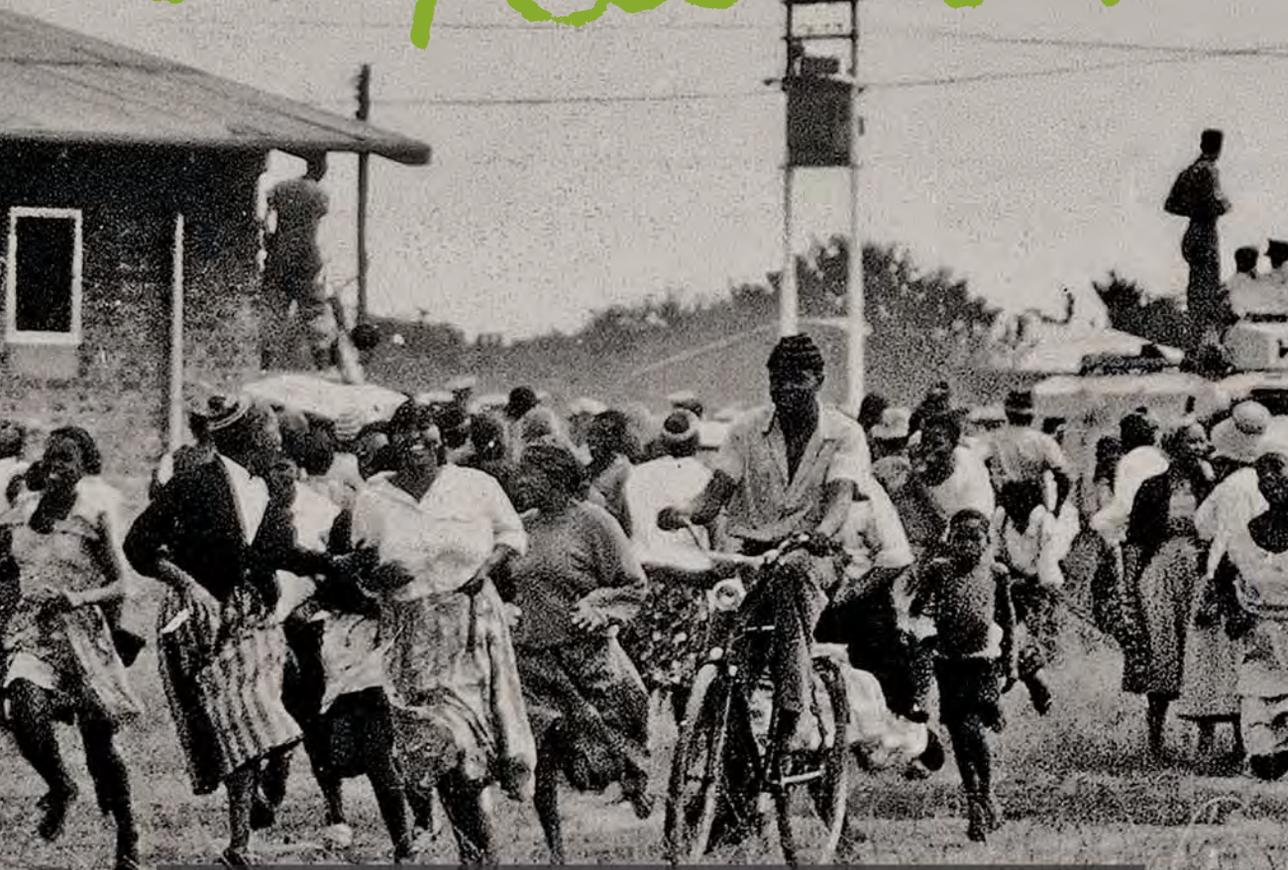


PART TWO 1960 – 1975



Oliver Tambo



MISSION IN EXILE

“People were running in all directions ... some couldn't believe that people had been shot, they thought they had heard firecrackers. Only when they saw the blood and dead people, did they see that the police meant business.” Petrus Tom, resident of Sharpeville

On 21 March 1960, the breakaway Pan Africanist Congress organised peaceful anti-pass protests around the country. In Sharpeville, Vereeniging, 20 000 PAC protesters marched to the local police station demanding to be arrested for not carrying their passes.

