

Spring Offensive

NOKUTHULA MAZIBUKO

First published in book form by Timbila Publishing, 2006
P.O. Box 470
Elim Hospital
0960
Limpopo
South Africa

AND

ThulaCreative
P.O. Box 5698
Cresta
2118

www.thulacreative.co.za

Spring Offensive
© Creative Commons 2006

ISBN:0-9585025-8-7

Editor: Pumla Dineo Gqola
Copy Editor: Busi Ziqubu
Cover Photograph: Ingrid Masondo
Layout and design: Digital-D Communications
Youngman on the cover: Thando Nzimande
Graphics: Peter Zwelibanzi Mabaso

This book is licenced under the **Creative Commons Attribution-Commercial-Share-Alike 2.0 licence** which allows commercial use of this material as long as you attribute me, Nokuthula Mazibuko, and as long as you share your derivatives under the same terms of this licence. Please note that this licence does not allow derivatives that are offensive.

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	<i>iii</i>
FOREWORD	<i>iv</i>
INTRO: Spring Offensive	<i>vii</i>
CHAPTER 1: Childhood in Soweto	1
CHAPTER 2: Family Ties	6
CHAPTER 3: Scattered lives	10
CHAPTER 4: The Birth of COSAS	13
CHAPTER 5: Mass Mobilisation	21
CHAPTER 6: A People's War	25
CHAPTER 7: Schools Ablaze	30
CHAPTER 8: Towards Limpopo	38
CHAPTER 9: Children of War	43
CHAPTER 10: Away from Home	47
CHAPTER 11: Back to Lusaka	54
CHAPTER 12: The two Amigos	64
CHAPTER 13: Farmer Brown	68
CHAPTER 14: Spring Offensive	72
CHAPTER 15: Homebound	75

Acknowledgements

For South Africa's past, present and future freedom fighters.

Spring Offensive was completed with funds received from the *Sunday Times* Bessie Head Award (2003). Chapters 1 & 3 were first published in excerpt form by the *Sunday Times* (June 2004)

This book was completed with the assistance of many many people, I would like to name the following whose assistance with research was invaluable:

Hlula Msimang, Nhlanhla Mabaso, Bafana Mzobe, Mazwe Msimang, Muhle Msimang, Veli Msimang, Ntsika Msimang, Sinda Msimang, Jabu Mabaso, Peter Mabaso, Zodwa Mabaso, Lulekile Mbatha, Kgomotso Nkadimeng, Siphso Binda, Fikile Ngcobo, Nomsa Lepotho, Moeletsi Nkosi, Lebello Maloka, Parks Tau, Refilwe Mogale, Natasha Charnley, Makhosazana Xulu, Maxine Hlaba, Sonja Sebotsa, Marilyn Aitken and The Grail, as well as many others whose insights through casual conversations have been helpful.

My literary friends, Pumla, Muff, Vonani, nangomso...
Thando, thanx for representing...
Ingrid, your pictures are magic

Also thanx to my loved ones, especially my parents and siblings, who I could not visit as often as I would have liked to during the writing of this book.

The Creator, my Ancestors, and countless Guardian Angels, who have shown me the way, thank you.

Foreword

We live in an upside-down world. Old men have sex with troubled young women in search of father figures and then apologise for not using a condom (as if HIV is the issue instead of a blurring of the boundaries of trust and the human rights dimensions!). Swirling round a triumphant old guy licking his lips are mothers dressed in cloths. We've seen them before--rent-a-crowd bussed into airports to greet corrupt leaders in places like Malawi during its worst years of dictatorship. It is inappropriate.

Most painful to see are those signs in the airclaiming veteranship of Umkhonto we Sizwe. Whether it is the wearing of the leopard that makes it so sinister or the use of the name of Umkhonto we Sizwe it would be hard to say. But it is inappropriate.

We all know that MK, like other structures of the Congress Alliance, has been racked and troubled for years, wondering whether it is worth holding on to the 'family secret'[1] or simply airing the problems we have with all the contradictions. We have seen many old men tamper with confused, tender young things in political structures and get away with it. We have seen imposters who sprang from nowhere in 1994 and who claimed to be part of us. We all know who landed us in jail (though we do not speak about it) or raped a woman and got a promotion. That, however, was never the way of MK. Such behaviour in MK would be inappropriate.

In MK when that sort of violation happened, there was

disciplinary action. There was always the political awareness that women are vulnerable, particularly in the camps, especially since they are outnumbered or overawed by figures of authority. To tamper with a woman in such circumstances was considered the gravest offence.

So now the question is, where are those young lions of MK who had the politics to navigate the difference between the panting fathers, the traumatised daughters, the different tiers of struggle, structures of struggle, new sites of struggle, countries affected by the resolution of struggle or by their own struggles?

In the past, those young lions moved as an engine, as one. Invisibly and courageously, working with their politics, their wits, their training and their units, knowing only the small part that each had to play but trusting the movement even if at their own level there were experiences of being thrown to the wolves, sold out or killed.

Nokuthula Mazibuko is a gender warrior in her early thirties. She is currently completing her PhD on Zakes Mda. In between she writes short stories and scripts for TV and radio compulsively and obsessively. It is her vocation to be a story teller and historian and by the 'accidents' of first her birth, then her life experiences and her marriage, she is uniquely poised to tell an almost continuous tale of resistance to apartheid colonialism from 1976-2006.

In this book she looks at aspects of the 1986 detachment that is generally overlooked that being a committed

revolutionary was lonely, heart-breaking work. That for many it led to sleeplessness and broken dreams, which was worth it as long as no one violated or overturned the trust that bound the young warriors.

The story of Nhlanhla, Hlula and others is essential reading for anyone who wants to know about MK for MK members themselves, this is a healing book. It helps to 'join the dots' of the world we knew.

This is the MK we know that links generations and organisations; it is the MK whose religion does not matter because it can co-exist with anyone who is committed to creating a just and safe society. It is the MK who hears the voice of the parents and ensures the safety of the child. It battles systems and tackles tyranny. It stands up for women's rights and it did so, historically in the camps, before the ANC took up the call!

Where did the MK we know and trust go?

Muff Andersson
Tuesday May

[1.] 'The family secret' is a term used by Professor N. Chabani Manganyi in his essay on violence in *On Becoming a Democracy: Transition and Transformation in South African Society* (Unisa Press: 2004).

Intro: Spring Offensive

The teenager entered Kentucky, and joined the queue of patrons waiting to buy deep fried chicken. He began to sweat profusely. He couldn't breathe properly, and his vision was blurring. His nose started to itch, and his eyes to water. He was intensely allergic to chicken and couldn't wait to get out of the outlet. He wanted to turn and run out, but couldn't. He had to focus, and pray that the itching didn't grow too unbearable. He spotted his contact. The teenage boy wearing a soccer kit at the front of the line. He had been told to wait for the boy to place and receive his order of fried chicken, get to the front of the queue, do the same, and then walk over to the boy and comment on how delicious the chicken was. If the boy responded by saying "ÿa, imnandi lenkukhu, ngifuna ukuthenga enye", he would know that this was the contact he had to pass the map to where the guns were hidden. The map had been smuggled into South Africa by another teenage a girl who was a student and activist in Zimbabwe. She had received it from comrades based in Harare, and had to pass it on to the Soweto comrade, who was now waiting in the chicken queue to hand it over to a boy he'd never met. All he knew was that the boy would be dressed like a soccer player, that he would be at Kentucky, that Saturday, at 15h00 , and would respond to code.

The map delivered, the activist ran out of the chicken franchise barely able to breathe, relieved that his part in the chain had been successful. It was now up to the rest of the anonymous chain to complete the spring offensive.

Chapter

1 *Childhood in Soweto*

*Sizobadubula ngombayi-mbayi
Bazobaleka
Nang' uTsietsi
uyababona, sebebaleka, sizobathola*

Names given at birth are carefully chosen to guide one's life's work. Hlula Thulani Msimang spent his teenage years and early twenties fighting for peace. Born in apartheid South Africa, his names seemed to shackle him to a destiny of war against a system that had for centuries dispossessed many blacks. Now in his thirties, his life and memories are dominated by events in his youth that dealt severe blows to the apartheid system. Memories he shares with friend and comrade, Nhlanhla Mabaso, as well as many of their friends, family and comrades who fought apartheid and won.

The two friends can't quite recall how they met; it was either at their homes, church, or school. Their parents were good friends through the Catholic church, and they encouraged their children to socialize together from an early age. Hlula and Nhlanhla lived a few streets apart in Rockville, Soweto. They started primary school in the same year, at the local St. Matthews Catholic school in 1975. They did not stay in the same class for long as Hlula and others were held back as standard in 1976 because school officials

declared them too young to continue the next year. Nhlanhla was let through, because he lied claiming to be a year older than he was. The friends were consoled only by the fact that they still saw each other during lunch break. Lunch was also when they saw their elder brothers Muhle and Jabu. They ate, played, gambled and fought together.

Political involvement for the Msimang and Mabaso brothers started early. They together with friends who were altar servers at Regina Mundi church, started the Faith And Action Group (FAAG), a small group of 10, in the hope of mobilizing youngsters in the church to join the fight against apartheid. They were inspired by their school organization Faith and Light, where the principal at St. Matthews, Sister Michael Gorretti, encouraged pupils to pray for the end of apartheid. But the young men thought prayer was not enough and so emphasized Faith and *Action* rather than just Faith and Light.

Nhlanhla and Hlula's political awareness was further harnessed when they joined Young Christian Students (YCS), an organization for young Christian activists committed to social justice, to which they were introduced by Nhlanhla's activist aunt Sis' Lucky Lephotho. At the launch, the school invited YCS's Father Albert Nolan to talk about the link between the Church's teachings and political activism. He spoke about the three truths: the Truth of the present, (apartheid, oppression), the Truth of the Ideal (freedom), and the Truth of Movement (moving

towards the ideal of freedom). During Father Nolan's visit, Nhlanhla was tasked with delivering a talk titled *God and South Africa*. In his talk he focused on what God challenged South Africans to do in order to bring about change. He stated that God wanted South Africans to transcend current difficulties.

During the first few months of 1984, the friends attended YCS workshops, and collected signatures as part of the million signature campaign organized by the newly formed United Democratic Front (UDF). Nhlanhla and Hlula had to go from house to house quickly explaining that the UDF, was a mass-based liberation front collecting signatures to protest against the fraudulent Tricarmeral Parliament, where blacks still could not vote or be in government. Many people pledged their support by signing their names next to their addresses. Some people refused to sign saying they did not want trouble. Hlula's and Nhlanhla's youth and courage were infectious, however, and made some adults think, "if these young kids can take on the state, so can we". They attribute their courage to meeting hundreds of other young people in the struggle through YCS workshops. Among the more memorable YCS workshops they attended, was one in June 1984 at Magaliesberg. The workshop was led by Father Chris Langeveldt, an Afrikaner priest from Phiri who spoke fluent seSotho. Father Langeveldt spoke at length about the See, Judge and Act analytical method they could use when in dangerous or difficult political situations. He explained that to *See* was to "ask WHY

till you die". He encouraged participants to question what was happening around them and ask why it was happening. The second step required that the participants make a judgment call, in other words, they would have to answer the question: "is what is happening right or wrong?". If the situation warrants action, then the final stage would be to *Act*, to *do* something. Doing something would mean utilizing the three Cs: Cooperation (thinking about whom to work with), Campaign (roping in fence sitters), and Confront (trying to neutralise and, convert those opposed to them).

