

Mzala: A Short Intellectual Biography

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INTRODUCTION

On 27 April 2010, awarding ‘The Order of Luthuli in Silver’, posthumously, to *Mzala* for ‘His excellent contribution to the struggle for a free and democratic South Africa’, President Jacob Zuma remarked: “Through his sharp mind and pen...“Mzala”...left a legacy of intellectualism, writing about the revolutionary process in the country at the time.”¹ Four years earlier, in a lecture organised by the Northern Cape, Galeshewe branches of the Young Communist League (YCL) and the South African Communist Party (SACP) to mark the fifteenth anniversary of *Mzala*’s death, Jeremy Cronin, deputy General Secretary of the ‘Party’, described him as ‘one of the most outstanding revolutionary intellectuals of the 1976 generation’; and his death as a ‘a great loss’. With a sense of despair, he concluded his speech with these words: ‘Our movement requires tens of thousands of *Mzalas*, commissars working away in state departments, parastatals, trade unions, branches, and communities’.² Within the Tripartite Alliance, the late *Mzala* is a renowned figure whose ‘exceptional’ intellectualism and revolutionary mind are revered. He is listed amongst exemplary freedom fighters that selflessly gave to the struggle for freedom; and whom the modern movement cadre should seek to emulate, especially in the era of non-ideological power struggles, ‘tenderpreneurship’ and conflict-ridden lucrative BEE deals.

Who was *Mzala*? Why does he occupy such an important place in the ANC and its allies? How then can it be explained that few amongst ordinary South Africans, particularly the younger generation, have heard of him; let alone getting acquainted with his intellectual works? I am currently researching a doctoral thesis on the life of Nobleman Jabulani Nxumalo, affectionately known as ‘Comrade *Mzala*’, which will provide answers to these and other questions. The biographical side, his early life, family and schooling, forms part of the study. And this aspect of his life is as interesting as the rest of his entire short life on earth. I am, nonetheless, more interested in his intellectual evolution and the formative years of his political ideas and activism. During the fifteen years he spent in exile, under different pseudonyms, amongst others, Jabulani Khumalo, Alex Mashinini and Jabulani Mkhathswa³, he contributed regularly to leftist and anti-apartheid publications such as *Sechaba*, *Dawn* and the *African Communist*, on the national, history, class and armed struggle. He was such a

¹ ‘Address by President JG Zuma at the National Orders Awards ceremony’. *South African Government News Agency*, 27 April 2010. <http://www.buanews.gov.za/rss/10/10042814051001> (Accessed 3 July 2012).

² Jeremy Cronin, ‘Blank pages should not be allowed in History: Cronin on Mzala’, Galeshewe, Kimberly, 25 February 2006. <http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Blank+pages+in+history+should+not+be+allowed++Cronin+on+Mzala> (accessed, 15 October 2012).

³ Mkhathswa is *Isithakazelo*, clan name, of the Nxumalo people.

prolific writer; there is suspicion that some of the names he used were never identified.⁴ Much research still needs to be done in this area. Furthermore, he produced numerous thought provoking scholarly articles on a variety of issues.

Mzala's research skills and extensive use of archival material earned him admiration and respect amongst many of his academic peers and comrades. He was, rightfully, regarded as one of the 'leading theorists' within the exiled movement. Although rich in theory and deep in analysis, his literary style was quite accessible. This could be attributable to his penchant for adopting phrases and analogies common in everyday language and parlance. His ability to 'borrow' proverbs and similes from the isiZulu language to further illustrate and substantiate his points places him in the League of 'literary authority.' With his distinct style of writing, it could also be argued that *Mzala* sought to 'indigenise' and 'turn Marxism/Socialism into common sense' for the ordinary 'proletarian' to comprehend. At some point, *Mzala* was working on an accessible isiZulu book on Marxism-Leninism.⁵

The 1988 *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda* was highly regarded by those who had read it and those who had only heard of it, alike; and it turned *Mzala* into a household name. Only within the Mass Democratic Movement, though. In Inkatha circles, it elicited a hostile reaction. Buthelezi threatened legal action against *Mzala* and anyone else seen to be 'complicit' in 'slandering' his name. The academic world—citing the 'excellent' and 'balanced' manner in which the book had been researched and written—reacted with shock and charged Buthelezi with infringing on academic freedom and freedom of expression.