The police became jittery and fired into the crowd killing at least 69 men, women and children, and wounding nearly two hundred.

The carnage of that afternoon would forever change the path of the liberation struggle – and would be a major turning point in the life of Oliver Tambo.

“...I was telephoned by Frene Ginwala ... with the news that the Indian government had issued Oliver, Yusuf and me with travel documents and that a plane would be arriving at 6:00 am the next day to collect us”

Ronald Segal, journalist and activist

Escape into Exile



The Sharpeville massacre shocked the world. Within days the government declared a state of emergency and put its armed forces on alert. Security police hunted down and detained hundreds of people, including many ANC and PAC leaders.

The ANC instructed Tambo, who was in Cape Town at the time, to leave the country immediately. But how? Ronald Segal, a young writer and ANC supporter, stepped in with a plan. He borrowed his parents' car and their chauffeur's cap, coat and gloves. Segal played the wealthy boss while Tambo posed as his driver, and they set off for Johannesburg

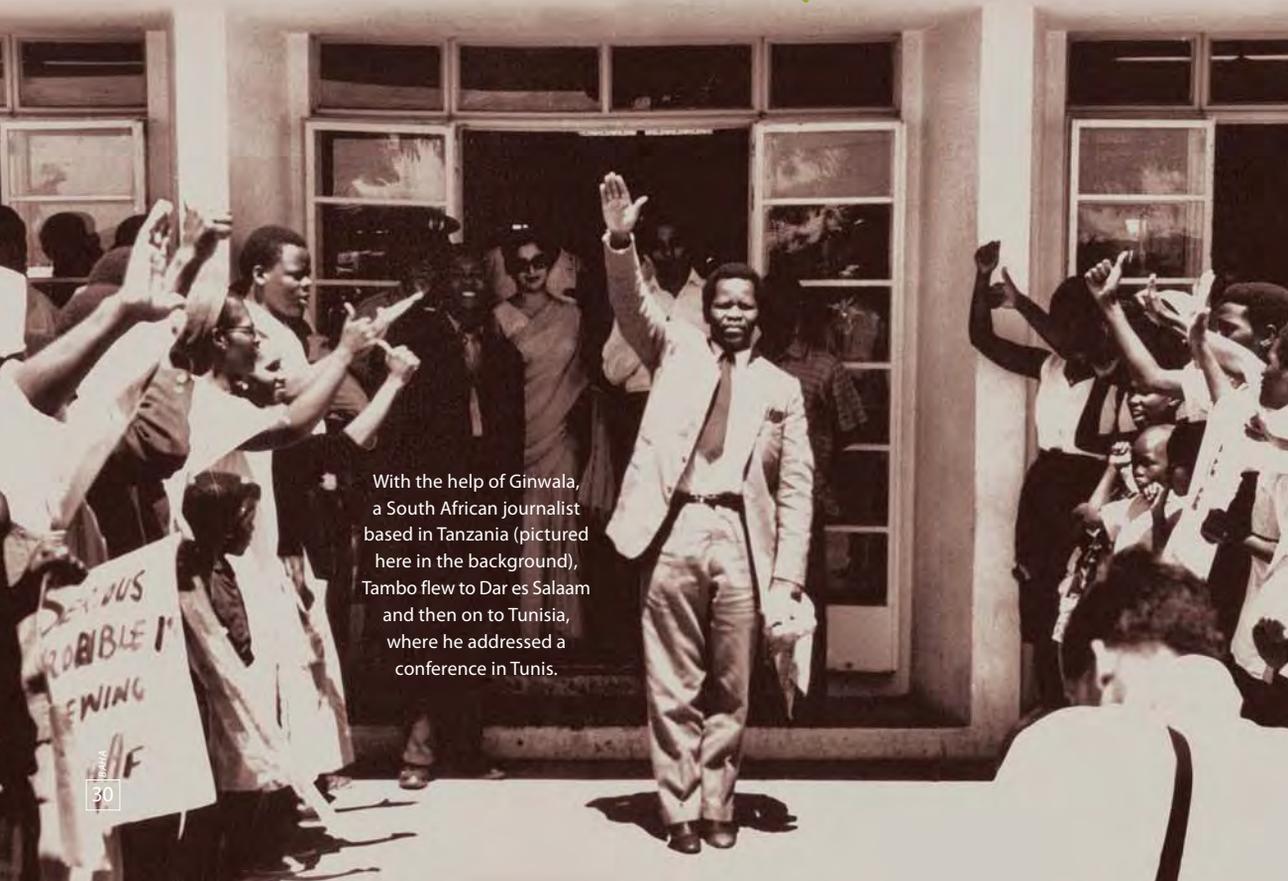
Risking arrest, Tambo went to say goodbye to a surprised Adelaide and the children at home in Wattville, Benoni. Tambo scooped Dali up into his arms and put Thembi on his lap, hugging them both. Adelaide went into the bedroom and packed a small blue suitcase for Oliver. It would be six months before Tambo would be reunited with his family in London.

