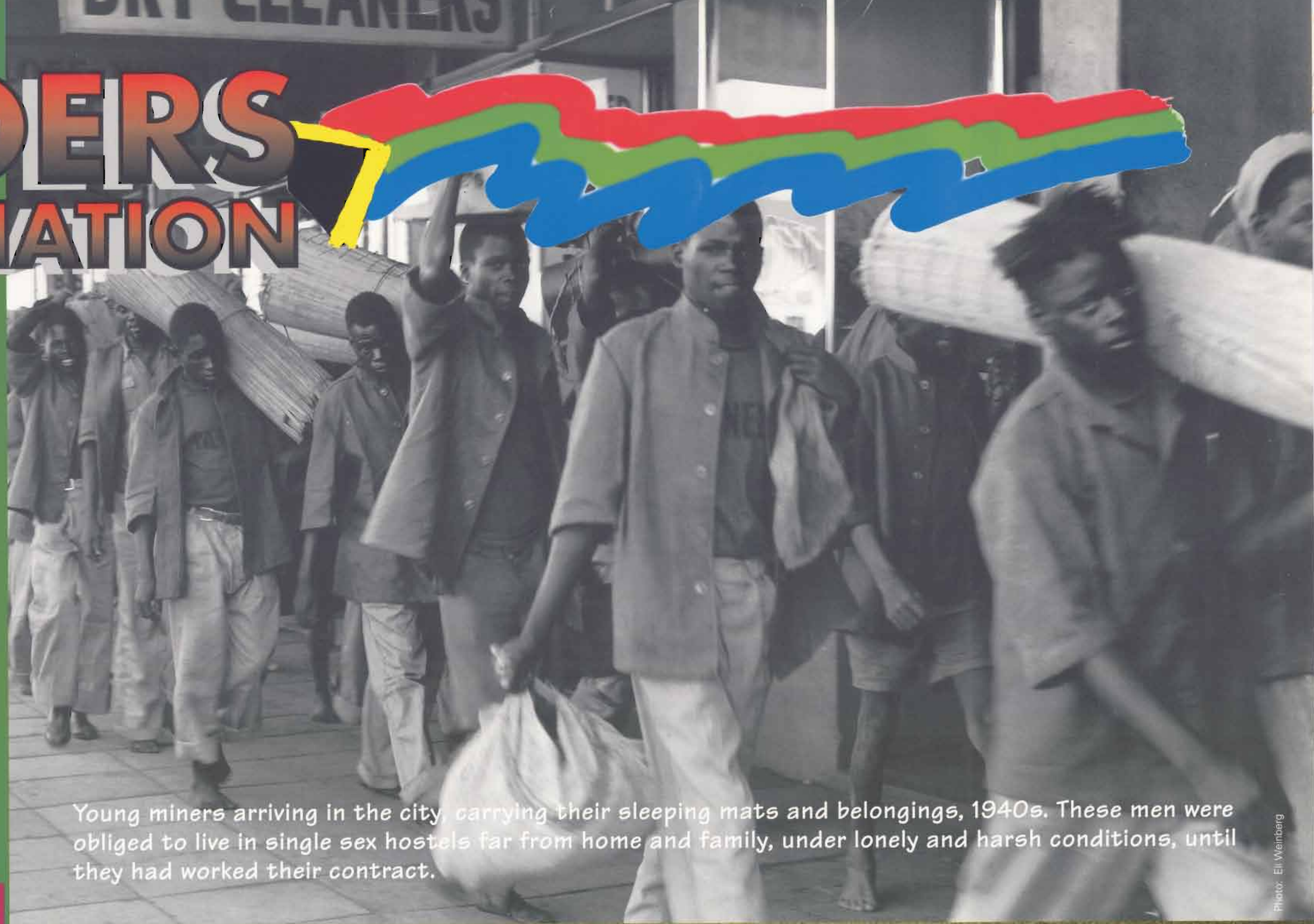


BUILDERS OF THE NATION

3 MIGRANT LABOUR

The migrant labour system has existed in South Africa for over a hundred years. It was used to underpin the apartheid economy. Men would leave their homes and find work in the diamond and gold mines to earn money to help their chiefs pay taxes. They also wanted to buy guns for hunting, and to defend their land. After the 1913 Land Act, which allowed blacks to hold only 13% of the land, rural families found it harder to survive.



Young miners arriving in the city, carrying their sleeping mats and belongings, 1940s. These men were obliged to live in single sex hostels far from home and family, under lonely and harsh conditions, until they had worked their contract.

