

## Epainette Mbeki (1916-)

ORDER OF THE BAOBAB IN GOLD



Epainette Mbeki (née Moerane) was born in February 1916 in Mangoloaneng, in the Sotho-speaking section of the Mount Fletcher district of Transkei.

She attended Mariazell Mission, before studying at Lovedale Teachers College and graduating as a secondary school teacher from Adams College in Durban. She obtained a teaching post at Taylor Street Secondary School. One of her fellow teachers was Govan Mbeki, the man who would later become her husband.

The Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) recruited her in 1937 – making her only the second black woman to join the CPSA, after Josie Palmer (Mphama). Mbeki became an active member of the liberation movement in Durban. She volunteered to work for the Child Welfare Organisation, helped to organise a rent boycott, worked as an agent for *Inkululeko*, the CPSA's newspaper, and ran the party's famous night school.

In 1940, she got married to Govan Mbeki and they moved back to Transkei, driven by their calling to help uplift and emancipate their home region's impoverished rural masses. The Mbekis obtained a concession to set up a trading store in Mbewuleni, in

the Idutywa district, which became the family livelihood. While Govan Mbeki became involved in national politics, Epainette ran the store and raised her four children – Linda, Thabo, Moeletsi and Jama – while also contributing to her husband's newspaper, *Inkundla ya Bantu*, and being an active member of the Zenzele movement, of which she was recording secretary for many years. She was also a founding member of the National African Chamber of Commerce.

After her husband had been sentenced to life imprisonment at the Rivonia Trial and her three sons had gone into exile, Mrs Mbeki remained at Mbewuleni. It was a time of deep trauma and hardship, as she attempted to eke out a living from her shop while enduring unspeakable harassment from the authorities. What kept her going then, and what keeps her going now, was her unflinching belief in community development, as well as her faith in self-help projects as a means towards social and economic advancement. Even during her most difficult years, she remained active in the community. This ranged from assisting the youth of Mbewuleni to complete their schooling and find employment, to serving year after year as the secretary of the Idutywa agricultural show.

FOR HER EXCEPTIONAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE ECONOMIC UPLIFTMENT OF THE UNDERPRIVILEGED COMMUNITIES  
IN THE EASTERN CAPE AND HER COMMITMENT TO THE FIGHT AGAINST APARTHEID

In 1974, Epainette Mbeki moved away from Mbewuleni to Ncingwane, closer to the town of Idutywa. Here she set up her shop again, and continued to work as an activist for social upliftment. A firm advocate of making a difference in one's own community, she remains in Ncingwane to this day.

An impassioned supporter of land tenure reform in the Transkei, she is the patron of a successful community farming project. She has organised the women of her village into a highly motivated craft and beadwork co-operative called *Khanyisa*. This initiative has just received funding to set up a craft village on the road between Idutywa and Willowvale.

Mbeki has worked tirelessly to bring quality secondary schooling to her district. Her efforts have been rewarded with the establishment of the Nobeko Mbeki Secondary School, named after her, and of which she is patron. She is also involved in the establishment of an AIDS hospice at Mbewuleni and a children's home at Komga. At the age of 90, she still works a full day, supervising her many projects, and dispensing advice and assistance to all who seek it.

This unassuming, remarkable woman has made great sacrifices for the liberation and advancement of the oppressed in South Africa and continues to be an inspiration to many.

Epainette Mbeki could have lived out her old age in the comfort of official residences in Cape Town and Pretoria. But she has chosen, instead, to remain with her community.

## *Fort Calata* (1956-1985)

**ORDER OF LUTHULI IN BRONZE  
(POSTHUMOUS)**



Fort Calata was born in Cradock in 1956, at a time when his grandfather, James Calata, was leader and general secretary of the African National Congress.

His politically conscious parents named him 'Fort' to mark the fact that at the time of his birth his grandfather was in detention at the Fort Prison.

He was married to Nomonde, and they were blessed with three children – Dorothy, Lukanyo and Thomani, whom Calata never got to see as he was born shortly after Calata's funeral.

Calata's strides into the revolutionary world began at the Cradock Municipality, where he was employed. Concerned about the appalling working conditions, he sent a complaint to his employers raising his concerns. This resulted in his arrest in 1976. He was arrested again while teaching in Dimbaza in 1979 but there is no clear record of the reason for his arrest.