The two men then travelled to Bechuanaland (now Botswana), which was a British protectorate at the time. South Africans did not need a passport to enter that country.

Seretse Khama (left), Tambo's old university colleague and soon to be independent Botswana's first president, gave him a safe place to stay.

After a few weeks, Tambo, Segal and Yusuf Dadoo of the South African Communist Party (SACP), who had since joined them, managed to leave Bechuanaland. Tambo had begun his journey of founding and building the Mission in Exile – a complex and exhausting task that would last for 30 years.

© K. Tambo



With the help of Ginwala, a South African journalist based in Tanzania (pictured here in the background), Tambo flew to Dar es Salaam and then on to Tunisia, where he addressed a conference in Tunis.

“Africa is one continent, one people, and one nation ... the independence of Ghana is meaningless unless it is linked with the total liberation of the African continent.” Kwame Nkrumah, first president of the Republic of Ghana

The Rebirth of Africa



BAHA

Tambo's mission began with Africa's decade of independence. The ideal of Pan Africanism – a dream of a united union of independent African states was popular at this historic time. At the centre of this great drama was Kwame Nkrumah, liberator and president of Ghana, who hosted the All-African People's Conference in Accra in 1958.

After Tunis, Tambo visited and was warmly received by Nkrumah. But Nkrumah, unhappy about the split between the ANC and PAC, argued for unity between the organisations.



BAHA

However, the dream of unity in Africa suffered a setback when the newly independent states split into two blocs. The more radical group led by Nkrumah favoured rapid political unity and promoted African socialism. It included Tanzania, Algeria, Libya and Egypt. Tambo was welcomed in many of these countries in the early 1960s.

The second, more conservative group, led by the Ivory Coast's Felix Houphouët-Boigny, promoted gradual economic unity.



Greatstock/Corbis

“Tambo had to be careful not to alienate either of these two blocs. He had to manage his relationships with both groups in a way that would most benefit the South African struggle.” Luli Callinicos, historian and biographer of OR Tambo

These two blocs fused together in 1963, when they formed the Organisation of African Unity (OAU).

But later, largely as a result of the determination and integrity of Oliver Tambo, some independent African states did support the ANC, often at great financial and security risk to themselves. Tanzania provided Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), the ANC's armed wing, with land and premises.



BAHA

In 1965, when Zambia became independent, President Kenneth Kaunda reached out to the ANC, offering them a base in Lusaka. Kaunda respected Tambo profoundly and they developed a warm friendship. He considered Tambo to be a great African leader, who was both humble and a master of diplomacy.

Other countries, particularly Angola and Mozambique, also provided crucial support to the ANC when they became independent, some years later.



Kwame Nkrumah addresses the crowd during Ghana's independence celebrations in Accra on 6 March 1957. Ghana was the first sub-Saharan African country to rid itself of the yoke of colonialism. Nkrumah became the first president of independent Ghana in 1960.

Oliver Tambo



May Bunge Archives

In addition to the legendary Kwame Nkrumah, Tambo met and was influenced by other African giants, or founding fathers, such as Julius Nyerere (pictured here with Tambo), Kenneth Kaunda, Amilcar Cabral and Patrice Lumumba.