YCS emphasized the importance of clear thinking; it was not an overzealous Christian movement. This is probably because it was an amalgam of various Christian denominations and it would not have been practical to be too enthusiastic about one faith over another.

Most members of YCS also became members of COSAS, the Congress of South African Students, an organization formally launched in 1979, to mobilize young people across the country to counter discrimination in schools. COSAS was effective in mobilizing thousands of youth in schools, before being banned by the Botha government in 1985.

The friends grew in YCS; they attended national conferences, had regional workshops (Soweto), inter regional workshops (Transvaal), and occasionally there would be international workshops attended by

national representatives. National YCS Coordinators, Secretaries and Treasurers were chosen annually at Conferences.

The analytical training Hlula and Nhlanhla received through YCS and COSAS helped them survive the rigors of fighting underground when they were later recruited into Mkhonto weSizwe. Their training underground, in turn, prepared them for their present lives in government, business and academia. Their sense of discipline and achievement doesn't quite tally with media images of chaotic, violent eighties youth, whose slogan "liberation before education" was meant to be proof of their fear of hard work. Hlula is studying for a masters in International Relations, and he is currently the Chief of Police in Tswane. Nhlanhla is putting his Computer Science and MBA degrees to good use through his work managing a computer center that supports and implements free and open source software in various sectors.

Their lives are a reminder that young people were willing to sacrifice themselves for the love of freedom. They are today more convinced than ever that apartheid was a chaotic and embarrassing mistake of history, whose demise was inevitable. They are adamant, however, that a decade after attaining political freedom is not the time to be complacent. South Africans must continue to advance economically, and strive to lead the world in innovation.

2 *Family Ties*

*Khwela phezu kwendl' ubatshela
Umam 'uyajabula
mangishayibhunu*

Family, played a very important role in how Hlula, Nhlanhla, their other siblings and fellow comrades were raised, and in how they became involved politically. They were born into oppression, and joined the collective battle against injustice; consequently, there was a sense in which, they were picking up the fight against apartheid from where the elders had left off.

Hlula was born in Rockville in his paternal grandparents' home. His grandparents came from KwaZulu before moving to Western township, and then finally to Rockville, Soweto. Mkhulu Msimang was part of a set of twins whose entire family was wiped out during the Zulu wars of the 19th century. His maternal grandparents, the Radebes also came from KwaZulu, and also eventually made their way to Rockville, a few streets away from the Msimangs. Hlula remembers distinctly that his early life was influenced greatly by both sets of grandparents. His mother worked many hours as a nursing sister, and his father worked for a bus company; so he and his three brothers, Muhle, Mazwe and Sabelo were looked after by both grandmothers, MaVilakazi, and

MaRadebe. The two grandmothers were very strict about instilling a sense of community, responsibility, and respect whilst raising them. They also inculcated a strict work ethic, teaching the boys how to clean, cook and iron. Mkhulu Msimang was a very good, hard working carpenter. Hlula's father Bab' Msimang came from a family of nine children in a household headed by MaVilakazi and Mkhulu Msimang. Bab' Sinda Msimang remembers growing up in Western township in the fifties, and having to move because the area was declared a 'black spot'. His elder brother, Mendy Msimang, went into exile in 1966, to escape police harassment. Hlula's mother, Sibongeleni Msimang, grew up as one of four siblings in KwaThema, Springs, surrounded by a wider network of uncles, aunts, and cousins. She trained as a nurse, and was extremely strict about hygiene. Her father, Mkhulu Radebe, worked for a paint company, and lost his entire savings after storing the money in an empty tin can, because he did not trust the white owned banks. He had buried his savings somewhere 'safe', when unfortunately his tin can was dug up by construction workers developing the site. Hlula remembers that his grandmother, MaRadebe, was very, very angry with him for losing their savings! This story had Hlula and his three brothers laughing for days, they were still too young to grasp the poignancy of the financial disaster.

*

Nhlanhla Mabaso remembers his home in Rockville, near the park, and the dam, as a place where there was a lot of political talk and activity. His parents Peter

Zwelibanzi Mabaso and Zodwa Maryrose Mabaso frequently hosted “gigs” which were a cover for arranging the safe departure and entry of activists, as well as for disseminating political literature. They would pitch a tent in front of their house, and have by invitation only all night discussions, fueled by good pap and vleis, and lots of beer and whisky. The Mabasos were concerned to pass on to their children Jabu, Nhlanhla, Lindiwe and later, Nonkululeko, the importance of freedom and integrity. Bab' Mabaso had grown up seeing his mother, Nelly Mabaso, working as a domestic worker in Johannesburg's posh suburbs. He could not fathom the sharp contrast between their shacks in Soweto and the plush mansion where his mother's white employers lived. The gross injustice of the situation upset him deeply as a small boy. MamZodwa's political views were shaped by similar experiences. Her grandmother, MaMbambo, worked as a domestic worker, for a very rich white family without making much of a living. MaMbambo struggled to support her seven grandchildren. Luckily Mam' Zodwa and her siblings, Constance, Maureen, Nomsa and Bheki received scholarships to attend the acclaimed St. Francis Catholic College, at Marianhill in the Natal Midlands. The siblings' political awareness was enriched by the arrival at St. Francis of Steven Biko, Mohlatsi May and other Black Consciousness activists in 1964. When Mam' Zodwa met and married Bab' Mabaso in 1968, they resolved to fight apartheid and improve life for their children, and grandchildren. Mam' Zodwa had joined the Grail

Christian Women's Movement, a global organisation committed to eradicating poverty and oppression, together with Hlula's mother, Sibongeleni, shortly before her marriage. The organisation's motto was "think globally and act locally". The grail was to be instrumental later when Mam' Zodwa and Mam' Sibongeleni had to find homes where their teenage activist sons could hide.

3 *Scattered Lives*

*Ngizolilwela
izwe lami
ngize ngilifumane*

In October 1984 disaster struck the Mabaso family. It was the morning of Mam' Zodwa's exams at UNISA, when about ten white policemen nearly knocked their kitchen door down. As soon as Nhlanhla's father, Bab' Mabaso opened the door, the police ransacked the house, looking for banned anti-apartheid material. They found banned books and cassettes on bookshelves, as well as posters of liberation leaders on the walls of the children's bedrooms. One of the policemen looked around and commented with disgust "hierdie huis stink politiek" (this house stinks of politics). They also scrutinised the Mabaso's passports, and harshly questioned them about the exit stamps to Botswana, Swaziland and Mozambique. Before they could answer, Mam' Zodwa and Bab' Mabaso were bundled into police vans together with their then two-year old daughter, Nonkululeko. Nhlanhla, and their other daughter, Lindiwe, were ordered to stay in their bedrooms by the policemen. The Mabasos were taken to Protea police station, approximately fifteen kilometers from their home where they were locked up in different cells. Nonkululeko, who was with her mother, started crying from hunger, but the

police refused her food. The crying toddler spent the night in jail, before relatives came to collect her the following day. After a few days, the Mabasos were moved to Diepkloof prison, (informally, and sarcastically, known as “Sun City” after a holiday resort) where they were put in solitary confinement for six months.

The arrest of the Mabasos had a profound effect on their family and friends. Hlula's brother, Muhle, remembers being very angry with a government that could take a mother and a father away from their young children. The community, school and church rallied to help Nhlanhla and his siblings. Their elder brother Jabu, who was preparing for his first year varsity exams, had to now look after his siblings. Family, friends, neighbours and relatives provided various forms of assistance. For instance, Bab' Sihlali, a local entrepreneur, helped with school fees. Mam' Sisulu, who at the time was working with the local Dr Asvat, arranged for the kids to get free medical care. Letters of support poured in from everywhere, locally and abroad. The Grail, the Christian women's support network of which Nhlanhla and Hlula's mothers were members, arranged a lawyer to put pressure on the authorities to release the Mabasos. The organisation forwarded a flood of letters protesting against the couples' arrest. Eventually, the campaigns succeeded in getting the Mabasos freed in March 1985.

When they came out of prison the Mabasos found their home and their children in tact. Bab' Mabaso

was touched and overwhelmed by the letters that expressed outrage at their arrest. They became even more convinced and determined that apartheid had to be totally opposed and dismantled.

Chapter

4 **The Birth of COSAS**

*Igama lamakhosikazi
Malibongwe*

Nhlanhla remembers meeting Kgomotso and Rogers Nkadimeng during a family trip to Botswana in 1983. He remembers that they were a young vibrant couple who loved each other very much. He was touched by the fact they were so far from home, fighting for freedom. Over the years, Nhlanhla and Hlula encountered Kgomotso Nkadimeng as a comrade and big sister; they would later fondly refer to her as Mamani. She was at least a decade older than them, and they were in awe of the fact that she was one of the founding members of COSAS. COSAS was the political school for many school going activists, and before its banning in 1985, groomed many leaders.

Mamani Kgomotso remembers the events in her life that led to the formation of COSAS vividly:

I come from a family of five. Four girls and one boy. For many years, I played a boy's role in that I was the one who used to clean the chimney which was an anomaly because chimneys were cleaned by boys in the township. I come from a working class family, not an affluent family. I got involved in politics in a very funny way in that in 1976 when we marched on June 16, I just said to somebody I didn't even know (because you know when you are in a

crowd you talk to anybody because you all are one), why don't we poison the white people because our mothers are domestic workers? Fortunately or unfortunately I talked to the wrong or right person because this person turned out to be part of the underground, I then became a potential recruit. Days later I was approached and told to join a debate team just to listen, and I did that. It was a political training type arrangement which really opened up my horizons. I was then recruited into SASM, the South African Student's Movement, which was a high school based organization, brainchild of SASO (the South African Students 'Organisation). In 1977 SASM was banned, I think immediately after Biko was killed we attended the last conference of SASM at Wilgespruit. After that it was banned, along with a number of other organizations. We then went into the underground. The underground was very organized then, it was well structured, it was very strong. At first we didn't know that we were working for the underground, we thought we were just part of a political meeting. Occasionally we would meet an old person who would come up with very big political knowledge, and we kept on asking ourselves, "what is this?" No one knew who that old person was, or what was happening, until I was arrested, and we were arrested and asked who this old man was, "was he an ANC member, was he a South African Communist Party member?". The first time I heard of the South African Communist party was in prison! And yet I worked for it unknowingly, that's for me the strength of the underground; it strengthened the student's movement. The underground ensured that 1976 was in existence, a number of people who instigated '76 were in touch with the underground. A number of them were in touch with people