When *Mzala* died in London, he was only 35 years old. At the time, he was a Ph.D candidate at The Open University in the United Kingdom, researching and writing on the South African 'national question'. His other published works on the subject reflect an avowedly materialist Marxist-Leninist conception of South Africa's history. *Mzala* highlights shortcomings with the 'Colonialist', 'Nationalist', and 'liberal', 'Pan Africanist' and 'Missionary' 'tendencies' and asserts that "A radical tradition in South African historiography that has made a truly comprehensive analysis of the national question has been the Marxist-Leninist tendency".⁶

Making use of oral accounts—with the hope of interviews with some of his contemporaries (in the activist and academic world) who may now be in senior positions in the public and the private sector—written and primary sources, including the liberation movement's archives, visual and audio footage and interviews, I want to produce a dissertation which moves beyond romanticised 'struggle hero' narratives which are ubiquitous in life stories of those who fought for liberation. At the outset, I acknowledge the 'exceptional' characteristics of some activists and leaders, but embrace the argument for a 'collectivist' notion of the struggle against oppression and racial segregation in South Africa. This will allow for a critical engagement with *Mzala's* radical political views within their socio-political and economic

⁴ 'Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo (1955-1991)', *The Presidency*, 27 April, 2010. <http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/pebble.asp?reid=1443&t=79> (Accessed 3 July 2012).

⁵ Cronin, 'Blank pages should not be allowed in History'.

⁶ Jabulani 'Mzala' Nxumalo, 'The National question in the writing of South African History: A critical Survey of some major Tendencies' (Development Policy and Practice, The Open University, Working Paper: 22) 59. [Http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/.../Mzala_Nxumalo_-_National_Question_in_SA_History.pdf](http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/.../Mzala_Nxumalo_-_National_Question_in_SA_History.pdf) (accessed 20 August 2012).

context, nationally and globally; delve deep into his inquisitive mind and thought provoking analyses. A typical ‘great man’ narrative, generalisation and sensationalism will, therefore, amount to a ‘lost opportunity’ and divert attention from *Mzala’s* ideals, critique of racial oppression in South Africa and aspirations for a free society. In researching and writing about the life of this revolutionary Marxist intellectual, one has to ‘tell it as it is.’ Howard Zinn, in his play ‘Marx in Soho’ regarded this as the ‘most revolutionary’ act. Moreover, leaving ‘blanks’ and ‘holes’ would be a disservice to *Mzala’s* memory who once cautioned: “Blank pages in history should not be allowed. Everything should be told. If needs be, it has to be told dispassionately and ruthlessly. Wishful thinking cannot replace the hard facts of life otherwise an exercise at history writing is reduced to sheer political propaganda for one’s organisation.”⁷

The following pages are a very short uncomplicated introduction to *Mzala’s* intellectual life.

EARLY LIFE, SCHOOLING AND EXILE

Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo was born on 27 October 1955 in Dundee, Northern Natal. His teacher parents instilled in him a passion for books and a culture of reading from a tender age. At both primary and secondary levels, he excelled. After matriculating at KwaDlangezwa in eMpingeni, he registered for a law degree with the University of Zululand (Ongoye). He was never to graduate. In 1976 *Mzala* skipped the country for exile in the midst of a police crackdown in the aftermath of the Student Uprising. Already, he had been detained more than once for, amongst others, encouraging school boycotts and strikes.⁸ Many other young people crossed the border at the same time. Initially, they had identified with the ideology of Black Consciousness and, like *Mzala*, had been members of the South African Student Organisation (SASO) which was once led by Steve Biko. But, in exile they allied with the ‘better organised’ and ‘better resourced’ ANC, in relation to other liberation organisations.⁹ In military terms, they were referred to as the ‘1976 detachment’, most probably to distinguish the newly arrived combatants from earlier recruits, amongst them the ‘Luthuli detachment’ of the legendary ‘Wankie Campaign’ of the late ‘60s.

In exile, *Mzala* underwent military training in Angola and, later, received political training in the Soviet Union and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). In less than a year in the military camps, his military and political seniors had recognised his abilities and had made him political commissar for Luanda.¹⁰ In the years he spent in exile, he crisscrossed the globe on ANC, SACP and MK assignments.

The 1955 Freedom Charter was, and remains THE document behind the ‘national democratic revolution.’ *Mzala* also took an interest in its provisions. In many of his writings, he makes

⁷ Nxumalo, ‘The National Question’, 41.