These leaders were strong Pan Africanists and encouraged the ANC and PAC to work together. Tambo supported the idea in principle, wanting to bring the PAC back into the ANC motherbody.

“Oliver treated members of the PAC and other organisations with respect. He emphasised that the enemy was the racist government, not the PAC.” ES Reddy, Principal Secretary, UN Special Committee against Apartheid

The United Front organised a march in Oxford Street in London in 1961 to protest against the visit of South Africa's Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd. The march, led by (from left) Oliver Tambo, Fanuel Kozonguizi (SWANU), Yusuf Dadoo, Fenner Brockway (Labour MP) and Nana Mahomo, attracted a large number of supporters. Verwoerd was in London to stage a walkout of the Commonwealth, telling world leaders not to interfere in South Africa's internal policies. Despite the bravado, South Africa's exclusion from the Commonwealth was a setback for the apartheid government, and a sign of the isolation to come.

VERWOERD
MUST GO!

NO
MORE
PASSSES
SHARPVILLES

The United Front

As much as he disliked the limelight, Oliver Tambo was now the international face of the ANC. He had to travel the world, meeting heads of state and other leaders.



SAATCHI

Soon after moving into exile, Tambo met with two PAC leaders, Nana Mahomo and Peter Molotsi in Dar es Salaam, where they discussed ways of working together. Tambo is pictured here with Nana Mahomo, Yusuf Dadoo and an unidentified woman.

In April 1960 the ANC became part of a United Front together with the PAC, the SA Indian Congress (SAIC) and the South West Africa National Union (SWANU), the forerunner of SWAPO.

"Our friendship was anchored in the strong bonds of comradeship rooted in the historical fact that we were fighting the same enemy." Sam Nujoma, SWAPO



COURTESY OF LULU CALDWELL

Under Tambo's guiding influence, the United Front made surprising progress in the short time of its existence:

- It lobbied the British Commonwealth to expel South Africa.
- In 1961 Tambo and the PAC's Vusi Make presented the United Nations with a memorandum for sanctions against South Africa.
- It joined the Anti-Apartheid Movement (formed by Father Huddleston in 1959).
- It called on independent African states not to allow South African ships into their harbours, and aircraft to land on their soil.

But at home in South Africa, the PAC did not support the United Front and it was dissolved in 1962.

“The time comes in the life of any nation when there remain only two choices: submit or fight. That time has now come ...” Umkhonto we Sizwe, 1961

A Time To Fight



On 16 December 1961, a new organisation inside South Africa, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK), announced that it was embarking on armed struggle. It would focus on acts of sabotage, it said, and would try its utmost to avoid the loss of human life.

To mark the launch of MK, electrical substations and government buildings were blown up in Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth and Durban. Umkhonto we Sizwe went on to carry out 200 acts of sabotage between 1961 and 1963.



A few weeks before the launch of MK, ANC President Albert Luthuli received the Nobel Peace Prize. In his acceptance speech, Luthuli hinted at the people's growing frustration with the apartheid government's violent responses to peaceful protests.

Tambo – like Chief Luthuli – was a committed Christian and had hoped that armed struggle could be avoided. Tambo was not part of the decision to form MK, but he accepted it. He now had the difficult task of explaining to the world that there was no choice but to turn to armed struggle.

“There is no longer any possibility to liberate South Africa from apartheid with peaceful means.”
Oliver Tambo, 1964



In November 1962, the ANC held a Consultative Conference in Lobatse, Botswana. It was at this conference that Robert Resha (pictured here with Tambo) prematurely made a statement to the press linking the ANC and MK. This put pressure on Tambo to claim MK as the ANC's military wing.

A few months after the conference, the ANC formally announced to the world that it was a revolutionary movement and that MK was indeed its military wing.

“Our fundamental aim is ... the seizure of power, which is not the prerogative of the white minority.” ANC Statement after the Lobatse Conference

In January 1962, MK's Commander-in-Chief Nelson Mandela, now operating underground, left South Africa to lobby support from independent Africa for the armed struggle. Mandela was particularly anxious to report to Tambo about the important decision to launch MK. They are pictured together here in Addis Ababa at a conference of the Pan-African Freedom Movement of East and Central Africa.

