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War in Worcester:

Pamela Reynolds

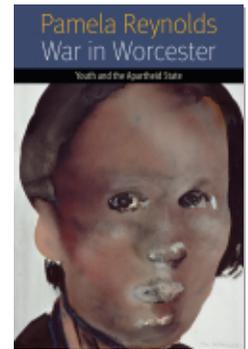
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Three Men and Loss

Three men, all born within three years of one another, are widely respected among the comrades in Zwelethemba for their contribution to the fight. They are Nelson Sonwabo (Sox) Sitsili, Zingisile Anthony (Z) Yabo, and Nation Andile Maart. Each suffered severely as a consequence of their activities, and each saw his life as having been seriously hampered in its fulfillment because of what he had been through. Each came from a family of activists: the mother of Sox was imprisoned for her actions, a brother of Zingisile died, and the parents of Nation were both activists—his father was imprisoned in 1960 for a year then banished to a homeland for a year. The early curtailment of their education, the loss of employment as a result of activism and frequent arrests, the absence of opportunities to obtain training in skills, and the harsh treatment meted out to them seemed to have combined in undermining their abilities to restructure their lives to their own satisfaction in the town in which they had made a stand. Their loss is representative of the loss experienced by many people in the country after the fight had ended.

A Gentle Man

Sox was born in 1963 in Zwelethemba. His mother was a committed leader in politics in the 1960s, and when he was a young boy, she was jailed for three months. She drew her son into political activism. His father was a trade unionist. Sox spent some years living with a kinsman of his father in Queenstown, where, as a schoolboy, he began his involvement in politics. He completed standard nine and in 1978 returned to Worcester, though not to school. He obtained a job in a factory and, after some time, became a shop steward; he also became immersed in the politics of the youth in the township. His colleagues spoke of his devotion to the cause and his contribution to leadership in the early 1980s. One of them said that he had “shared the trenches with renowned leaders” of the anti-apartheid movement. At one point he was the national publicity secretary of a large union.

Sox died on February 18, 2007. He was very thin in the years that I knew him, and he suffered from chronic tuberculosis. He was always a kind and gentle man, and, toward the end of our interaction, he could no longer sustain a conversation about his past. It seemed to me that he had been deeply harmed by maltreatment at the hands of the security forces. He faithfully attended our meetings but seldom said much.

Trying Not to Remember

Zingisile was born on October 18, 1966, of Xhosa parents in Zwelethemba. He was the last born of nine children. Members of his family were activists, and his parents were fully aware of his political engagement. An older brother went into exile, and on his return he was killed by a policeman in an incident the nature of which remains unclear. During the 1980s, the family was targeted for awful harassment. Zingisile was in the top layer of leadership among the youth, and he contributed to the establishment of a number of local structures. Having completed standard eight, he left school because of his involvement in the struggle.

Toward the end of 1985, he left in the company of others, including Eric, from the area to go into exile and continue the fight from there. The group was arrested and detained at a border post, and it seemed to them that they

had been betrayed by a member of the group, a man not known by them. They were hauled back to Worcester and were severely tortured en route and on arrival: he was held in captivity for six months. He did not see a doctor on his release.

Zingisile admits having been full of rage against white people for their treatment of him. His torture included repeated near suffocation and false executions, and the hearing in both his ears was affected by the beatings he received. He found solitary confinement difficult to bear. He says that he used to be a gentle and patient man, but the pain and terror made it hard to hold down a job after his release, especially because he found it difficult to take orders from white people and because he always intervenes when he thinks that another person is being unfairly treated. "I was so full of hatred that I tried not to remember them, as I feared I would take revenge," he declared. Of all the men in MAZE, he most clearly admitted to having experienced psychological suffering expressed as rage and despair. He wanted to learn to control his rage, as he disliked his new aggressive persona, and he said that he needed therapy to help him to change. He resented his lack of education and his inability to advance in his work, yet, despite failing for a long time to sustain gainful employment, he continued to participate in community projects.

Zingisile was the one who questioned me about myself most persistently and who asked me the most questions about the world. After some time he was able, he said, to drop his longing for revenge, although he found it hard when thinking about a policeman who had tortured him and was still, in the 1990s, in the local police force.

When I met Zingisile in 2001, he was unemployed but was a volunteer for the ANC on recruitment and HIV and AIDS instruction. He said he no longer wished to take revenge on anyone. He seemed warmer and more talkative than before.

After we had completed our project, in 2002 I invited the men in MAZE to join me at a restaurant in Worcester. First we gathered in Zwelethemba, and Zingisile said quite forcefully that his wife and children were hungry, and therefore how could he eat? He was speaking on behalf of the unemployed, he said. He looked ill, and he was very thin. He had been diagnosed as having anemia, he told me. I said that I understood his position and that he need not dine with us, but if he did I would add the cost of the meal to give to his family. He accepted money from me but did not join us.

A Harsh Toll

On June 4, 1962, Nation was born to a large family (he had four brothers and four sisters) in Zwelethemba. His parents were activists, and he says of his father, "He was a powerful figure, he influenced me." At the age of twelve, Nation began to take a close interest in political activities; he left school early and completed only standard three. At eighteen, he was employed in a textile factory. His active involvement in the youth movement began in the early 1980s. In October 1985, he was arrested with twenty-eight others, including Amos Dyantyi and Amos Khomba, and was held for six months awaiting trial, then released on bail. The trial of seven of those who had been detained was only heard in court four years later; they were acquitted. While awaiting trial, Nation was tortured, and he said that he never regained the feeling of physical well-being. Initially, he experienced a lot of anger and despair as a result of the harm done to him as well as poverty and loss of employment. He often questioned me firmly but politely as to what I could achieve out of my research that would help them. His sadness was palpable. His wife left him, and he lost his home and his job. His parents and his friends stood beside him. He saw no doctor or healer, and no ritual was held for him after his incarceration. Nation was a member of the ANC, and he was involved with COSAS, ZWEYO, and the UDF. His friends affirm his contribution to the struggle.