In Dimbaza in 1983, Calata befriended a new teacher by the name of Matthew Goniwe, who shared his concerns about the injustices of apartheid. They both resolved to work for political change.

Calata and Goniwe formed the Cradock Residents Association, tasked with negotiating for a reduction in rental fees in Cradock. Calata was appointed the treasurer of the organisation.

Calata was at the forefront of the high level of political activity that was sweeping across the Eastern Cape. Between 1980 and 1985, he led a rural revolution that emboldened comrades from neighbouring towns in the Eastern Cape.

In 1983, Calata joined the United Democratic Front (UDF), propelling him to the status of a national activist who was carefully monitored by the security police. On 31 March 1984, Calata was arrested at his home and detained for six months at the Diepkloof Prison in Johannesburg, in terms of the Internal Security Act.

He was often brutally assaulted during detention but the apartheid police failed to break his spirit. Calata's family was continuously victimised by the police for their involvement with the UDF. In 1985, Calata, Matthew Goniwe, Sparrow Mkhonto and Sicelo Mhlawuli (the Cradock Four) – all of them anti-apartheid activists – were abducted, assaulted and brutally

## FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION AND DEDICATING HIS LIFE TO A FREE, JUST AND DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

killed by the apartheid police while returning from a meeting in Port Elizabeth.

The four young activists sustained serious injuries, ranging from multiple stab wounds, to their throats being slit and their bodies burnt 'to prevent identification'.

These murders sent shock waves around the country and about 40 000 mourners converged at the Lingelihle Stadium to pay their last respects to the young comrades who had sacrificed their lives for the liberation of this country.

Their murders followed soon after those of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO) members Sipho Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawuli Godolozzi (known as the PEBCO Three). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings confirmed that the security police were indeed responsible for the murders of the PEBCO Three and the Cradock Four.

Fort Calata dedicated his entire adult life to the fight for his community's rights and led a civil organisation that deepened the crisis for the apartheid State, drawing additional international

attention to the inhumane system of apartheid. The struggle was never too demanding for this visionary fighter for a just society.

## *Sicelo Mhlauli* (1949 - 1985)

**ORDER OF LUTHULI IN BRONZE  
(POSTHUMOUS)**



Sicelo Mhlauli was born in Cradock in 1949. After completing high school, he trained as a teacher at Lovedale College, Alice and taught at Tembalabantu High School in Zwelitsha Township in the mid-70s. He married Nombuyiselo Mhlauli (née Zonke) in 1980. They were blessed with three children.

Mhlauli was arrested and taken into custody for taking part in the students' strike at Tembalabantu High School. Ciskei police periodically interrogated him wherever he was. He was labelled a 'trouble-maker' and survived by relocating from one place to another without the police being able to trace him. He befriended another fierce activist, Matthew Goniwe. When Goniwe was arrested, Mhlauli often visited him.

Mhlauli was one of many who attended the launch of the United Democratic Front (UDF) in 1982. He eluded the police when he relocated to Oudtshoorn, where he started teaching in 1982. He continued with his political involvement in Oudtshoorn, despite attempts to stop him.

Mhlauli was an active member of the UDF. In 1983, he survived an arson attack in which his office and personal belongings were

destroyed – an act attributable to the dirty tricks campaign of the apartheid securocrats.

In 1985, Mhlauli and his comrades Fort Calata, Matthew Goniwe and Sparrow Mkhonto were abducted, assaulted and brutally killed by the apartheid police while returning from a meeting in Port Elizabeth in what became known as the killing of the Cradock Four.

They sustained fatal injuries and were burnt 'to prevent identification'. The post-mortem results showed that Mhlauli was stabbed 43 times with different weapons and that the attackers poured acid on his face and chopped off his hand.

These murders sent shock waves around the country and about 40 000 mourners converged at the Lingelihle Stadium to pay their last respects to the young comrades who had sacrificed their lives for South Africa's liberation.

The spirits of the mourners were lifted when a massive South African Communist Party flag was unfolded and 'flown defiantly' at the funeral. The young lions were roaring from the grave.

## FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION AND DEDICATING HIS LIFE TO A FREE, JUST AND DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

Their murders came shortly after the murders of the Port Elizabeth Black Civic Organisation (PEBCO) members Siphon Hashe, Champion Galela and Qaqawuli Godolozzi (known as the PEBCO Three). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings confirmed that the security police were indeed responsible for the murders of the PEBCO Three and the Cradock Four.

