: 'Liberation before education'. Hundreds of young people left the country to join the ANC, many hoping for scholarships to study. Donor agencies responsible to the governments of Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Germany and other countries funded Somafo, which was the subject of idyllic propaganda in the left and liberal press internationally. Unesco paid the salaries of its teachers. Yet Masondo and the ANC were totally unaccountable. Mngqibisa's statement in evidence continues:

Sexual abuse: Andrew Masondo impregnated a young Somafo schoolgirl in 1989 and she had to abandon her studies. Masondo seriously abused human rights in the ANC. A majority of ANC girls who studied abroad used their bodies to get scholarships.

This statement confirms a remark in a history of the ANC in exile in *Searchlight South Africa* No 5 by Bandile Ketelo and four colleagues. In their account, they state that Masondo was 'involved in abuse of his position to

exploit young and ignorant women and girls'. (p 36) According to them, he was also a key figure in the running of the ANC prison, Quatro, in Angola. Masondo was cynically appointed director of Somafco by the ANC after being dropped from the NEC and the Central Committee of the SACP in 1985, having been made the scapegoat for the mutiny in Angola. He was then in his 50s. In Somafco he had the power of a Nicolae Ceaucescu. The ethics of appointing such a man to such a position over young people seems to have escaped the ANC and the SACP.

Masondo's conduct as director of Somafco urgently requires investigation by women's organisations, international donor organisations (including governments) and the South African Democratic Teachers' Union (SADTU). It involves one of the most sordid episodes in South African education. But it is unlikely that anything will be done.

In a letter from Tanzania (16 June 1991), Mngqibisa said that two other ANC members were sent to Angola in 1987 as punishment for their criticism of Imbokodo. One of them was the elderly man who arranged for the girls to write their statements at Ruth First Centre. The other was a white South African member of MK, known as **Johnson**.

The stand taken by Nduli, Moore, Professor (we do not have his real name), Mngqibisa, 'Johnson' and the elderly man who obtained the girls' statements took great personal courage. It was one of the most honourable acts of the exile. Professor, in particular, paid dearly. Imbokodo should be required to produce the young women's statements, which Maseko illegitimately seized from Mngqibisa in order to conceal the abuse by Imbokodo staff. We do not know what became of the young women, who protested at the abuse to which they were subjected, in the name of the ANC, thousands of miles from the protection of their families. We do not even know their names.

Some Personal Details

Cecil Nduli (known as 'Baba' or Father Nduli because of his age) and **Jimmy Moore** were repatriated to South Africa in 1991, after living in extreme poverty in Dar es Salaam. They were re-admitted to the ANC after Jimmy Moore approached Walter Sisulu during his visit to Tanzania in 1989.

Robert Mancini had been delegated to Tanzania by the NEC in Lusaka to keep an eye on dissatisfaction among ANC members. Mngqibisa has written to Mr Justice Richard Goldstone giving details of a murder by Imbokodo in Tanzania in 1987 which was covered up by Mancini. Three officials of the security department — known as Lawrence, Vusi and Stalin — tortured to death an unknown ANC member in Mazimbu camp, Morogoro. They were arrested on the spot by a Lieutenant Chezi of the Tanzanian People's Defence Force, who was a government representative in Mazimbu, and were sentenced to four years' imprisonment by a Tanzanian court. Mancini, as a senior member of the NEC, 'never, ever acknowledged to the ANC community who the deceased was. Under Mancini's orders the deceased was

buried secretly by unknown people in an unknown place. Manci must tell the deceased's parents where their son is.⁵

Sizwe Mkhonto (real name Gabriel Mthunzi Mthembu) was commander of Quatro at the time of the mutiny in Angola. Still in his teens, he called out the principal leader of the mutiny, Ephraim Nkondo, from his cell at Quatro on 26 May 1984. Nkondo was seen being pulled around the camp with a rope around his neck. The next day he was found dead in his cell, with the rope around his neck.⁶ Oliver Tambo informed Nkondo's sister-in-law, Mrs Curtis Nkondo, that Ephraim had 'committed suicide in a cell'.⁷ It was almost certainly murder, not suicide. Sizwe Mkhonto told the Commission that torture allegations were made by people who aimed to 'besmirch the image of the movement'.⁹ He continues to be employed by Imbokodo at ANC headquarters in Johannesburg. No adequate investigation into Sizwe Mkhonto's role in the death of Ephraim Nkondo, and in many other atrocities, has taken place.

Sam Mngqibisa has written a poem about the education of an Imbokodo officer. It formed part of his evidence.

Give a young boy — 16 years old — from the ghetto of Soweto, an opportunity to drive a car for the first time in his life.

This boy is from a poor working class family.

Give him money to buy any type of liquor and good, expensive clothes.

This boy left South Africa during the Soweto schools uprising in 1976.

He doesn't know what is an employer.

He never tasted employer-exploitation.

Give him the right to sleep with all these women.

Give him the opportunity to study in Party Schools and well-off military academies in Eastern Europe.

Teach him Marxism-Leninism and tell him to defend the revolution against counter-revolutionaries.

Send him to the Stasi to train him to extract information by force from enemy agents. He turns to be a torturer and executioner by firing squad.

All these are the luxuries and the dream-come-true he never thought of for his lifetime . . .

This Security becomes the law unto itself.

References

1. Accounts of Mr Mngqibisa's experiences in exile were previously published in *Searchlight South Africa* Nos 7 and 8 (July 1991 and January 1992).
2. *Searchlight South Africa*, Nos 8 and 9.
3. The background to this is given in Mngqibisa's account in SSA No 8.
4. Sisulu had known him in South Africa, decades before.
5. Letter, 23 January 1993.
6. SSA No 10, p 23.
7. Testimony from Joe Nhlanhla, head of the ANC Department of Intelligence and Security — 'Imbokodo' — to the Motsuenyane Commission. *Sowetan*, 19 May 1993.
8. *Sowetan*, 9 June 1993.