who were released from the Treason Trial in the 60s. Some of those old men left the country, but some of them stayed behind and organized a number of different cells. I come from Soweto and presume Soweto had a number of different cells both from the workers and from the students. That's how we were strengthened. After the banning of SASM and SASO and many other organizations I was introduced officially into the movement. It must have been the beginning of '78. We started receiving people who were going to exile. If you remember Gauteng, or Transvaal as it was known then, was most active. So a number of people who came from KwaZulu and Cape Town left via the Transvaal en route to Botswana, it was an open route, in the sense that it was safer; the people here were already well trained in organizing to get people out of the country. They already had contacts, and knew all the safe places to cross, they knew the safest times to get in arms, books, and what ever else needed to enter or leave the country. I was involved in organizing safe houses for people in transit, and distributing ANC propaganda material. I was involved in ANC political education. I unknowingly also harboured some soldiers. I was embarrassed later, because I often in meetings spoke strongly against comrades, who appeared and disappeared. Little did I know they were underground operatives. I found out later... We were then instructed to form a new organization. I was sent together with a lady called Mpho Masetla, we went to Botswana and fetched lots and lots of money, and we were given instructions to form an organization - COSAS. We left with Mpho and believe you me from Gaborone to Soweto, we hitch hiked, and we were in nine different cars. It was quite an experience for me, but I was brave enough to go through it with a friend, a comrade, Mpho. The ANC gave us strict instructions to ensure that the new organisation

shows in no way affiliation to the ANC. And naïve as we were, we came back, it was at the height of the struggle between the so called Charterists then , and the Zim Zims. We thought these guys are not realistic there's no way we are not going to show that WE are Charterists. So we went through the country and met a number of influential youth leaders who were influential in their different schools and we managed to come up with a group that met at Wilgespruit and formed the Congress of South African Students. I must say that when we formed that organization, for that day and night and morning, we discussed for more than 20 hours, just the name COSAS. And those of us who were defiant who really wanted COSAS so that Congress comes out somewhere, won the day, it was in April. And in November, the whole executive of COSAS was arrested, because the system knew it was an ANC front. We were naïve because we didn't anticipate the arrest, we were just concerned with showing that we are Congress, we are Charterists that's fine to show the Azanians, and the Africanists. That was a shortcoming on our side, but we were young; we were youth, we didn't understand the politics of those great men who advised us that the organisation should not be seen to be aligned to the ANC. We were arrested, and what was said, and what could have broken somebody, at that time it was section six, you were kept without trial, no one knew where you were, your family didn't know, you were kept, you could be killed. I was literally told that I was a bitch, I've actually joined the struggle to service these men sexually, nothing else. There's no woman, or girl of my age who can be involved in politics. Women are as dom, as whatever. All sorts of derogatory words were thrown at me...I must say that if that didn't break me I don't know if there's anything

that can break me. We were there for five and a half months, the whole executive. Steve Mogale, as you recall, was the first COSAS president. And when we were arrested that night, on the 23rd of November 1979 about thirteen cars came to pick me up at about 2am. I must say that before then, from 1977 to 1979 my family didn't know that I was involved in politics. Until then, they had concluded that I must really like boys, because the people who came to visit me all the time at home were young men! No woman came except for Mpho, Mpho was my friend. And it was only that night of the COSAS exec arrest that my parents realized I was involved in politics. I must say, they were shocked - very, very, very shocked. As I said, I don't come from an affluent family, and I don't come from a political family, so it was their first experience with politics. And they were told I was involved in politics, I carry guns (I hadn't seen a gun by then), they became very scared. Apparently they raided the entire COSAS exec at the same time, so that none of us could escape. We were all thinking "who, amongst them sold me out." And of course the police would confuse you inside and they would say "oh Mpho said you've done this and that, why are you denying it?!" And you sit and question yourself, and eventually say to yourself, "no my comrade would never do that". And of course that's what sustained us. But I must say it was a very seriously challenging time then. Very few girls were involved, you were criticized from all angles including from other girls. Of course within the cells themselves you were constantly undermined by your male comrades. But of course if one understands the social influences one can't really say one was undermined, we were all under the same influences, they all thought women are lower, women are weaker, therefore they need to be protected. Therefore I

wouldn't really want to label them as oppressive as such, we were all influenced by the same environment. But it was a challenge because some of the people we were in cells with, were much more higher educationally they'd been more exposed, they'd read even more books, they'd been involved in debates, and you were there trying to find your way, and someone would come with a big bombastic word! And for the whole meeting you'd try to figure out, "but what is that word?!" [laughs] And you miss everything else! Afterwards you'd run to the dictionary and find the word, and try to construct a sentence with it! It was quite an experience. But it was a beautiful experience because then one learnt. You knew that when you go to a meeting, you've got to prepare yourself, you've got to know what people are talking about. You started being open, you started being assertive, you started questioning, in that process one developed. For me it's an experience I will never shed for anything, if I hadn't been politically involved, I would not have learnt all those things.

I then left the country after our release. We were released without trial. I don't know if I mentioned that in COSAS itself, only three people, knew the truth about the ANCs involvement. It was Steve Mogale, it was Mpho Masetla, and it was myself. The rest didn't know they just thought, "oh it's a student's movement", the students are organizing themselves. Because I knew the truth, and the enemy already knew who were the people in the cell, I was instructed to leave the country. I left the country about two months after my release. I was still very sick. I was badly tortured. It's a good thing I never had kids after that because I don't know whether milk or blood would have come out of my breasts. They used to use pliers and apply electric shocks...After that I was sent to Cuba, I was too

weak to go to the camps. I was sent to Cuba to study political science, and I underwent medical treatment. After Cuba, I was sent to a camp in Angola. When I trained, it was in a camp of seven hundred men, and there were only two women in the camp. Myself, and Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi.

First I was based in Botswana. I was based in Botswana for many years. I helped in the formation of the UDF, I helped in the formation of a number of small social organizations inside the country. There was one active factory shop which acted as a front for the movement, which then made the Vaal Triangle burn at some point. The people heading that were my contacts. I was involved in a number of activities within the trade Union movement and COSATU itself.

I then got married and my husband was killed after five months of our marriage. In a car bomb. I survived by seconds literally, because he had gone to warm the car, we were living together. We knew there was an emergency alarm in Botswana, so we were not even sleeping at that place where the car was parked. So we came that morning, and had a bath, it was in May, May 14. I was still putting on make-up, and he got irritated and said, I'll find him in the car. He's going to warm the car. He went...the car was booby trapped. And he was blown into pieces. There was no body to bury...just pieces that were picked up, up to five hundred metres where the car was parked. The car was a skyline and it exploded into four big pieces. The only visible thing which could be seen of his remains, were the legs on the paddles. But the rest...there was nothing....After that the Batswana then discovered I was a refugee. By the way, before that they didn't know. They thought I was a

Motswana. And I was PI - ed, and became persona non-grata. I left Botswana, a few days after my husband's burial.

I went to the Soviet Union for three years, to study. I came back and I was then sent to Zimbabwe, where I was also a member of the political military council. By the way I met Nhlanhla a few months before my husband was killed.

5 *Mass Mobilisation*

*Izokunyathel' iCOSASi
weBotha shu
uzokwenzakala
He bhasobha!*

Sometime early in 1985, the newly formed Soweto Civic Association (SOYCO) planned a march on the Soweto mayor, Kunenes' house, in Pimville. Kunene's house had been the target of numerous unsuccessful petrol bomb attacks. As members of the Bantu Urban Council, apartheid puppets like Kunene were targeted for attack by activists.

On the morning of the march, a Saturday, Nhlanhla woke up hoping his family was still asleep. He wanted to leave without answering any questions. He slowly left his bedroom, and walked to the kitchen. His heart sank when he saw his mother already preparing morning porridge.

“Why are you up so early? Today's Saturday”. His mother's voice was tense.

Nhlanhla was feeling impatient and anxious, in no mood to have a discussion with his parents . He quickly mumbled something about attending a protest march. He paused thinking of a way to quickly leave the house.

Bab' Mabaso entered the kitchen, and was also surprised to see his son up. Nhlanhla quickly retreated to his bedroom, where he put a warm tracksuit on top of his pyjamas. He went to the bathroom to wash his face and teeth, whilst trying to think of a way to bypass his parents' vigilance. He tidied his room, collecting scraps of paper lying around. On his way to throw the rubbish out, he took the two rand note he had carefully placed under his books, in his tracksuit pocket. He stood a moment in the cold chilly morning air before quickly walking towards the gate, and into the street. He kept walking towards the street corner, to board a taxi to central Western Jabavu to meet up with other comrades, from there they departed for Pimville. He would explain to his parents later.

At the march, a group of about twenty activists had already gathered outside Kunene's house, with placards hoisted high on which were written warnings against the mayor and his masters. The comrades were defiantly and passionately singing freedom songs, chanting freedom slogans and toy-toying. There was no sign of the mayor, or any other inhabitants at the mayors' double storey house.

The Soweto Civic Association had arranged a bus to transport comrades from the youth centre in Central Western Jabavu to Pimville. The second bus load had not yet arrived, and the now thirty or so strong protesting comrades, had been protesting for less than an hour when approximately ten caspirs and

police vans surrounded the activists and ordered them to disperse. They quickly arrested civic leaders, Amos Masondo and Amanda Kavada. The crowd jeered, chanting the slogan "an injury to one, is an injury to all!". They challenged the police to arrest all the activists present. The police promptly obliged, rounding up everyone and throwing them into awaiting police vans. The police made sure they all fitted into the vans, and deposited them into one cell at Moroka police station 10kms away.

Word got around that the Pimville protest had been disrupted by police and that activists were detained at Moroka.

On Monday morning at St.Matthews, pupils could talk about nothing else but the arrest of student leader Nhlanhla together with other activists and civic leaders at the weekend. They heard that the activists had spent the weekend in jail, and scholars around the area were restless for more news and action to be taken. By the end of the school day student leaders, among them Hlula's brother Mazwe, had mobilised students to march to Moroka, approximately 5 kms away, and to demand the release of arrested school children and Civic leaders. They had convinced most of the school to march. Along the way, they were joined by students from Hoernley High school. As the march progressed towards Moroka police station, more and more students and Soweto residents were recruited by the emotive and insistent freedom chants. The march grew to more than a thousand strong.

At Moroka, information filtered that the activists had been taken to Protea Court. The march proceeded to Court, where chants which insisted on the release of the activists by the pathetic and ruthless regime interrupted proceedings. Police surrounded the crowd, arrested as many as they could fit into the caspirs and drove them to Moroka.

At the police station, police had a hard time trying to find enough space to lock up the three hundred or so arrested school children. They were held in cells for a few hours and released early evening just as it was getting dark.

Meanwhile Nhlanhla and the activists who had appeared in Court were released without bail. They appeared in Court again a week later, but the case was dismissed because of insufficient evidence proving that the protesters had meant to harm the Soweto mayor.

Chapter

6 *A People's War*

*Zimbumbulu zamabhunu
angeke zisenzento
angeke siwulahl' uMkhonto weSizwe*

The ANC pronounced 1985 “The Year of the Cadre”, by calling on communities to form mobile military units. In his January 8th speech Oliver Tambo stated:

“The strength of any organisation lies in the calibre of its individual members and units. In order to advance in keeping with the momentum of our struggle we must improve the quality and expand the quantity of our membership. We need cadres of unquestionable loyalty, dedication and understanding of our struggle. In order to achieve such a high standard and spur our nation into a greater onslaught on the enemy and its institutions, we declare this year, 1985, the Year of the Cadre!”