⁸ See Cronin, ‘Blank pages should not be allowed in History’.

⁹ See Dougie Oakes (ed.), *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History of South Africa: the Real Story* (Cape Town: The Reader’s Digest Association, PTY Ltd., Expanded Third Edition: completely upgraded, 1995) 451 and 461; See also Janet Smith and Beauregard Tromp, *Hani: A Life Too Short* (Johannesburg and Cape Town: Jonathan Ball Publishers, 2009 Reprint) 451.

¹⁰ See The Presidency, ‘Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo (1955-1991)’.

reference to the Charter. However, 'The Freedom Charter and Its Relevance Today' written in 1983, the 30th Anniversary, was also a commentary on some recent political developments in South Africa. Marxist *Mzala*, whilst acknowledging that the document was not 'socialist', in the literal sense, he, like many, saw it as a blueprint for socio-economic development in a post-apartheid South Africa.

THE FREEDOM CHARTER

In the paper, he reacts to the launch of the 'National Forum' and its adoption of 'The Manifesto of the Azanian People', touted as an alternative to the Freedom Charter. Providing the historical background to the formation of the 'Congress of the People' and its constitution, *Mzala* argues it would be too simplistic to compare the Kliptown gathering and its demands, in the form of the Freedom Charter, and the Hammanskraal conference, including the Manifesto. Furthermore, he protests that, historically, labelling the document an 'ANC document' is inaccurate:

The Congress of the People finally became the biggest single gathering of representatives of the people's grievances ever known in South Africa... the Freedom Charter became, not only in principle but also in actuality, the charter of the people, the content of which has its source in their homes, in the factories, mines and rural reserves.... The ANC only adopted this Charter as its policy document as advised in a Presidential address by Professor Z K Matthews, then acting on behalf of Chief Luthuli, who was banned and confined to the Lower Tugela district.¹¹

The staunch Communist *Mzala* concedes: "Yes, it is true.....unlike the Azanian Manifesto (which pretends to be socialist), the Freedom Charter is not a socialist document" but a national democratic document."¹² *Mzala* had no qualms regarding the 'revolutionary' nature of the demands put forward in the Charter which the National Forum had cast in doubt: "It is a revolutionary document indeed because its implementation is impossible without the complete dismantling of the whole State of white supremacy."¹³

He further explains that unlike the 'opportunistic' and 'divisive' Manifesto:

The Freedom Charter is based on the historic realities of our country, and one of those realities is that all black people, workers and non-workers, are nationally oppressed and are consequently involved in a national democratic revolution. The Freedom Charter thus asserts the necessity for the creation of a people's government as a principled alternative to racist apartheid rule.¹⁴

¹¹ Mzala. 'The Freedom Charter and its Relevance Today: Article written by Mzala on the Thirtieth Anniversary of the Freedom Charter', 1983. 3. [Http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Comrade+Mzala](http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Comrade+Mzala) (accessed 12 July 2012).

¹² *Ibid*, 9.

¹³ *Ibid*, 8.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 9.

Mzala reacts to the ‘premature’ and ‘ill-conceived’ call for a ‘Black Socialist Republic’ made by the National Forum. In this, he makes clear his views on the trajectory of the liberation struggle and the relationship between the ‘national’ and ‘class’ struggle:

The real essence of the present phase of our revolution is not the winning of socialism but, as the Freedom Charter reflects, the winning of people's democracy, a true republic with power to the people, all the people! The drafters of the Azanian Manifesto fail to see the revolutionary significance of this step, that is, the significance of the struggle for true national independence and self-determination.....The reality is that the chief content of the present phase of our revolution is the national liberation of the black people. It is actually impossible for South Africa to advance to socialism before the national liberation of the black oppressed nation.¹⁵

Acknowledging that there might be some areas of further debate and engagement with the document, he concludes the piece with: “We defend, fight and die for, the ideals enshrined in the Freedom Charter, not because it is an all-time document, but because it is a revolutionary guide to a life free of misery and oppression.”¹⁶

THE ARMED STRUGGLE

Mzala’s other area of interest was the armed struggle. The thousands of young people leaving for military training in the ANC camps after 1976 saw an upsurge of MK activities within the country’s borders.¹⁷ Excited by these developments, *Mzala* wrote ‘The Immediate Task of Our Movement’, which combines a historical account of the formation of MK and an argument for the intensification of the armed struggle.