Sicelo Mhlauli is a symbol of selfless dedication to the cause of justice and equality. He was an outstanding teacher and his lessons to the communities of Cradock and Oudtshoorn spread across the whole country as a guiding light for all to realise the importance of selfless dedication to justice, democracy, and equality.

Mhlauli's contribution and unwavering commitment to the struggle for liberation will forever be etched in the minds of all freedom-loving South Africans.

## *Sparrow Mkhonto* (1951 - 1985)

**ORDER OF LUTHULI IN BRONZE  
(POSTHUMOUS)**



Sparrow Mkhonto was born in Cradock in the Eastern Cape in 1951. He was married to Sindiswa, and their son, Lonwabo, was born in 1972.

Like many of his fellow political activists and comrades, Sparrow Mkhonto's political consciousness resulted from the oppressive conditions of apartheid. He became involved in the political struggle in 1983 and became the chairperson of the Cradock Residents Association, tasked with negotiating for a reduction in rental fees in that town. Mkhonto endured a series of assaults and detention without trial by the apartheid police while working at the railways in Cradock. He realised that the oppressive apartheid conditions went hand in hand with the exploitation of workers.

Mkhonto was never satisfied with his job at the railways because of the constant harassment he had to endure from the police, and which was supported by his bosses. At times, he was detained for days while his family knew nothing about his whereabouts. In 1983, he was fired after being labelled a 'communist' by his bosses. The labelling as a communist had adverse effects on the Mkhonto family as Mrs Mkhonto was also fired from her job at a hair salon for being 'the wife of a communist'.

Mkhonto was often arrested for a day or two and was brutally assaulted every time before being released by the police. This was a common violent tactic of the apartheid security police used to instil fear into activists and to persuade them to renounce the struggle for liberation. But this was not enough to deter Mkhonto from his active participation in the struggle for basic human rights for the oppressed.

On 27 June 1985, Mkhonto and his comrades Fort Calata, Matthew Goniwe and Sicelo Mhlawuli left their homes to attend a meeting in Port Elizabeth. They were abducted, assaulted and brutally killed by the apartheid police in what became known as the killing of the Cradock Four.

These murders shocked the world. About 40 000 mourners converged at the Lingelihle Stadium to pay their last respects to the young comrades who sacrificed their lives for the liberation of this country.

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The TRC heard evidence that Mkhonto was shot twice in the head, was stabbed several times and that his body was burnt.

Sparrow Mkhonto fought heroically against oppression. He had the courage to leave the comforts of a professional life to wage a sacrificial war for the realisation of the rights of the oppressed. He never doubted that freedom could only come through the efforts of those who yearned for it.

The apartheid killers may have succeeded in removing him physically and permanently from society but his spirit continues to enrich the fabric of a democratic South Africa.



## Ruth First (1925 - 1982)

ORDER OF LUTHULI IN SILVER  
(POSTHUMOUS)



Ruth First was born into the politically conscious home of Jewish immigrant parents, Julius and Matilda First, in Johannesburg in 1925. Her father was a founder member of the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA), later known as the South African Communist Party (SACP).

Her home was regularly visited by political activists of all races who discussed and debated the apartheid State. This homely political milieu would leave an immutable political impression on the young Ruth.

She graduated from the University of the Witwatersrand with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Social Studies in 1946. Her studies deepened her insight into the nature of political societies in general, and the political system in South Africa in particular.

Spurred by her political vision of a just society, she helped found the Federation of Progressive Students in 1946. She served as secretary for the Young Communist League in 1946 and the Johannesburg branch of the CPSA, as well as the Progressive Youth Council. Throughout this period of political activism, First advocated the socialist vision of economic relations for South

Africa, and relentlessly argued for the need to mobilise all sections of society for the achievement of freedom.

Her irrepressible desire for public debates on the unjust political system led her to participate in the Johannesburg Discussion Club, which, among others, fostered closer working relations between the SACP and the African National Congress. She clearly understood that a socialist order could only be attained in the context of a free and democratic society.

In 1947, she embarked on investigative journalism until she became editor of the left-aligned newspaper *The Guardian* between 1947 and 1952. Even in the highly censored environment of journalism, she still managed to cover stories reflecting the miserable working conditions of the black working class.

Some of the stories included women's anti-pass campaigns, migrant labour, and bus boycotts, all of which were framed by her concern for the peasants and the working poor.