Inspired after hearing Tambo's speech on Radio Freedom, many young people aspired to become the trained and disciplined cadre envisioned by the ANC, by forming small underground cells. These used rudimentary homemade weapons to launch attacks on police stations and military patrols. Like many others, Nhlanhla and Hlula were ready to graduate from throwing stones and petrol bombs at state buildings and vehicles, to more intense armed struggle. So when they made contact with Umkhonto

weSizwe (MK, the ANC's military wing) via a cadre they knew only as Ntsimbi, they did not hesitate to form an underground cell. Ntsimbi, a mercurial, mysterious man in his thirties, explained that he traveled around the country locating comrades who were ready to fight, and he equipped them with more skills and weapons. He was aware that Nhlanhla, Hlula and others were already part of the youth movements, and had taught themselves to make and use petrol bombs; his job was to train them to use a wider range of weapons more effectively.

In the main, the training sessions with Ntsimbi happened after dark, in the veld not far from Regina Mundi church. They also trained in other parts of Soweto, and in Swaziland. The unit under Ntsimbi, included Hlula's cousin, Veli Msimang, and friends Jabu Mnyandu and Bafana "DiBabzo" Mzobe. Hlula was made commander of the unit, and Nhlanhla commissar. None were allowed to tell anyone about being part of an underground cell.

Hlula and Nhlanhla's unit was formed at a time when police brutality and the killing of activists was escalating. There were daily funerals in Soweto, and in the whole country. Funerals became platforms to continue the struggle. Even after the July 21st, 1985 State of Emergency was declared and mass funerals banned, comrades continued to use funerals as platforms to mobilise support against the apartheid state. Many comrades were killed. When a young activist from St Matthews was killed by police, his

classmates arranged the funeral, and kept vigil with his grieving family. Students from St. Matthews were extremely angry, and the funeral was used to further conscientise them. Comrades took turns carrying the coffin on their shoulders as they toy-toyid from Phiri to Doornkop cemetery, some five kilometers away, to bury their comrade.

Comrades from Soweto, Duduza, Alex, Mamelodi, and the whole PWV area, traveled to bury each other. Dressed in *hamba kahle comrade* t-shirts and clenched fists, they raised dust determined to bring down the apartheid state.

In the heated mid-80s climate, activists intensified attacks against apartheid related machinery. Units like those to which Nhlanhla and Hlula belonged, conducted sporadic grenade attacks on passing caspirs and police stations. Typically, the youths would go jogging around the township looking for targets to ambush. After spotting and casing a target, they would wait for the commander's call before throwing the grenades and dispersing. Most attacks happened at night, to prevent civilian casualties.

At their homes Hlula, Veli, Nhlanhla and DiBabzo's dads could sense that the young mens' level of political involvement was reaching dangerous levels. The fathers called a meeting at the Msimang home to talk to their sons. They were worried that their activities were becoming too risky. They advised the young men to tone down. The young men listened

carefully to their fathers, as pre-discussed. They then engaged their fathers, by acknowledging that the situation they were all in was far from desirable; however, they pointed out that they had no choice but to fight. They advised that if more people joined the struggle, the fight would not last as long, and they could then all lead safe lives. Hlula remembers that by the end of the meeting they had convinced the fathers to organize themselves into civic structures. The civic structures were part of the M-plan which had been masterminded by the ANC in the 50s, where communities were encouraged to form themselves into street committees so that political mobilization would be structured and effective. When the meeting ended, there was a plan around which of the fathers would contact the Soweto Civic Association and get information about forming a more localized Rockville Civic Association. Meetings would be called to get the community to organize themselves. (As part of the Rockville Civic structures, Bab' Msimang became known as "Chairman Mao" because he became chairman of this and that.) The fathers agreed on technicalities such as who would book a venue, who would print pamphlets etc. Money came through from organisations like the SACC. Sometimes it was money from personal pockets that helped arranged Civic meetings.

However, not all parent child disagreements about political involvement were solved as easily. Many parents feared for their children's' lives and tried to dissuade them from participating in rallies and

exposing themselves to being shot and killed, or at the very least arrested.

7 *Schools Ablaze*

*Ho ya rona
ba pelo tse thata
ko pele
magwala atshetshela mo raho

*Iyo yo yo Solomon
uyinsizwa yoMkhonto weSizwe
uliqhawe lekhaya eAfrika

*Siyaya ePitoli
bhasobha weMalan
songena ngebazooka

*Mama ngiyeke
ngithath'isibhamu
dubula nges'bham'

*Kure kure kwatinova
emama inobaba
tonosangananga Zimbabwe

*Wathint' abafazi wathint' imbokodo
uzakufa*

By the time Hlula had joined the underground struggle, he had left St. Matthews and was attending high school at a college in Soweto. It was his father, Bab' Msimang who suggested he apply to the college in the hope that his aptitude for commerce would be

harnessed. He wrote and passed an aptitude test, and started Form One. What Hlula found at the school were, children of Soweto's middle class, whose attitude was somewhat detached from the rest of the liberation struggle. The teachers also drummed it into these students that the college was a special school, and that learners were privileged to be there. This led to the institution being elitist. Despite his displacement from St. Matthews, Hlula quickly made friends and settled in. His move to his new school coincided with his involvement in YCS, and COSAS. At the college he found fellow comrades in James Moeletsi Nkosi, Lebelo Maloka, Parks Franklin Tau, Mzwandile Lumka and Sicelo Dhlomo. They decided to form a COSAS branch at the school; they felt they couldn't pretend they were not in Soweto and pretend to be blind to the poverty in their community. One of the first projects as COSAS at the college was to do away with the prefect system and start a Student Representative Council.

In 1985, activists at the school, including Hlula, pushed for students not to write exams in solidarity with the rest of the protesting students of Soweto. The slogan "liberation before education" had been adopted and schooling had been interrupted in most parts of the country. Hlula remembers a meeting held by senior students who were determined to write final year exams. Hlula was not invited to the meeting, as it was a meeting for seniors. But he attended the meeting anyway and told students in standard eight that they shouldn't write exams when

the rest of Soweto students were not writing. The seniors put their foot down and decided to write. They had to be bused to a venue outside Soweto to write as tension between activists and those who wanted to write was high, and school officials feared that those who sat for exams would get beaten up. Whether or not seniors should sit for exams remained a volatile issue throughout the eighties in Soweto and other parts of the country.

The banning of COSAS in July 1985, did not stop activism in schools. At Hlula's college, comrades continued to engage in political debate, and to participate in local political structures like the Soweto Youth Congress (SOYCO). SOYCO had been formed to try to fill the vacuum left after the banning of COSAS. Comrades in schools dealt with a range of issues concerning problems around exams and management in schools.

They also intervened when, for instance, crimes were committed in communities. Hlula once had to round up comrades at the college, to confront a vicious group of local gangsters who were terrorising the community - raping girls and murdering people. Hlula got together about ten comrades, and they went to each gangster's house and warned them that they should stop terrorising the community or else the wrath of the comrades would be unleashed on them. For some years after their encounter with the activists, the gangsters kept a low profile.

In Rockville some of the young men who used to hang out at the shop corner joined weekly SOYCO meetings. It was quite encouraging to hear the singing of political songs, instead of their usual misogynist, anti-social chants. But matters could get complicated as was evident when one of the former gangsters, who couldn't read or write was voted in as the SOYCO secretary; he very nervously whispered to Hlula that he was not in a position to effectively execute his duties as secretary, and disappointed comrades had to vote again. There was also the very tricky case when one of the former gangsters wanted Nhlanhla as chair of SOYCO to pronounce a death sentence on someone accused of rape. Nhlanhla quickly suggested that perhaps rulings on life and death were better addressed by the adults in the Civic movement.

Not all conflicts were resolved through warnings, persuasion or avoidance. Lashings against students and community members who were transgressors of community laws or who refused to take part in school or consumer boycotts were often carried out. Violent interventions were controversial within and outside comrade circles. There were debates about the effectiveness of using violence to force people to join the struggle. Did violence alienate or ultimately convince the masses to intensify the fight against apartheid? Death by necklacing was extremely controversial. Necklacing was carried out mostly against people thought to be spies for the government.

*

Sometime in 1984 then president PW Botha planned a visit to Hlula's college. Hlula went to the principal and complained about the school hosting Botha. He tried to get students to boycott the visit, but he couldn't get enough scholars to militate against the visit. Learners were given flags of the Republic to wave and to welcome Botha. The school's administration locked Hlula in a walk in cupboard, for the duration of the visit, fearing he would disrupt their program. Following the Botha visit, Hlula decided to stop co-operating with teachers and the principal. He remembers the Botha incident as the kiss of death for the mainly white college administration. He started arriving late to school, and being generally disruptive. He urged students to lobby for the principal's resignation, and on one occasion, he and other comrades punctured all four of the principal's tyres. The angry Principal responded by targeting Hlula and accusing him of damaging his tyres. A confrontation then followed, which saw comrades and students leaving classes to come and witness the loud arguing. The altercation escalated as comrades chased the principal out of the school. The principal got into the other school car and drove away. When he came back two days later, students again chased him away. He never returned. Some of the white teachers also left and didn't come back; a few of the teachers left with school computers and property. Comrades checked school records to see exactly what was missing, after which they drove in the school's mini bus to teachers' homes to retrieve

this property. They recovered some computers, cameras, and projectors, but some of the musical instruments were lost. Comrades also went to the principal's house, to demand that he return the school's car, which he did, a few days later.

As a leader of the local COSAS branch, Hlula acted as the college's principal when, for a few months, the principal was not replaced. While in charge, he and the SRC decided to change the curriculum by cutting out Afrikaans classes, and replacing these with political education. They tried to call regular parents' meetings' and to continue with classes under erratic and tense conditions.

On 11 June 1985 the police finally pounced on the college's activist leaders. Hlula, Sicelo, Lebelo, Parks, Cecil and Mzwandile were preparing for the college's commemoration of the June 16 uprising. They were working late preparing pamphlets and discussing logistics such as the venue and speakers for the event. Most nights, they slept in the school's staff room, as they did not want to risk being arrested at their homes. On the night of the 11th, Hlula remembers being suddenly woken up by police dogs and torches shining everywhere around him. He had fallen asleep first, leaving his friends to a half-hearted pillow fight and half listening to Radio Freedom. He was woken up by the sounds of barking dogs. As he struggled to open his eyes, he saw the more than a hundred policemen who had come to arrest them. Hlula fought hard against being handcuffed and put

in the van. He screamed punched and kicked the policemen. After a vicious fight the police restrained him and threw him in the police van.

The police took Hlula and his comrades first to Protea police station, and later moved them to Sun City in Diepkloof. They were held for about 2 months. Hlula was beaten hit and interrogated mainly about activities at the college; the police didn't seem to know anything about his underground work. When they were eventually released, Sicelo was isolated and kept behind. The police tried to charge him with necklacing, but couldn't pin anything on him, and he was finally released. Hlula took Sicelo to his friend DiBabzo's hideout place as he suspected the police might try their dirty tricks on him again. (DiBabzo would later complain bitterly to Hlula about Sicelo's insomnia which made him chat all the time and read newspapers throughout the night.) Hlula also discussed the possibility of Sicelo joining his underground unit as he was extremely brave and dedicated. The unit, however, concluded that the probability that he was already part of a unit was high. Sicelo was later arrested again and found with weapons. After his release he was found shot and stabbed in the veld. For long, people thought he was killed by boers, however TRC hearings revealed he was killed by informers posing as activists who spread rumours that Sicelo was a double agent. When Sicelo's mother found out at the hearings who her son's killers were, her heart broke. She had trusted her son's killers, they had attended his funeral

and comforted her. She later developed ill health and passed away.