In line with ANC policies, support of the military resistance by the ‘masses of the people’ is acknowledged to be critical: “No matter how skilled or courageous our guerrilla units can be, the lack of mass support could mean their doom.”¹⁸ Support of the armed struggle by the masses—lack of this would mean ‘doom’—and the actual armed resistance are simultaneous processes. Evoking Joe Slovo, *Mzala* is adamant that an effective military campaign against the enemy, will lead in popular support and offer hope and confidence amongst the oppressed, thus creating conditions necessary “for a gradual mass participation in their armed revolution.”¹⁹ The Cuban and Algerian experiences are quoted to further illustrate this point.

Mzala believed that taking up arms against the brutal apartheid regime was a crucial element of the struggle. He felt, this could lead to the overthrow of apartheid. However, in his analysis, he warns that: “It would therefore be wrong for the reader to draw a conclusion from the article that armed activity alone can accomplish a revolution in South Africa irrespective of the objective political situation and in disregard of other forms of political

¹⁵ *Mzala*, ‘The Freedom Charter’, 9 and 16.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 29.

¹⁷ See Dougie Oakes (ed.), *Reader’s Digest*.

¹⁸ See Comrade *Mzala*. ‘The Immediate Task of our Revolution: Armed Struggle in South Africa’, 1980. <http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Comrade+Mzala> (accessed 3 October 2012).

¹⁹ *Ibid*, 4.

struggle.”²⁰ However, his understanding of ‘armed resistance’ in a revolution was broad. He saw a relationship between the guerrilla activities of MK and the ultimate formation of a ‘people’s army’—such as it was the case in Cuba—reinforced and directed by the movement and its capable military leaders. This is ideal in a ‘revolutionary situation.’ What constitutes a ‘revolutionary situation? *Mzala* invokes Lenin:

What, generally speaking, are the symptoms of a revolutionary situation? We shall certainly not be mistaken if we indicate the following three major symptoms: (1) When it is impossible for the ruling classes to maintain their rule without any change: when there is a crisis in one form or another, among the ‘upper classes’, a crisis in the policy of the ruling class, leading to a future through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes burst forth. For a revolution to take place, it is usually insufficient for the ‘lower classes not to want’ to live in the old way: (2) when the suffering and want of the oppressed classes have grown more acute than usual; (3) when, as a consequence of the above causes, there is a considerable increase in the activity of the masses, who uncomplainingly allow themselves to be robbed in ‘peacetime’ but, in turbulent times, are drawn both by all the circumstances of the crisis and by the ‘upper classes’ themselves into independent historical action . . . the totality of all these objective changes is called revolutionary situation.”²¹

According to *Mzala*, a ‘misreading’ and ‘vulgarisation’ of Lenin would assume that the vanguard party would have to sit and await ‘D-day’, the existence of the scenarios painted above, to launch a revolution. On the contrary, *Mzala* argued that “an open struggle of the guerrillas supported by the people will certainly speed up the development of a revolutionary situation to its highest phase – the nation-wide crisis.” Thus leading to a situation whereby the masses become active participants in the revolution: “An assessment of the maturity of the subjective factors at this stage of the revolution must ascertain not only the readiness of the vanguard movement and its political leadership, but also the material possibilities to sustain the struggle till the masses are able to shift from being mere supporters to being active participants in the revolution.”²²

The analysis, emphasising the prominent role of the masses in armed resistance and popular political mobilisation, transcends the confines of the ‘guerrilla war’ vs. ‘passive resistance’ schools of thought in relation to the most effective method of struggle. Some of the points relating to the masses and armed struggle are further elucidated in ‘Cooking the Rice inside the pot’ which appeared in *Dawn* as a reaction to the ‘revolutionary situation’ in South Africa in the 1980s.

COOKING THE RICE INSIDE THE POT

‘Cooking the Rice inside the pot’, was written for *Dawn* in 1985 in the backdrop of popular unrests under conditions consistent with Lenin’s ‘revolutionary situation.’ *Mzala* realises the changing material conditions:

²⁰ *Ibid*, 1.

²¹ V.I.Lenin, Collected Works, Vol.13 p.213-214. Quoted in Comrade *Mzala*. ‘The Immediate Task of our Revolution’. 3.

²² *Ibid*, 6.