Oliver Tambo

The Tambo Family: Making Sacrifices

South African exiles faced many hardships and deprivations. The Tambo family was no exception. Each member of the Tambo family paid a heavy personal price.



University of Dundee

When Mandela went to London in June 1962, he broke the news to Tambo that the ANC was posting him to its headquarters in Tanzania. Adelaide Tambo had recently given birth to their third child, Tselane, and was holding down a demanding job as a nurse. She decided to stay on in London, often working double shifts to support the family.

Tambo regarded himself as the head of the 'ANC family'. He was anxious to give as much as he could to the young people in exile. Ironically, Tambo who was 'father of the nation' in exile, was seldom there for his own children.



Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation

The children Tembi, Dali and Tselane, saw little of their mother and even less of their father. They went to boarding school and felt cut off from the struggle.

"I felt you could only be British if you were white. Yet I did not feel like a South African either ... Culturally I was a little black Englishman." Dali Tambo



Courtesy of Barbara Harmel

Adelaide remembered that there were always young South African refugees coming to stay. Some, like Thabo Mbeki (pictured here at his graduation ceremony in Sussex in 1965, with Adelaide Tambo and Michael Harmel), were regular visitors and would bring news of their father.

"Their parents were on Robben Island. They ran away to Lusaka, then they were sent abroad ... At one point, there were 16 kids altogether." Adelaide Tambo



Oliver & Adelaide Tambo Foundation

As they grew older, the children worried about the safety of their father, believing he was in constant danger. Tembi Tambo remembers that in their prayers they would ask God to let their father die at home. But not all the memories are painful. There are some happier ones too:

"Dad had a sense of fun! One day we sat him down and promised to bring him 'something very special' to drink. We concocted a mixture of fruit juice, tomato sauce and washing-up liquid. Dad drank it all up, smiling at 'the delicious drink'. The joke was on us!" Tembi Tambo

"When I was a 12 and 13 year old, one of my favourite things to wear was my Dad's jerseys. He was always away travelling, and they sat, ignored, languishing in his wardrobe ... They were too big, which I loved and they hung down to my thighs, which I loved and they were thick wool or cashmere, which I loved and they usually had the scent of Daddy on them, which I loved." Tselane Tambo

“We salute the heroes of Rivonia. Their imprisonment is not the end of the liberation struggle or of resistance to tyranny ... it is the beginning of a new and decisive stage.” Oliver Tambo

The Rivonia Trial



Mayibuye Archives



BPMA



Wits History Archives

During 1963 and 1964 the apartheid government reacted with a brutal campaign of detentions and torture of thousands of activists. They captured many underground operatives, in the first instance, mainly guerrillas from Poqo, the armed wing of the PAC. The number of prisoners on Robben Island swelled.

In 1963, a group in MK, headed by Govan Mbeki (centre) and Joe Slovo, devised a plan, 'Operation Mayibuye'. It proposed an ambitious training programme of 7 000 guerrillas. People would be mobilised into an underground system of small cells.

Operation Mayibuye aimed to shift MK from sabotage to military attacks to harass South Africa's large, well-equipped army. Joe Slovo, one of its authors, left the country to present the project to Tambo. But before the plan could be discussed, disaster struck.

In June 1963, the Special Branch raided MK's secret headquarters on Liliesleaf farm in Rivonia, north of Johannesburg, and arrested almost the entire elected leadership – including Walter Sisulu, Govan Mbeki, Raymond Mhlaba, Ahmed Kathrada, Elias Motsoaledi, Dennis Goldberg and Andrew Mlangeni. Together with Mandela, who had already been arrested the previous year, they were charged with sabotage and conspiracy and potentially faced the death penalty.

After Mandela and his comrades were sentenced to life imprisonment, Oliver Tambo paid tribute to them.



The spear was passed to Oliver Tambo. In addition to leading the Mission in Exile, he became the new commander of MK. He carried the weight and the future of the struggle on his shoulders.

Here Tambo meets a group of South Africans who have arrived in Dar es Salaam to join the ANC in exile in November 1962. The group includes Thabo Mbeki (centre, in conversation with Tambo), as well as Manto Mali (later Tshabalala-Msimang, in front in a black dress).