Chapter

8 *Towards Limpopo*

*Wawungekho mzuwana siwela iLimpopo
Izibham bha bham izibham
Ezomkhont' izintombi sezishaya ibazooka*

By 1986, it was getting more and more dangerous for Hlula, Nhlanhla and the rest of their cell members to operate as police knew who some of the comrades around Rockville were. When they heard that their trainer Ntsimbi had been captured at a local house during a vicious shoot out, they planned to leave the country. The cell decided that, Hlula and Nhlanhla be the first to go.

An upcoming World Council of Churches Children of War Tour to the USA, for which Nhlanhla had recently been selected, would be a convenient cover for him to leave the country. If the South African Police were planning to pounce, they would probably try to stop him leaving the country at the airport. So the young men decided that they should leave by bus, a day before the start of Nhlanhla's tour. Difficult decisions about who to tell and who to involve had to be made quickly. Hlula suggested that they leave as though on a visit, going to Zimbabwe where they could try to find the ANC, and that Nhlanhla could then proceed on the children's tour from there.

A week before their planned departure, they told their parents of their imminent exile. In an emotional meeting, the parents felt that the young men should be sent to Australia where they could be looked after by the Christian Women's Grail movement. Nhlanhla and Hlula saw a unique opportunity in their parent's suggestion to go to Australia. If they pretended to go along with the plan, a rumour would spread that they'd given up on the struggle and chosen to be safe in Australia, thus making it easier for them to come back undetected to do underground work. They agreed that Nhlanhla's mother, Mam' Zodwa and his five-year-old sister Nonkululeko, accompany them, so as to make the trip seem like a family outing. The young men did not tell their parents that when they arrived in Zimbabwe, they would not get on board the Australia bound plane, but would instead go in search of the ANC and continue to re-enter South Africa through its borders. They had to appear convincing since, although their parents knew that they were activists, they had no clue that they had been recruited into the underground.

It was critical that the news and details of the imminent departure remain only with the two families. Saturday, November 5th, Guy Fawkes Day, 1986 was the day set for leaving. The week passed quickly with Nhlanhla and Hlula finding it difficult to contain their excitement; they went through their plans over and over trying to think of ways to avoid anything going wrong. Because they were hiding in

different places, they were not in constant communication. Nhlanhla spent the week at his aunts' houses in Pimville and Phefeni, while Hlula lived with various friends, and comrades.

The friends woke up early on the morning of departure, ready to face the journey. The November sky was overcast, preparing for afternoon showers. They met, as planned, at Hlula's house - bags packed with a pair of trousers each, two t-shirts, and two jerseys. When Jabu, Babzo and Veli, arrived to say goodbye, they discussed the need for them to lie low for a few weeks, or even months. Babzo and Hlula had already started new underground cells as an extension, and they would now have to cut themselves off from these for a while. Nhlanhla and Hlula were briefly visited by their girlfriends and fellow comrades, who had no clue that the two were leaving. Hlula was particularly heartbroken about leaving his girlfriend behind, as they were deeply in love. Nhlanhla was ready to go, as he doubted the wisdom and ability to adequately pursue romance and freedom simultaneously.

At three in the afternoon, the Mabason and Msimang fetched their sons, and took them to attend Catholic mass at the Grail Center in Parktown. After mass, the young men said their final goodbyes to Mama and Bab' Msimang, Sabelo, comrade Sisa and to Grail members Marilyn, Emilia, Innes, Emma and Pam. Bab' Mabaso drove the young men, Mam' Zodwa and Nonkululeko to the bus station in Pretoria. The bus

departed for Harare at 9pm.

With Nonkululeko wrapped in a blanket on her lap, Mam' Zodwa prayed intermittently for the whole nine-hour trip. The young men tried to keep their minds off the trip by exchanging a walk-man, playing love songs by the Mannhattans, over and over. The bus traveled slowly, stopping to pick up more passengers as it made its way through the various towns: Potgietersrus (now Mokopane), Pietersburg (now Polokwane), Louis Trichardt (now Makhado), and finally, as dawn was breaking, Messina (now Musina).

The South African police at the border were nearing the end of their night shift, and were quite eager to go home and rest. They looked at the African woman carrying the child too big to be carried, and followed by two tired looking boys. They looked through the passports. "How long?" the one with the stamp barked. "We're just visiting for a few days..five days" Mam' Zodwa answered, trying to keep her voice even, all the time praying for guidance and protection. After ten long minutes of the policeman scrutinizing, writing and stamping, the family was allowed through; they, boarded the bus to cross the one or so kilometer of no man's land towards the Zimbabwe side of the border. The Zimbabwean police were quick and disinterested in the South African visitors who were probably going to see relatives for a few days; not questioning that the young men would be missing school, as they knew

that schooling in their neighbouring country had come to a virtual stop. Scholars were engaged in a war against the state, and were constantly boycotting classes.

Nhlanhla and Hlula couldn't contain their joy and relief as soon as their passports were stamped through; they gave each other a hand-slap and exclaimed, "siyiwelile iLimpopo" (we've crossed the Limpopo!). Hlula phoned home, telling his brother Mazwe in code to notify the others that they had crossed safely. The time was six o'clock in the morning on the 6th of November. They still had another nine hours to travel north to Zimbabwe's capital Harare. Their gratitude and happiness at having left South Africa safely was tremendous. The young men slept most of the way to Harare, where they made contact with the ANC. Nhlanhla proceeded to the *Children of War Tour*, and Hlula left for the ANC headquarters in Lusaka, where he tried, unsuccessfully to convince Oliver Tambo to allow them to stay and fight with MK. The friends were persuaded by the ANC to follow their parents' plan and finish Matric in Australia. They had to wait a year, before resuming underground work, and growing the structures they had started back home in Soweto.

Chapter

9 *Children of War*

*Emazweni
bakhala ngayo
iFreedom Charter*

During the *Children of War* tour Nhlanhla, traveled across, the United States for a month, visiting New York City, Philadelphia and Washington DC. The tour was attended by 63 children from societies weakened by war, poverty and different forms of violence. There were children from the United States, Venezuela, Palestine, Israel, Guatamala, Nicaragua, Cambodia, Phillipines, Namibia, Aghanistan, Lebanon, Ireland, Chile, El Salvador, Haiti.

Nhlanhla, using the pseudonym Thami, made the following speech at a Thanks Giving event during the *Children of War* tour in New York City, 17th November 1986.

Good morning. Jodie has already said my name; it's Thami, Thamsanqa. I come from South Africa. The problem is still existing, people are still dying everyday and there are detentions. Before I came I had heard that a lot of people --, about eight thousand people have-- have managed to slip through the fingers of the apartheid police. Eight thousand people who are supposed to be in detention right now, facing torture and all that. More and more money is

coming to South Africa, and that money is used to build more jails, more complicated jails which can result in a person wanting to commit suicide. The money is used to buy more military vehicles which come and patrol our townships, and have occupied a number of our schools and are used also to go and attack countries neighbouring South Africa, and they are used to keep the occupation by the South African apartheid government in Namibia. All this is done because the system of racism has to remain in our country because the government wants to remain so. And resistance to it brings more suffering; on the other hand it brings more hope to the people. More people are fighting at the moment. They are challenging everything that is concerned in their lives. One thing that has come up because this system of racism has to stay in our country, the government is forcing people into reservations and makes them a minority through the genocide that is going to happen, that has already started happening. The continuous killing of the black people in the country and their being subjected to these small pieces of land which have got dry, very dry land as such, which have got diseased rivers in some cases. In a number of cases the rivers run dry as such, more especially when there have been droughts. So, more people are being put into this situation. On the other hand, the government is organising lots of activities during the year. Like its got holidays which are called Republic Day, Kruger Day where they honour apartheid colonialists. And they've got the day of the Covenant which is like Thanks giving Day. On this day they come and they thank God that God has brought them safely to Africa. They say that Jan Van Riebeck discovered the Southern part of Africa in 1652. Yet Jan Van Riebeck didn't discover South Africa, there were people already living there. He actually stole it you know. He didn't

discover land he actually stole it from the native people. And the people are slowly being driven into reservations. They are being killed systematically so that they become a minority. On the other hand, those who are still living in town in the cities, enjoy and celebrate these days like the one they are going to celebrate on the 16th of December. They'll be coming together as families to thank God that God helped them to steal the land. One wonders is it really true that God helps people to steal land, you know. Did God really help people to go hungry and stay and die in the reservations? Did he really help people to be divided according to race and have all these prejudices come? Did he really help these people to create a situation where others will be exploited because they are totally dependent, they are totally on the mercy of their employers. I think it's clear that's not the case. It's a misuse of God's name. The need for people to entertain themselves is being exploited by this government in our country, in South Africa, by putting celebration days on the most irrelevant days. However, I've noticed things changing. Young people and other older people have started asking that is there anything to celebrate on this day. Right, we agree that we celebrate on other days, we celebrate Christmas, we celebrate Good Friday. But December 16th is irrelevant to the South African people who are suffering, who have been dispossessed of land. That day is the day when the colonialists pretended to be friends and yet they were actually going to kill people, and dispossess them of their land. So on that day whilst the apartheid rulers and their friends go to town and celebrate, the people in the township and in the reservation go home and fast. It creates a very strange situation. I've found out that these types of problems are not only existing in our country, they are all

over the world. We've got Australia which has almost wiped out the Aborigine people. They live on dry piece of land. Their country Australia is said to be a developing country and becoming also a world power, but there are poor people. They are dying...they are forgotten. We've also got the US, the indigenous people, they are poor. This is a challenge to all of us here to do something. We had a peaceful day here yesterday; well, the people in the reservations are dying peacefully no one knows about them. They die in the dark, they die in silence. All over the world the situation is the same. We are celebrating we say this country is in peace, but we are actually having indirect violent attack on people. We don't see them when they die. But we are still killing them. We are killing them when we forget about them, when we do nothing. This is some form of violence. We need peace, real peace not some pretending peace. And the real type of peace is going to come when we work for it. It's not going to come like some miracle, like a birthday present. There 's a lot of apathy at the moment, where some people say ah well there are so many problems what can I do? I am too small. That is one of the tricks the system uses on our people by making them believe that this is hopeless. But people are fighting and they are hopeful that change will come. And change will come but we'll have to work for it. Thank you.

Chapter

10 *Away from Home*

*Sobashiy' abazal' ekhaya
saphuma sangena kwamany' amazwe
lapho kungazi khon' ubaba nomama
s'landel' inkululeko*

Hlula returned to Zimbabwe from his Lusaka trip with mixed emotions. He was excited to have met Oliver Tambo and other ANC leaders. However he felt disappointed by their insistence that he and Nhlanhla continue with their parents' plans and finish matric in Australia rather than join MK in the camps. He collected his belongings in Harare and boarded the sixteen hour flight to Australia.

At Sydney airport he was met by two elderly Grail women who took him to a house in that city, where he was to stay for a few weeks, before continuing to Melbourne, where he would spend the year. When he arrived at the Grail House in Sydney he slept for two days. For the first time in almost three years he was able to close his eyes, and feel safe enough to sleep deeply through the night. (The Grail women kept waking him up wanting to know if he was alright. They had never seen anyone sleep for such a long time!) While in Sydney he met the ANC representative, Eddy Funde, whom he helped with tasks around the office making posters and

pamphlets for anti-apartheid rallies and meetings. At one anti-apartheid rally he met many young people who belonged to a peace movement; they wanted to know all about the role of young people in the liberation movement.