In 1939, she married Joe Slovo, a renowned anti-apartheid activist and socialist. Frequented by their fellow comrades from

## FOR EXCELLENT CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRUGGLE AGAINST APARTHEID AND PROMOTING MEDIA FREEDOM IN SOUTH AFRICA

the ANC and the CPSA, their home soon became a nursery of ideas with regard to the ending of apartheid.

First's debating prowess was legendary.

She also protested against the outlawing of communism in 1950 and in the same year, understanding the struggle for freedom to be the same for all South Africans, participated in the Indian Passive Resistance Campaign.

She helped form the Congress of Democrats in 1953, and became the editor of *Fighting Talk*, a journal supporting the Congress Alliance. She was part of the Congress of the People, which drafted the Freedom Charter in 1955, and she later channelled her energy into writing anti-apartheid investigative political reports in her pamphlets and books.

Her skills as a journalist helped her efforts to build anti-apartheid structures and support systems. She edited *New Age* (successor to *The Guardian*) and helped to formulate the initial broadcasts of Radio Freedom from a mobile transmitter in Johannesburg in 1962.

In 1963, First was detained following the arrest of senior ANC leaders, although she was not among the accused Rivonia trialists. She was detained in solitary confinement under the 90-day clause, in terms of the infamous Suppression of Communism Act. She fled to London upon her release in 1963 where she continued her fight against the apartheid regime.

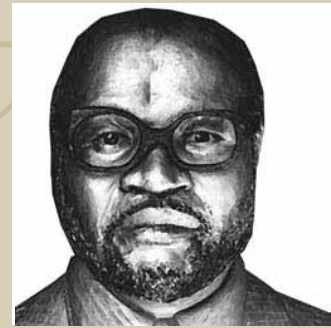
In 1977, she was appointed professor and research director at Eduardo Mondlane University in Maputo, Mozambique. There she wrote a number of books and edited Nelson Mandela's *No Easy Walk to Freedom*.

Renouncing the material benefits afforded to her by the colour of her skin, Ruth First symbolised ultimate patriotism and love for humanity through her immense sacrifices in the struggle against apartheid.

She was killed by a letter bomb sent by intelligence operatives on the orders of those determined to preserve the apartheid regime in South Africa.

## *Joe Nzingo Gqabi (1928 - 1984)*

**ORDER OF LUTHULI IN SILVER  
(POSTHUMOUS)**



Joe Nzingo Gqabi was born in 1928 in Aliwal North in the Cape.

Propelled by the appalling socio-political conditions faced by black people in the Western Cape and the depressing lives of Africans in general, Gqabi absorbed political consciousness at the early age of 22.

In 1950, he became the organiser of the African National Congress (ANC) Youth League. A keen writer, he worked for the militant newspaper, *New Age*, mandated with arousing public awareness of apartheid in the 1950s. His career, journalism, which he pursued partly because of its closeness to the common people, gave him first-hand experience of apartheid's dehumanisation of black people. Through the might of the pen, he was also able to expose the brutally repressive conditions of African communities.

As a journalist he could assist in educating the masses on their responsibilities to fight apartheid until the bitter end. His work gave him the experience necessary to become a leader and an activist, with a keen understanding of his revolutionary obligations to the creation of a society free of racial oppression.

Realising that the apartheid rulers were totally closed to reason, Gqabi joined the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) in 1961. He successfully carried out numerous sabotage campaigns against the apartheid regime in his role as a soldier of MK.

Gqabi was arrested with 28 other comrades while undergoing military training in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). The Rhodesian State deported him to South Africa where he was tried and imprisoned for two years for leaving the country illegally. He was further sentenced to 10 years on Robben Island under the Sabotage Act.

Robben Island, which many inmates referred to as 'the university', because it was where veteran leaders such as Nelson Mandela and Walter Sisulu were imprisoned, further educated Gqabi about the nature of the struggle.

He was released from Robben Island in 1975, upon which he continued with underground activities to educate the youth about the struggle and their roles in it.

## FOR EXCELLENT CONTRIBUTION TO THE STRUGGLE FOR A NON-SEXIST, NON-RACIAL, JUST AND DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

Concerned by his activities, apartheid agents made an attempt on Gqabi's life by planting 7 kg of dynamite under his car, which was fortunately discovered before it could explode. Determined to silence him, the apartheid State arrested him again in December 1976 for his role in the June 1976 student uprisings, but failed to produce incriminating evidence against him. He was duly released in 1977 and immediately left the country for Botswana, before going on to the independent Zimbabwe.