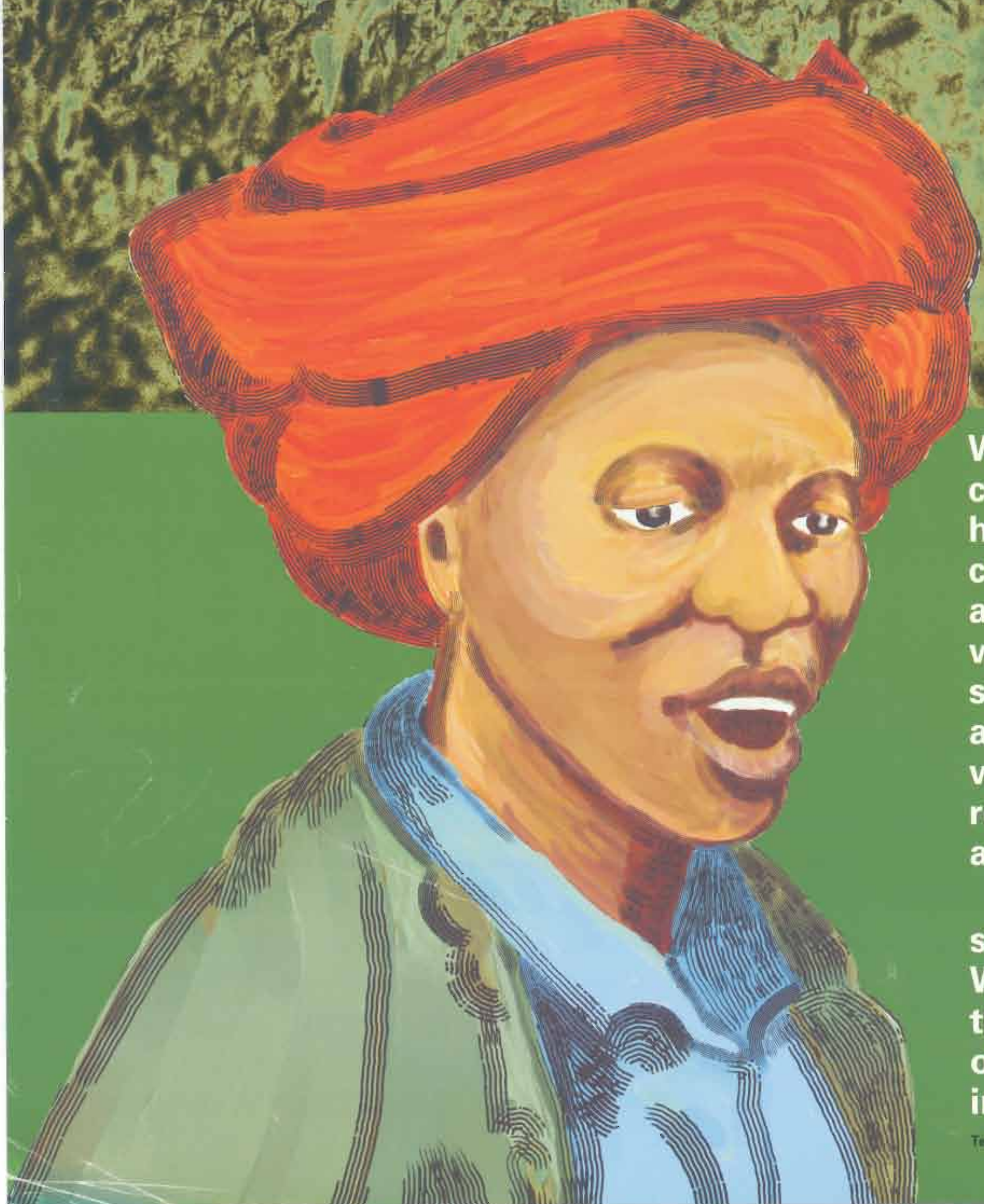
Photo: El Wernberg



A woman thatching her home. Without their menfolk, the women increasingly had to take on work traditionally performed by men.



The wife and child of a migrant worker plough the land.



Women kept the families going. They cultivated the land, built and repaired the houses, took care of the cattle, raised the children, nursed the aged and the sick, and buried the dead. Increasingly, women were left on their own, without the support of their men. They had to survive as best they could. Often they had no way of telling when their men-folk would return, or even whether they were alive and well.

Through their hard work, rural women subsidised the migrant labour system. We salute these courageous women for their unpaid labour and their selfless care of their families and the rural homesteads, in the face of great difficulties.

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Labour bureau truck collecting men from the rural areas.

Photo: Larson