Nhlanhla returned from the United States and joined Hlula in Melbourne. They stayed in a big house owned by the Grail. The house was run by three Grail nuns - Pat, Alison and Jenny. The Grail women took their mothering roles quite seriously, making sure that dinner was served daily at six sharp; a routine that irritated Hlula immensely. His lifestyle on the run in South Africa was worlds away from the calm regiment of life as a school boy in Melbourne. He and Nhlanhla struggled to adjust to regular schooling as they had not attended classes for most of 1986. Pat arranged extra accounting lessons for Hlula, to help improve his grades. The mothering and concern for the young men went too far when Alison refused that Hlula attend a youth anti-apartheid conference in the US because she feared his studies would suffer. Hlula put his foot down, insisting that he would go to the conference with or without Alison's permission. Hlula attended the conference, and came back full of revolutionary zeal. He played Radio Freedom and Bob Marley tapes loud in the room he shared with Nhlanhla. Hlula's blaring struggle music, and his long periods thinking about home and family prompted the Grail nuns to consult with his friend Nhlanhla about his well being. Nhlanhla reassured them.

The year spent in Australia was good for the two friends. For the first time in a long time they were living a normal teenage life going to school, playing soccer, going to parties, conferences and even going away on a few beach weekends. Hlula was especially pleased about the presence of all the beautiful girls they were interacting with. He had endless arguments with Nhlanhla about the wisdom of having girlfriends, whilst still fighting for freedom. Nhlanhla believed they had to focus on fighting for liberation and think about girlfriends later. Nhlanhla was determined to stop himself from missing the girls he had fallen in love with back home. Hlula saw no problem in pursuing love and freedom at the same time. He had left the love of his life in Soweto, and he let his mind admire the many beautiful girls he met. The girls reciprocated his attentions admiring his charming handsome looks. The Grail nuns were very impressed with Nhlanhla's seemingly conservative attitude towards girls, despite his dashing looks, the nuns were convinced that he was preparing for life as a Catholic priest! Love arguments aside, the friends were quite popular and made many friends, some of whom still keep in touch.

News from home in Soweto was that DiBabzo, Jabu and Veli had crossed safely into Zimbabwe and had proceeded to Angola for training. Hlula's brother, Mazwe, tried to keep him and Nhlanhla informed about politics at school and in the youth structures. Although they had to immediately burn all letters,

especially those not in code, Hlula kept one of Mazwe's letters received sometime in 1987:

SCHOOL

At school izinto azihambi kahle ngoba inhlangotho yabafundi ayisebenzi kahle. Noma kunjalo ama-area afana neMomoja namanye ayasebenza. Kulonyaka sithola ukuthi amaqabane nabafundi bazimisele ukufunda abasafuni nokuzifaka noma ukuzibandakanya nabanye abafundi. I people fundo yona angiyazi imiphumela yayo kodwa ngokubona kwami kungathi kuzodingeka ukuthi sisebenze kakhulu ukuze sithole inqubeka. Kodwa ama shop-work sinawo okufundisa abafundi.

Crisis: okwamanje sisafunda asikahlangabezani nokukhulu. Into nje wukuthi oongxowankulu bayafika kwezinye izikole behamba ngezithuthuthu babange umsindo. Izincwadi zokubhala nezinye zokufunda sizitholile futhi sezingama 72pg.

Epace bayaqhuba noma i-man power ishoda babambile. Mhlangotho bathe abasayifuni iSRC ngoba yiyo eyenze ukuthi kungabhalwa ngakho-ke sesiqhuba nokhongolo yodwa futhi iman-power iyala ngoba iningi alisazimisela.

Ekuqaleni konyaka sithole ama application form wokuthi siwa fille wona athi -siyathembisa ukuthi ngeke sisayinyova, siyayivuma -icorporal punishment nabazali bayayivuma na?

*-mawuphule into esikoleni uzoyibhadala ngoncedo labazali
-uma uneproblem ngetransport kukhona ibhasi le DET lizokulanda likuse esikoleni liphelekezelwa ihippo*

-sizokugadwa amasotsha nokunye okuningi okungenangqondo

Kodwa salishisa laphepha kuzo zonke izikole kwaba ngathi zizovalwa izikole kanti qha.

-Ieksamen yona sizobhala ekupheleni konyaka.

-Isosio yasebranchini nayo iyaqhuba noma singakatholi ifull membership siyazama.

-NamaZimzim awakapheli asasilwisa namanje nawo ayalwa sampela

-Imembership ye exec isejele futhi ne spcc, abanye basejele abanye abasabonakali.

-izikole ebezivaliwe zivuliwe.

-kulekampani yokulanda ababalekile sinamaproblem ngoba kuthiwa silanda abahambile nje namaqabana ahambile ayofunda emabhoding, basho oBhabhane noVeli ngakho bathi siqale ngabo.

-Imomoja beyiplane imass mhlango abafundi ngezi 11 ngo 11

LOCATION

Elokshini siqhubekile impela kodwa usemningi umsebenzi Ama youth com sinawo kuyo yonke imigwaqo kodwa sithola ukuthi emigwaqweni eminye awasebenzi ngokufanele. Kwamanye sithola ukuthi abantwana bakhona aba attendi imihlangano yabo. Kodwa lokhu siyakulungisa futhi besesizo thatha isinyathelo sokusungula amaBlock com. Kodwa sisaphethwe amaBlock com abudala wona sesiwaqalile and ayethembisa

-icivic iyethembisa ngoba sisebenza nayo kuyo yonke indawo futhi imitha regularly and on weekly basis ngoba umsebenzi mningi. Inhlango yentsha iyaqhuba i ardo com. Iqinile nomsebenzi uyaqhuba. Ikansele isendleleni futhi isilungiselwa ama sub structures ayesebenza mpela except i woman com ayala amantombazana awafuni ukuza kuma miting.

STATE INTIMIDATION

asikayiboni ngoba namaphoyisa awa sangenangeni sonke isikhathi elokshini, ayesaba

THE PEOPLE

Sebahabulile abaningi futhi bazimisele ukusebenza uma umsebenzi ukhona.

GENERAL

Indawo isenjalo abantu bayaguquka. Umsebenzi uyaqhuba. Amaqabana aqinile. Amarent, bus, OK, boycott aqinile

Abasebenzi angikazi kahle. Othishela basayibambile. Isikole siyaqhuba.

Inhlangano yentsha iqinile. Imshengu shack iyadilizwa amabhunu.

Kodwa abantu bayakha khona la kudilizwe khona. Namakansile futhi sewaweak abankrupt

Sebasicimela amanzi nogesi ngethemba lokhuthi sizobhadala, kanti qha asibhadali.

I report ekahle iyeza ilindeleni. Qinani is the message from amaqabani.

From Us.

Letters and updates from comrades at home helped to lessen the distance between the quiet suburban existence of middle class Melbourne and the turmoil of Soweto. Although now removed from the frontline of activism, Nhlanhla and Hlula's political involvement did not stop entirely while they were in Australia. They presented a weekly political slot at a local community radio station. ANC member, Terry February, arranged the slot which the two co presented for an hour in the afternoon, playing South

African music, freedom songs, poetry and reading newspaper clips on developments back home.

Among the highlights of their year in Melbourne was ANC president Oliver Tambo's visit; he arrived as part of a global tour to strengthen international support for the anti-apartheid struggle. Tambo presented a lecture on the weakening apartheid state and progress made by the anti-apartheid global alliance at a packed local varsity hall. A few days after his talk the young men went to visit him, and were impressed that he remembered the meeting he had with Hlula in Lusaka convincing him of the wisdom of finishing matric. This confirmed to the friends that OR's memory was indeed way above average.

By the end of the year Hlula and Nhlanhla were ready to return to Zimbabwe. Hlula had developed terrible stomach ulcers, and was quite ready for a change of environment. Grail members tried to convince them to stay on and attend varsity, but the friends were intent on leaving. They were quite homesick, and eager to rejoin MK.

At the end of 1987, Hlula and Nhlanhla left for Lusaka.

11 *Back to Lusaka*

*Yizani sibambane ngezandla
abake babonana bayobonana futhi
molweni zihlobo
siyajabula thina ukubona iAfrika iphambili
akuna nto size nayo zihlobo zethu
sizokwakha ubuhlobo nani bakithi
siyavuya xasibona iAfrika iphambili*

Nhlanhla and Hlula flew to Lusaka at the end of 1987, to the ANC administrative center to report their return. They met with the ANC's Politico Military Council which included then Mkhonto we Sizwe's Commissar, Chris Hanu, Joe Slovo, Ronnie Kasrils, Jacob Zuma, Joe Nhlanhla and Josiah Jele. Hlula and Nhlanhla battled to contain how star struck they were, and to focus on the meeting about their future and the possibility of reviving their Soweto units. Chris Hanu suggested and promptly arranged for the two to go for further training in Angola, before reviving their networks and units.

*

In Lusaka, the friends visited Hlula's aunt, Mam' Msimang, and his uncle, both of whom were very emotional at seeing them.

*

En route to Luanda, they spent a few weeks at an ANC house in Bulawayo, where their parents and siblings came to visit them for Christmas. Mam' Zodwa, Bab' Mabaso, Lindiwe, Nonkululeko, Jabu,

Bab' Sinda, Mam' Sibongeleni and Mazwe, all arrived excited and relieved to see Nhlanhla and Hlula looking fit and healthy. The visit was a good opportunity for Hlula to brief Mazwe about reforming the underground units with guys from his old college, and others from Rockville. They agreed to call the unit Sicelo Dhlomo, in memory of their slain friend and comrade. Before the families left Bulawayo, Nhlanhla gave Mazwe a pair of soccer boots with a hidden map inside it, with directions to where guns and grenades were buried. The families left Nhlanhla and Hlula in good spirits, not knowing they would soon leave the house for further military training in Angola. On their way back into South Africa, Bab' Sinda was questioned by the South African police at Beit Bridge about an album with pictures of Hlula and Nhlanhla wearing UDF t-shirts, and one of Nonkululeko carrying a "free my parents" placard (taken after the Mabaso's arrest in 1984). The police checked their computers and both Hlula and Nhlanhla's names came up, as comrades wanted by the state. Bab' Sinda explained that the two were not exiles, but were in school in Australia, and that the families were in Bulawayo visiting other relatives. The police let the families through after nearly four hours of questioning.

*

Nhlanhla and Hlula arrived in Luanda at the beginning of 1988, and they were welcomed by the sweltering coastal January heat. They stayed in a four bedroomed flat with about twelve other cadres. The group of ANC cadres mainly kept to themselves and

didn't participate much in life outside of political and military training. Occasionally they flirted with the beautiful young Angolan women from a flat across the road, and went to dubbed Angolan films. Most evenings were filled with long hours playing chess on the balcony.

Political training involved attending class in the mornings about the history of the struggle, and the gains and challenges so far. The lessons went into detail about why the cadres were fighting in the revolution; they detailed the objectives, and the primacy of the politics of arms. The armed struggle was emphasized as a *method* it did not constitute the entire struggle. The four pillars of the struggle (underground, mass, international solidarity and the armed struggle) were assessed.