Great political events are unfolding before our eyes. To the overwhelming majority of our people it is already obvious that a great revolution is in the wings in South Africa. Today South Africa is a spectacle of a people utterly resolved and completely devoted to the cause of revolution. The democratic movement that has developed in the heart of our country is a powerful testimony of our people's unwillingness to accept reforms of the system. Our people have long ago discovered that what is needed in South Africa is a new society, a new political and economic system, a radical change of all that is existing.²³

The article deals with a number of issues relating to the intensified resistance in South Africa. *Mzala* centralises the role and agency of the 'people' in the revolution for their political and economic emancipation. Like Rosa Luxemburg, he detested 'ultra-centralisation' and top down leadership structures, although, his conception of the 'Party' was undoubtedly Leninist and 'vanguardist'. The masses inside the country (inside the pot) are the main agent for change. 'Cooking the Rice' denoted the 'revolutionary process' to overthrow the established apartheid order. *Mzala* was adamant, for a 'delicious meal', the revolution/ Rice HAD to be cooked inside the pot. Using a biblical analogy, he reminds the leadership and those in exile that the real battle for freedom is inside South Africa with the leadership marching side by side with the masses towards victory:

We often meet people who imagine that when we talk of the working people swelling the ranks of our movement we are referring to the exile structures of our organisation. This is incorrect thinking. Leadership, in the final analysis, means going to the masses, merging with them into an invincible fighting force. History's great call to our movement headed by the African National Congress is to begin a process of de-exiling ourselves, of transferring the initiative of the liberation process to the actual arena of our struggle, inside South Africa. We must fight our way back into our country, we must find ways of dispatching units of our political and military leadership to the various pockets of mass resistance inside South Africa. Yes, let us always remember that while we engage ourselves in building pyramids in Egypt, the main task is still cross [Sic] the Red Sea back into our own land.²⁴

Quoting Che Guevara, he reiterates his belief in the concepts of 'people's army' and 'people's war':

Guerrilla warfare is not, as is often thought, a small-scale war, a war conducted by a minority grouping against a powerful army. No, guerrilla warfare is war by the entire people against the reigning oppression. The guerrilla movement is their armed vanguard; the guerrilla army comprises all the people of a region or country. That is the reason for its strength and for its eventual victory over whatsoever power tries to crush it; that is, the base and grounding of the guerrilla is the people.²⁵

And, in *Mzala's* opinion, the intense resistance in South Africa was an indication that the masses were ready to overthrow the system through violent means. He looks at the prospects for arming the masses for a 'People's War.'

²³ Comrade Mzala. 'Cooking the Rice inside the Pot: A historical call in our Times', 1985. <http://amadlandawonye.wikispaces.com/Comrade+Mzala> (accessed 12 July 2012).

²⁴ Comrade Mzala, 'Cooking the Rice inside the Pot'.

²⁵ Granma Havana, December 3rd 1967. Quoted in Comrade Mzala. 'Cooking the Rice inside the Pot'.

When no response to the article was forthcoming, he wrote a riposte under a different name: 'Preparing the fire before cooking the Rice inside the pot.' For now, we will not deal with the contents of the 'rejoinder'.

THE NATIONAL QUESTION

Understandably, the 'national question' was a major subject of interest for *Mzala*. In his commemorative lecture in Galeshewe, Cronin commented:

Mzala, like other leading theorists of the time (for example, Joe Slovo) was at pains to show the important inter-linkages between the national question and class, within the concrete situation of South Africa. He continuously sought to underline the national dimension of the class struggle, and the importance of class within the national question.²⁶

A number of his writings were on the national question. So was his unfinished doctoral thesis. The article 'The National Question in the writing of South African History: A critical survey of some major Tendencies' looks at how some major theories have dealt with the 'national question' in the writing of South African history and criticised 'unscientific', 'embarrassingly ignorant and 'irresponsible' methods some historians have employed in writing about the past. He states: "just as history has made epistemological advances by its mutual relationship with anthropology and archaeology, so can it benefit from a co-operative relationship with philosophy and other social sciences that define ethnic and national processes."²⁷ He highlights shortcomings with, amongst others the 'Africanist', 'Colonialist', 'liberal' and the Afrikaner nationalist schools of thought and their 'varied understanding' of the national question'. He proposes a radical all-encompassing approach, incorporating the socio-political and economic foundations of pre-colonial African society is promoted. Let's look at *Mzala's* take on the various 'tendencies' in historiography:

The 'colonialist' tendency has the 1652 arrival of Jan Van Riebeeck at the Cape as its point of departure. The African pre-colonial past and presence in southern Africa, centuries before the arrival of Europeans, is denied. The 'historical facts' presented by colonialist tendency, *Mzala* argues, have come in handy for the Nationalists to justify the system of apartheid and the Bantu Stan and land policies. *Mzala* sees even those 'moderate' Afrikaner writers, such as Herman Giliomee, being unable to fully escape the influence of the colonialist tendency in their writing and dealing with the national question.²⁸ Using the Mfecane/Difaqane as an 'alibi', this tendency also advocates the idea that the interior of the country was unoccupied when the voortrekkers moved in around the 1830s, thus providing a justification for land dispossessions and the denial of political rights to Africans.

Whilst the 'Liberal' of the period after the 1960s managed to make some 'breakthroughs' and sought to depart from methods that presented history from the point of view of the white community, this school, according to *Mzala* also failed to break out from the 'prejudices' and 'assumptions' of their 'white community'. Some missionary educated Africans, including Walter Rubusana, have also written on South Africa's history, but their contributions, whilst

²⁶ See Cronin, 'Blank pages should not be allowed in History'.

²⁷ Nxumalo. 'The National Question'. 5.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 5-8.

also not without their shortcomings and drawn heavily from previously published works, have gone widely ignored.²⁹ There is a number of African ‘nationalists’ who have ‘attempted’ to write on South Africa’s past. But they have, unfortunately, fallen ‘victim to the influence of their liberal and colonialist historians’. This is mainly due to their ‘overreliance’ on ‘Eurocentric’ sources which cast doubt to the belief advanced by DDT Jabavu that Africans would be better positioned to write about fellow Africans, since they had a ‘unique’ understanding, and had personal experience of African conditions.³⁰

Unlike the ‘inclusive nationalist’ tendency, the ‘Africanist’ is ‘exclusive’, ignores the issue of class and moves from the premise that “Africans as a pure, homogenous and undifferentiated category.” This is a major shortcoming, in *Mzala’s* observation. He further questions the historical validity for adopting ‘Azania’ in their writing on the national question.³¹ *Mzala* concludes with a suggestion that the radical ‘Marxist-Leninist’ tendency has made a ‘truly comprehensive analysis of the national question’. *Mzala* argues that Books such as Jack and Ray Simons’ *Class And Colour in South Africa* (93) as well as Francis Meli’s *South Africa Belongs To Us*, have demonstrated that a Marxist-Leninist approach to history writing can offer some solutions to the dilemmas of South African historiography and writing on national question.³² He concludes with a commitment to follow in the footsteps of Marxist-Leninist historians in his Ph.D thesis which was, regrettably, never completed.

Another contribution to the debate on the ‘national question’ was ‘Revolutionary Theory On The National Question in South Africa.’ Written in 1988, this article draws heavily on the ANC, South African and global history. There is also a discussion on the link between ‘class’ and ‘national’ struggle in the South Africa ‘unique’ context. He says:

In the context of the South African revolution, there is no doubt that the national question (at least from the point of view of the working class) should emphasize the unity of black and white workers so that their minds are not drugged by narrow nationalism. But it is equally important to point out that the white working class will never itself be free from capitalism until black people are freed from the yoke of white supremacy. Furthermore, the unity of black and white workers will remain a pipe-dream unless white workers recognize the right of Blacks to self-determination.³³

Another one of *Mzala’s* works on history was *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a double Agenda*.

GATSHA BUTHELEZI: CHIEF WITH A DOUBLE AGENDA

Mzala wrote *Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a double Agenda* in 1988 as part of an on-going internal debate on Buthelezi and Inkatha in the context of the liberation struggle. Cronin

²⁹ *Ibid*, 9.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 36.

³¹ *Ibid*, 58.

³² *Ibid*, 59.