The apartheid regime finally succeeded in assassinating Gqabi on the night of 31 July 1981, at his house in Ashton Park in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Great political leaders like Oliver Tambo described Joe Nzingo Gqabi as a 'seasoned political leader of outstanding ability' and as 'a member of MK whose commitment, dedication, courage and fearlessness led to his election to the national executive committee of the ANC'.

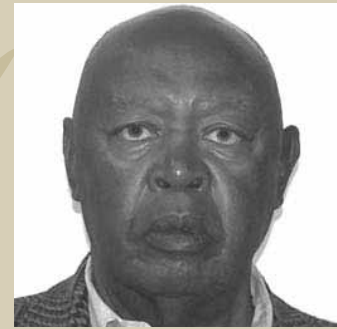
He was a liberation stalwart whose leadership qualities rubbed off on his protégés.

In assassinating Gqabi, the apartheid regime thought that it had eliminated him forever. Yet, Joe Nzingo Gqabi's selfless contribution to the struggle and his inspirational leadership had already sown the seeds for freedom in South Africa.

Gqabi's remains were buried in Aliwal North on 16 December 2004, South Africa's national Day of Reconciliation.

# Isaac Lesiba Maphotho (1931-)

ORDER OF LUTHULI IN SILVER



Born in Ga-Makgato (Blouberg Municipality) on 26 February 1931, Isaac Lesiba Maphotho completed his Standard 6 at Uitkyk Secondary School in 1952.

Maphotho left his home town towards the end of 1952 to search for employment in Pretoria. Upon finding a job at the City Council, working in the Department of Native Affairs, 'Bra Ike', as Maphotho is affectionately known, was soon confronted with the discriminatory laws and exploitative conditions under apartheid labour laws, prompting him to seek a political solution to this suffocating atmosphere.

He found the answer in the African National Congress (ANC) and soon became an active member. Atteridgeville and Benoni were his areas of political operation and he soon became recognised as a strong and principled political leader. Through the ANC, Maphotho became involved in underground activities to destabilise the apartheid regime, before he left the country for Dar es Salaam on 28 February 1961.

He became one of the first recruits of Umkhonto We Sizwe, which was established in December 1961. In 1962, the ANC

sent him to Beirut International School from where he returned to Dar es Salaam in 1963. In the same year, he was enrolled for military training in the former Soviet Union as part of the Luthuli detachment.

Some of his comrades included current Minister of Intelligence, Ronnie Kasrils, Pat Mmolawa and the late Joe Modise (former Minister of Defence). Maphotho was the commander of the detachment and after completion of his training in 1965, he returned to the Kongwa Camp in Dodoma region, Tanzania, where he continued to serve as commander until 1967.

He rose among the ranks of the ANC when he was given the mammoth task of chief logistics officer for the Luthuli detachment during military operations. This led to the fateful day of 6 April 1968 when he was captured by the erstwhile Rhodesian security forces. He was duly tried and sentenced to death on 9 August 1968 before being imprisoned at the Gami Maximum Prison. There he continued to serve the ANC as a group leader for 13 years until his release by the new Zimbabwe Government under Robert Mugabe on 14 May 1980.

## FOR OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION AND DEDICATING HIS LIFE TO A FREE AND JUST DEMOCRATIC SOUTH AFRICA

In the 1980s, he travelled extensively in his capacity as the regional leader of the ANC to mobilise the international community against the apartheid system. Some of the countries he visited included Libya, Cuba, Scotland, England, Italy, Spain, the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, Germany, Chile, Sudan, Ethiopia and Switzerland.

After the unbanning of the ANC, Maphotho returned to South Africa in 1992, 31 years after he left the country. He continued to serve the ANC in various capacities and initiated the Limpopo Premier's Bursary Fund tasked with funding tertiary education for needy students. In a fitting honour to this struggle icon, the ANC's Isaac Maphotho Branch in Polokwane was named after him.

Maphotho dedicated his entire adult life to the struggle for liberation and human rights in this country. The racist conditions into which he was born aroused in him a principled political consciousness that sought to restore the humanity of all.

Isaac Lesiba Maphotho is still serving the ANC with loyalty and is a member of the provincial legislature in Limpopo.