Military training began at the crack of dawn with jogging and intense physical training at the beach. After about two months in Luanda, Hlula and Nhlanhla were taken to an ANC camp about an hour from the capital where they would learn about various weapons and how to use them. At the camp they were kept underground and away from other units. They were taught Military Combat Work, which covered the setting up of secret communication networks, selecting and training good cadres, intelligence and counter-intelligence, leadership and other key aspects of insurrection planning. They conducted practical sessions which included counter surveillance, and target shooting

with all sorts of arms pistols, machine guns, grenade launchers, makarovs, and scorpions. They also attended classes on fire arms engineering where they acquired expertise in the art of demolition, and the proper use of explosives.

The instructors were strict about following procedure, and insisted that cadres be very careful when handling weapons, as there was no room for mistakes. Hlula proved to be an excellent left and right handed marksman.

Hlula and Nhlanhla stayed in Angola for just under a year. Chris Hani occasionally checked on them and made sure they didn't get lost in bureaucracy. Hani's guidance and interest in them greatly helped their morale because conditions in exile were tough, sometimes driving cadres to madness. For instance, once, a newly arrived young doctor who'd joined them for training lost his mind in the camps; the uncertainty and sometimes desolate loneliness of exile was too much for him. Hlula attributes their relative stability during underground training in exile to the fact that even back home in Soweto they were deeply involved in struggle, and left with no idealistic notions of what exile would be like. They also had the constancy of each other's company.

When they left Angola, they reported to the military headquarters in Lusaka and proceeded to stay at a house called R.C. (Regional Command). R.C. was somewhat depressing; comrades there lived in

squalor, with cadres and commanders passing through without engaging them, or wanting to stay there long themselves. After the camaraderie and structured life of Angola, R.C. was a big disappointment to the guys. They demanded to see Chris Hanu, and were told, he was on his way to Zimbabwe. They then requested, and were granted permission, to leave for Zimbabwe, with the intention of discussing with Hanu re-forming their units back home.

When they left R.C. for Zimbabwe they were part of a group of six comrades en route to Bulawayo. The plan was to travel the four hour trip south to the Zambezi from Lusaka by 4X4, cross the Zambezi using a pumped up raft, walk 20 kilometers across a game reserve to a point where a contact on the Zimbabwe side would pick them up. The contact would then drive them the remaining nine hours to Bulawayo. This way of traveling was known as “the train”.

The trip started after dark, and after about three hours on the road, most of the young men had fallen asleep. They woke up suddenly airborne, after the driver had lost control of the 4X4, and had veered off the road, thus plunging the vehicle into a ditch. Luckily no one was seriously hurt, save for some scratches and bruises. They had no option but to abandon the vehicle, and walk the rest of the way to the Zambezi river house. The comrade with the compass was quite good with directions and

managed to lead everyone to the river house; they all tried not to think about the time they had lost because of the accident, and about whether the contact would still be waiting on the other side. At the house they had breakfast, and the guards proceeded to load the cadres on a small raft, and anxiously started to row across the hippo infested Zambezi river. The raft was too small for six people with bags. All thoughts stayed determinedly on keeping as steady as possible, and rowing as fast as possible across the three kilometer Zambezi stretch towards Zimbabwe. They reached the other side, and walked 20 kilometers across a game reserve to their pick up point. They wandered off the trail and lost their way briefly, but the comrade with the compass managed to get them to the pick up. When they arrived there, no one was waiting; the contact had already left, probably thinking they had decided to cancel the trip. The group decided to sleep in the nature reserve and wait for dawn before walking back to the Zambezi crossing. They tried to keep their minds off the medley of animal sounds and shimmering eyes in the dark. (At one point Hlula was convinced he was staring straight at a pack of hyena eyes!).

As they walked back to the crossing, at dawn, they hoped that the MK person at the crossing would have news of their pick up. They had neither food nor water because their contact was meant to give them provisions. One of the comrades who had become somewhat unfit was so tired and hungry, he literally crawled back to the river. At the river they

reconnected with their guide on the Zambia side (he had gone there after not finding them at the agreed upon spot in the Zimbabwean game farm). They drove the nine hours to Bulawayo in complete silence, which was occasionally by the violent retching of one of the comrades who had become sick from exhaustion.

In Bulawayo they stayed on a farm house which had just recently a few months prior to the comrades' arrival been bombed by the boers. Because of the high safety alert, they had to sleep in trenches dug around the house. The units based at the farm were those on their way to missions in South Africa. During their stay in Bulawayo they received a few letters from Hlula's mother Mam' Sibongeleni who was in New York for a few months doing work for the Grail. She had sent them care of a family friend in Zimbabwe. Writing from New York was safer since there was less chance of the security police intercepting her letters. In the following letter, she tries to get Hlula and Nhlanhla to go back to Australia and attend university:

*119 Duncan Avenue
Box 475
Cornwall-on-Hudson
New York 12520
Tel (914) 539 8495
5/1/88*

*Darling Hlula and Nhlanhla
How are you both? Did you hear about the news of what
happened at the boarder gate? Nkuli's photo started the*

whole thing, you remember the one with the placard "Release my parents". Anyway they now know you are Nqobi, Patrick you are in Zimbabwe, you are studying in Australia. So keep away from Kathy's place as much as possible because they have her address. We told them you are not in exile but in school in Australia. They wanted to know the reasons why you left SA and we told them that after your detention you needed to be back in school, and you got scholarships to Australia and we don't want you to come back because it's easier for us financially as we don't have to pay any school fees. So that was that. Play safe boys. Your name was in the computer machine there. They just pressed and got it.

I am with Alison here, but I am leaving today for Philadelphia and Washington. We'll be back 10/1/88. We (Alison and myself) have found out from Ruth in Australia that you two have \$2000-00 over there and that you may get scholarships easily if you intend to go back. In the meantime Pat will do some investigations as to which Universities are best, etc.

Re-Switzerland I wonder if you are aware of the fact that you have to study and learn Swiss before you can start school there. We thought it might be better if you were there during school holidays to go and see or study whatever interests you there. We will get a Grail member who lives there as a contact person. How is Mamkhulu. Gogo was very thrilled with the news of your being there and ofcourse by her present. She prays day in and out for you two. You are advised to start preparations early for school next in Australia if you intend going there this month as school re-opens in March. Contact Ruth, Pat or Alison for further

news. I did not see Pearl, I left before she could fetch her present. Write soon and let me know what is in your heads and minds. Expect results next-week.

Love Mom

In another letter Hlula's mother wrote about the murder of Sicelo Dhlomo, and the families' continued harassment by the police:

*119 Duncan Avenue
Box 475
Cornwall-on-Hudson;
New York
12520
17/2/88*

Darling Hlula

I heard the news about Sicelo, Oh what a pity. Uyabona ukuthi kunzima kanjani. Ukuba ningale nani ngabe sekukhona okunivelele. I phoned home 16/2/88 and bangitshela ukuthi i murder and robbery squad ibilapha ekhaya befuna wena. They said they wanted to ask you about a few things bathi bayazi ukuthi wena no Sicelo were friends, so bathi bazobuza wena ukuthi obani izitha zenu; some people who may have wanted to kill him. They said as he was your friend they wanted to ask you because they are investigating his death. They were told by your Dad that you are at school but they did not ask where, and they said they will be coming back again. I think there is an uproar about Sicelo's death.

I've been to the Dube's and I had a very nice afternoon with them; Zola was looking forward to you both to come over here for your schooling this year. She sounded disappointed

when I said you were not keen to come this way. Then Hlula uzoqala nini ukuthintana no Pat Sheeran mayelana ne schooling this year because I think it is getting late already; and I don't know how easy it will be to get a school at this time of the year. Missing you a lot. Keep well and take care. Things that are happening these days are shocking. Write soon, I love you both.

Ma.

Hlula and Nhlanhla had to constantly side step the issue of going back to school when discussing the future with their parents. Their constant moving about, helped them avoid the issue for some time.

Chapter

12 *The Two Amigos*

*Awuleth' umshini wam'
weTambo*

True to his brief Mazwe reconstituted underground units as per Hlula's instructions in Bulalwayo at Christmas. The one under his direct command consisted of himself, his cousin Ntsika, and two friends Wandile and Moeletsi.

After forming the unit, Mazwe and Ntsika had to resign from the executive positions they held in the youth movements SOYCO and SOSCO, so as not to draw attention to themselves and their weapons-trafficking underground work.

Each of the unit members under Mazwe also started and commanded sub-units, and in turn those members commanded and started yet more units. The chain continued in this way, with individual units not knowing who the members from other units were. All the sub-units eventually reported to Hlula and Nhlanhla, who, in turn, reported to military headquarters (MHQ) in Lusaka. Hlula had to ensure that headquarters had passport photos and biographies of unit members. At one time he counted about 50 members whose details he'd passed on.

Mazwe's unit worked closely with his elder brother,

Muhle, who was at varsity in the North West near a convenient border crossing, as well as Nhlanhla's elder brother, Jabu, who was also a varsity student, and a good safe driver to have when moving weapons. Using the map from the soccer boots given to them, Jabu and Mazwe drove two hours north of Soweto to a place near Warmbaths, to dig up a cache of grenades and guns. They had to remove the weapons they had temporarily stored in the dog kernel the weapons at Jabu's home in the dog kernel, they promptly moved them when they found the dog and younger sister Nonkululeko playing with a grenade. They distributed the cache to several units, briefed to destabilise local security structures. Comrades waged wars against local councilors, the police, passing army patrols as well as local gangsters suspected of being police agents. The units managed to successfully intimidate and weaken local security structures, and newspaper reports in the late eighties detailed escalating attacks against councilors and police.

What was more complicated to deal with was the gangster element which terrorised communities with the rape abductions notoriously known as *jackrolling*. Groups of girls would be taken at parties, schools, and streets and gang raped for days, and sometimes weeks. Comrades fought gun battles with gangsters like *amakabasa*, and *amajapan*. Mazwe and Ntsika earned the nickname “the two amigos” when they pistol whipped a pair of notorious thugs who were threatening and attacking school girls in Rockville. Another challenge came in the form of the members

of Inkatha Freedom Party.

Supported by the security police, Inkatha members were involved in battles with township communities at that time. Battles between comrades and Inkatha hostel dwellers escalated in the late eighties and raged through the early nineties.

Mazwe tried to keep Nhlanhla and Hlula as informed as possible about the climate in Soweto and the work of the units. He wrote letters in code, and these were destroyed soon after they were received; he also sent messages via students and comrades. Their mutual friend, Refilwe Mogale, was one such go between; she was a fellow comrade they had worked with in Soweto, who was finishing high school in Zimbabwe. When Refilwe traveled back and forth between school terms, she couriered messages and maps about hidden weapons. Also trained under Mazwe's command was a female unit, which successfully helped a comrade escape police guard after he'd been shot and taken to Baragwanath Hospital. The female unit was extremely efficient, as apartheid sexism was often blind to the possibility of female cadres.