³³ Comrade *Mzala*. ‘Revolutionary Theory on the National Question in South Africa’ (London: Zed Books Ltd., 1988) 18.

states: “In part, the project (which did not enjoy support from all quarters of the ANC) was an intervention into a debate within the movement itself. There were those who believed that Buthelezi was “essentially one of us”, and that he should be handled with “kid gloves”. *Mzala* believed passionately that, whatever strategy was adopted towards Buthelezi, it should be based on the truth, and not on an opportunistic fudging of reality.”³⁴ At the time the book hit the streets, Buthelezi was the leader of Inkatha yeNkululeko Yesizwe—an ANC/UDF rival—the political head of the KwaZulu homeland and the apartheid appointed³⁵ *inkosi* (chief) of the Buthelezi in Olundi at Mahlabathini. In this very well written intellectual work, *Mzala*, in a display of his command for the archives, from a historical perspective, contests the Inkatha leader’s assertions of being anti-apartheid and pro-democracy; and disputes Buthelezi’s hereditary claims to the Zulu monarchy’s office of *uNdunankulu*, Prime Minister. ‘Name dropping’ is seen as one of Buthelezi’s strategies in bolstering his unfounded claims. The captivating title arose from a speech delivered by Buthelezi to the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly. Asserting that he was a ‘man of peace’ who only uses logic to resolve political differences, he remarked:

Throughout my political life I have never had double agendas. I have never spoken out of both sides of my mouth. Of all the black leaders in the country, I have been steadfast in my commitment and I have withstood terrible storms of protest because of my commitment to the politics of reason.³⁶

Citing the 1983 oNgoye university killings and other incidents of violence involving the ‘anti-UDF’ Inkatha *amabutho*, vigilantes and, later, the Zulu Police—derogatory referred to as ‘Opopayi’ or ‘Zulu Popayi’ in township colloquial—on occasion in collaboration with apartheid security forces; and, later, the Zulu Police, *Mzala* protests and locates Buthelezi and Inkatha within the paradigm of ‘Uncle Toms’ working within the system of apartheid, not to overthrow it but to sustain it. Regarding Inkatha and its affiliates’ antagonistic response to the 1985 nationwide consumer boycott organised by community based organisations and trade unions, *Mzala* likened Inkatha:

To a ‘train’ scheduled to carry the oppressed people to freedom. Some people have boarded it with the sincere belief that it would do just that. But it has been standing still beside the platform all this time, because the ‘train’ has no wheels, and so cannot move.³⁷

Living up to its collaborationist role, “The only time it reveals any real energy is when it mobilises its resources to unleash violence and terror against the very people who are

³⁴ See Cronin, ‘Blank pages should not be allowed in History’.

³⁵ On how Buthelezi collaborated with the Bantu Authorities Act of 1951 and his subsequent official appointment in 1957 as the head of the Buthelezi chieftaincy and the Mahlabathini Tribal Authority bypassing his elder brother Mceleli who had a much stronger genealogical claim to the chieftaincy, see *Mzala. Gatsha Buthelezi: Chief with a Double Agenda* (London and New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1988) 55-74.

³⁶ Buthelezi's address to the KwaZulu Legislative Assembly, 27 May 1985. Quoted in *Mzala. Gatsha Buthelezi. 2.*

³⁷ *Ibid*, 137

struggling for freedom.”³⁸ Was Buthelezi at some point ever an active member of the ANC as it is often mentioned?³⁹ *Mzala* contends:

It needs to be pointed out here that....prominent leaders of the ANC in Natal, amongst them Archie Gumede, MB Yengwa and Johnny Makhathini, have said that he never was...No contemporary of Buthelezi during the legal days of the ANC remembers his belonging to any branch of the organisation...Neither is there any documentary or real record of his having participated in any ANC conference, whether as an elected delegate or an ANC branch leader.⁴⁰

There is, however, a probable explanation for this ‘misrepresentation’ of historical facts: “The error probably arises from the fact that in the 1950s Chief Buthelezi did associate with certain individuals, who were ANC members including, among others, Jordan Ngubane, MB Yengwa and Zami Conco.”⁴¹

Did Buthelezi take part in any of the anti-apartheid movement’s mass based militant activities prior to the 1960 banning? Is there any credibility to his claim that he opposed Bantu Authorities? *Mzala* states he has:

Found no written or publicly known oral evidence to support Chief Buthelezi’s claims that he opposed the system of Bantu Authorities. He certainly did not participate in the Defiance Campaign of 1952 when thousands of people in Natal, following the lead of Chief Albert Luthuli, took part in the campaign aimed, amongst others, at the Bantu Authorities Act. Nor is there any record of Chief Buthelezi expressing support for the women in Zululand who at the time were locked in the battle against the pass laws. Neither is there any record of his ever having taken a stand against the Bantu Education Act of 1954 [Sic] despite the widespread protests against the imposition of an inferior education system upon Africans. There is also no record that in 1955 during the preparatory campaign of the Congress of the People. This campaign involved not only people who were ANC members. People from all political walks of life participated in it, and sent delegates to Kliptown on 26 June 1955. Chief Buthelezi was neither a delegate nor did he send a delegate.⁴²

With regard to his stance on the ‘anti-pass laws’ campaign, *Mzala* quotes Buthelezi’s biographer to explain the quagmire the chief was caught up in: “The campaign posed a difficult problem for Buthelezi at the time, for he could hardly publicly encourage his own tribesmen to break the law and jeopardise his position when it was important that he be in a position of authority no matter how far removed from the national scene.”⁴³

Buthelezi’s lawyers tried, in May 1991, a few months after *Mzala*’s death, to force public and University libraries to remove copies of the ‘libellous’ book from their shelves. With

³⁸ *Ibid*, 137.

³⁹ See Dougie Oakes (ed.). *Reader’s Digest Illustrated History*. 482.

⁴⁰ *Mzala, Gatsha Buthelezi*, 66.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 66.

⁴² *Mzala, Gatsha Buthelezi*, 64.

⁴³ Ben Temkin, *Gatsha Buthelezi: Zulu Statesman*, quoted in *Mzala. Gatsha Buthelezi*. 65.

apartheid and its censorship policies collapsing, academia was astounded at Buthelezi's 'new censorship' and attempts to stifle debate around his politics, particularly, since there was never any tangible attempt on his part to counter allegations contained in the book. He appeared to be abusing his powerful position within the apartheid state's apparatus to silence critics and those perceived to be 'in collusion' with them.⁴⁴

CONCLUSION

In early 1991, during negotiations for a transition to democracy, Jabulani Nobleman *Mzala* Nxumalo passed away. When he fell ill in Prague⁴⁵—he was a SACP (international committee) representative on the editorial of the *World Marxist Review*—he returned to London, where he passed away in a hospital. The movement was in mourning at a crucial stage of the revolution. A sense of 'great loss' is evident in this SACP obituary:

A tragic loss on the evening of February 22, 1991 Jabulani Nxumalo, better known as Comrade Mzala, died in London. His tragic death at the age of 35 has robbed the national liberation and working class movement of a powerful thinker, orator and writer..... The death of Comrade Mzala has deprived our movement of one of its most brilliant talents. Perhaps the greatest loss of all is to our Party's ongoing attempts to indigenise Marxism-Leninism on South African soil.⁴⁶

Nineteenth years later, on the awarding of the 'Order of Luthuli in Silver' to *Mzala*, the 'tragic loss' is, poignantly, recalled:

His death robbed the ANC and its Alliance partner, the SACP, of one of its most prolific writers, a revolutionary intellectual and thinker. His death was a huge loss to the entire South African people at a time when his thinking skills were hugely needed inside the country during the negotiations period and a time to rebuild the ANC inside the country.⁴⁷

His body was repatriated for burial in South Africa. *Mzala* is, therefore, amongst those freedom fighters who never witnessed the fruits of the drawn-out struggle for freedom. A conciliation, however, is that his legacy leaves on, not so much is slogan, song and dance, but in the archive he left behind. The material, substantiated by oral research and other sources, being analysed for the Ph.D, will paint a clearer picture of *Mzala* and his world outlook. We can only wonder as to what exactly he would say of today's society. But, guaranteed, he would be distressed by the socio-economic conditions of the 'toilers of the earth', the majority of whom are victims of apartheid, almost nineteen years into the new South Africa.

⁴⁴ See Chantelle Wyley and Christopher Merrett. 'Universities and the new censorship'. *Critical Arts*, Vol 5 No. 4 1991.

⁴⁵ The Presidency says of the short time he spent in Prague: "He earned the respect of the leaders of many communist parties for his sharp, no-nonsense and polemical style". See 'Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo (1955-1991)', The Presidency.

⁴⁶ SACP obituary to 'Jabulani Nxumalo "Mzala"'. <http://www.sacp.org.za/main.php?include=docs/biography/2006/jnxumalo.html> (accessed 07 July 2012).

⁴⁷ 'Jabulani Nobleman Nxumalo (1955-1991)', The Presidency.