*

In 1989, Ntsika, Moeletsi and Wandile had to leave South Africa, after weapons they had buried in a park in Rockville were discovered during a dramatic police raid. Police had descended on the park with helicopters and more than ten *hippos*; hundreds of police combed the park with sniffer dogs and unveiled a massive arms cache. With the help of MHQ in Lusaka the three made arrangements to leave the

country. Ntsika had to meet comrade “A”, the MK chief of operations, and explain why arms were stored in a public park where “lovers make out”. His defense was that they were in a part of the park not well maintained and generally not frequented.

Ntsika, Moeletsi and Wandile finished training in Tanzania. Ntsika hated life in exile: the uncertainty, waiting around to be deployed, and some of the corrupt practices of the comrades like the unauthorised “frying” (selling off) of supplies left him feeling disillusioned. He met up with his brother Veli, in a camp in Tanzania. Veli was suffering from malaria at the time, and not able to converse lucidly. He also briefly visited Hlula who had then moved to Harare, and Nhlanhla (or Thami as he was known in Harare) who had just returned from further military training in Russia (where he used the name Sizwe). Ntsika returned to South Africa, in 1990.

Chapter

13 *Farmer Brown*

*Sivelele skhumbul'ekhaya
thina songena ngejumbo
uma sifika siyalithatha*

In Harare Nhlanhla and Thulane lived in one of the ANC houses with, among others a comrade called Shorty. Hlula continued to correspond via letters with his love and fellow comrade from Soweto.

Life in Harare was bearable. Hlula had started his BSc degree at the University of Zimbabwe, and Nhlanhla was working as a database/computer specialist at the Popular History Trust, which later merged with the South African History Archive. The two, had also reconnected with their friend, mentor and comrade, Mamani Kgomotso Nkadimeng, who was also based in Harare.

Their three bedroomed house in the Kopje suburb, was a fairly organised and homely place where they divided out duties and shared monthly provisions from the ANC. Their breakfast staple was *ncwancwa*, a kind of sour soft porridge. Lunch and supper consisted of sandwiches with cheese donated from Finland, or *pap*, and vegetables, and meat sometimes. Hlula learnt to cook as a youngster and did it well. With three brothers, and no sisters, the Msimang boys made their peace early in life with house work. The

brothers spent many days cooking in their tiny Soweto kitchen, a skill that later came in handy for life in exile. Although Zimbabwe was better resourced than many of the ANC's bases, supplies were still a problem, and at the end of the month, meal times were often bare, with the house mates making do with whatever was left.

Hlula and Nhlanhla learnt from Mazwe that the units back home were well structured and operational. There were, however, two very serious accidents during attacks; in one, a comrade was injured by shrapnel when he didn't go down fast enough after throwing a grenade at a police man's house; in another accident, a comrade got shot in the thigh by a fellow unit member because he got confused and ran in front of the member firing (the particular comrade had not been sufficiently trained and had been shocked by the sound of a makarov pistol).

Nhlanhla and Hlula had to sit tight in Harare and could not go into South Africa without getting explicit instructions from Lusaka. They didn't know many people in Harare, which was a good thing because they were only allowed limited contact even with the South African exile community. Their daily routine was almost always exactly the same. They woke up at around six, did morning press ups and sit ups, had breakfast at around seven (sour soft porridge with sugar and milk), cleaned the house for an hour, did laundry, prepared lunch of hard porridge with milk or spinach, or potatoes. Then they'd do some reading, play cards, snakes and ladders, ludo, or chess (always

with the radio on, blaring out the latest soul and pop hits). And in the evenings, they took turns doing night watch. Night watch was especially stressful during high alert, when an ANC house had been bombed, or when it was known that the boers and their consorts were lurking around. This routine restricted their lives, often making them feel slightly claustrophobic. They hoped for trips across borders and the resultant meetings with those from home. It was always good to hear news from home. Recently, however, they had started hearing about the increase in rapes from the radio -- gang rapes where groups of thugs in minibus taxis abducted girls and gang raped them, or *jackrolled* them. There were rumours that some of these thugs were working for the boers, and were set loose on township communities to spread fear and terror. Nhlanhla often wondered if his sister Lindi was safe; he had not seen or heard from her in months. He also painfully agonized about the fact that he could not just board a bus and go home, or turn a corner and see familiar streets and faces. His powerlessness to change his life had a surreal feel about it -- a feeling akin to being jailed in a wide open space.

Exile could also be quite humorous, like when Shorty arrived home one day carrying a very large tray of baby chickens. He walked up to Hlula and Nhlanhla and put the tray on the table. The yellow, and some white chicks chirped excitedly, marveling at their new environment. Shorty explained that he had gotten, from the market earlier that day, a really good deal on the chicks: they cost a few cents each, coming to only a

few dollars for the whole tray of hundred! He excitedly explained that he would fatten and look well after each chick, until they were big enough to eat and sell. Hlula, who was shocked at Shorty's bold and mad scheme, explained that it would be unwise to run a chicken business at the house, as they were underground, and chickens would attract unwanted attention. Nhlanhla could not stop laughing, he had never seen so many baby chickens in his life. And the thought of Shorty suddenly becoming a chicken farmer was hilarious. Shorty became known from that day on as "Farmer Brown". Farmer Brown was extremely possessive of his chicks, he would not let the other house mates feed them, or even go near them. He tried daily to feed them seeds, and shower them with tender loving care. But all the care did not stop the chicks from perishing one by one, and causing a terrible stink, and abruptly ending Shorty's brief foray into chicken farming.

Chapter

14 *Spring Offensive*

*Sithi ngawo lonyaka womanyano
s'khulule Tambo
ngebazooka, ngemortar, neAK

Thina nomdala so-base' eNgwavuma

Weapons brought into South Africa by underground units such as the ones headed by Hlula and Nhlanhla's units were used against government installations to send a strong message to the masses, that apartheid was not invincible, it was weakening and would ultimately be brought down by the people's army, uMkhonto we Sizwe. A cadre who wished to remain anonymous related the following attack:

...I had to enter South Africa from the Botswana side, the border there was quite open. We crossed that place back and forth all the time. I traveled through Botswana on the back of a van, a bakkie, with a fellow cadre, a coloured guy with a big beard. He looked like a boer driving his bakkie, and I was his worker. I had two large sports bags full of arms. RPG bazookas and grenades. On the way to the border Batswana police were searching vehicles, but we were let through because I just looked like a farm worker. It started to rain; I was soaked at the back. The weapons were wrapped in layers of plastic, so I wasn't too worried. Along the way, we picked up another cadre who was to enter SA with me. At the border, my friend the bakkie driver, couldn't cross into SA with us, so he dropped us at the border at Pitsane Village.

Pitsane Village was dark, so we struggled a bit to find the tree where we were to meet our contact. And the bags were quite heavy. We crossed on foot to meet two contacts under a tree. We had a code that if the one person had a newspaper under his left arm, it meant all was clear, there were no police following them. Luckily our contacts were there and they helped us load the two bags into the car. You see, we had to plan as much as possible, and keep to time, or the chain would be broken, and the mission messed up. So before we came, one of the comrades would go back and forth relaying messages to unit members at various points, until everyone knew exactly what to do and what time to be where. Anyhow, once we got into the hired car after crossing into SA, we drove the three hours to Soweto.

Two of us were sitting at the back, with pistols ready in case we came across a road block. In fact, at one point we thought a car was following us, and we cocked our guns, fortunately it was a false alarm. We got to Soweto and met at a house with two more unit members. We were meant to attack a police station the following day. But when the guys told me of the escape route, I was not very happy. They had not factored in the fact that there were many police houses along the route they hoped to use to escape. We then decided on another target. There was a mass toyi-toyi planned outside the Urban Bantu Council, UBC, in Jabulani the following day. The march would be the ideal time for a dramatic attack on the building, an attack that would let people know that the people's army is strong; you know, to boost morale, because there was a lot of propaganda about MK being ineffective. We wanted to counter that propaganda. So on the day of the toyi-toyi we waited for the sun to set, before driving to UBC. There were five of us in a beetle. We positioned ourselves accordingly, two RPG bazookas, and

two grenades. As soon as I gave the signal the guys launched the attack, practically blowing UBC sky high. We quickly got into the car and drove off. News of that attack was all over the townships.

15 Homebound

*UMandela inkokheli yethu
thina' madela kufa sithembele kuwe
sohlangana eAfrik' entsha
sobonana futhi
sohlangana ngenhlalo enhle
nangenkululeko*

The release of political prisoners , and the unbanning of political parties in the early nineties, resulted in the ANC suspending the armed struggle and many exiles returning to South Africa.

The underground units had to seize operations. Chris Hani traveled the length and breadth of South Africa's townships convincing cadres to hand over arms caches which the ANC then destroyed.

Many units continued to arm themselves against apartheid sponsored vigilante agents as train and street battles had not stopped.

Amidst the chaos of the rapid change of 1990, Nhlanhla heard, whilst still in Harare, of the death of his younger sister Lindiwe from malaria. He could not attend the funeral and was told of the hero's send off given to her by comrades from St. Matthews and local youth groups. Lindi had had some training in hiding weapons, and making leaflet bombs.

The units under Hlula and Nhlanhla disbanded in 1991. The disbanding process unfortunately resulted in a n accident where two people died when one unit member, had not disposed of grenades properly, and his grandmother thought the grenade was a piece of coal, she put it in the coal stove, and it detonated killing her and another family member. The accident affected the units intensely because they felt they could have been much more careful in ensuring that members dispose of weapons safely.

*

Nhlanhla and Hlula returned to South Africa in 1991. Nhlanhla left first, and Hlula followed a few months later.

In 1993, the comrades mourned along with South Africa the murder of their leader, Chief of Staff, Chris Hani. Nhlanhla had guarded Hani for a few weeks in 1992 as back up to his regular bodyguards. The comrades who met Hani were generally touched by his humility and respect for the youth.

The Mabaso family suffered another loss when Nhlanhla's aunt, Sis Lucky Lephoto, who introduced Nhlanhla and his friends to YCS, was beaten to death by a jealous ex-boyfriend in May of 1993. In 1996, more tragedy struck when Hlula's mother passed away after falling ill with pneumonia. In December 2004 Nhlanhla's father, Bab'Mabaso passed on, after falling into a diabetic coma. The extended friends and family network helped each other through these intensely

painful losses.

*

Although the eighties and nineties were tough decades politically and personally for the units started under the Sicelo Dhlomo outfit, the dawn of democracy in South Africa has brought a bitter sweet sense of hope.

The teenagers who fought apartheid on multiple levels, continue to wage economic battles, as poverty continues to keep Africa behind. They are optimistic that the 21st century is indeed Africa's century.

*

Hlula is currently the Chief of Police in Tswane . He is father to Mbali.

Nhlanhla works at an Open Source Computer Centre. He is married to the author, and is father to Bahl'abantu.

Mazwe, is a General Practitioner. He is father to Sibongeleni. He is married to Fiona.

Muhle works as a graphic artist for government. He is father to Vangile.

Jabu(Mabaso) is a legal practitioner. He is father to Thando and Naledi.

Moeletsi works in the South African National Defence Force.

Refilwe works in the financial sector, and she is mother to Mohale.

Ntsika has completed his PhD in artificial intelligence, and works for a para-statal.

Veli has completed his PhD in chemical engineering, and works for a para-statal.

Bafana works for the local council.

Jabu(Mnyandu) was killed during a family dispute.
