

# Staffrider

Volume Four Number Three  
Nov 1981 R1.00 (incl.GST)



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Prof. Kunene teaches in the Department of African Languages and Literature, University of Wisconsin and his articles have appeared in learned journals around the world.

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Front Cover: 'Miriam Zenzi Makeba', photo, Edoard Coffi  
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Dikobe waMogale Martins

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## Staffworker :

# The Story of a Blind Black worker



A nine months ordeal behind  
a factory switchboard machine

by Elda Oliphant

I talk of blind people because that's my sphere. The blind also have ambitions like anyone else, and nothing should bar that. I have been doing voluntary research on the needs of a black blind person, and also at the same time trying to orientate the community about the blind.

There is a lot that the black community is doing for blind people. Organisations like the women's Manyano or Zenzele YWCA are sending donations to the blind schools and institutions. Now that is not the thing. If only they could go into the pros and cons, meet the blind inmates, the blind students, the black blind persons before sending anything to the National Council. Then they would really know what the needs are for which they are sending donations. Doing it this way could have much more meaning, rather than sending it not even knowing whether it is serving that purpose.

In fact disabled people deplore begging. Unfortunately we cannot talk about eliminating that before we can replace it. That is really the pity of it. At times we feel that the 'able bodies' are *encouraging* begging, because they think that by throwing in a cent or two their consciences will be clear. If only they could have a better way of doing it. Speak to the individuals concerned. Actually find out why is it that they are in the streets. You may find that there is something better that you could do for this person. I mean it is such a pity. At times you put in a rand and for a month or so you feel you can pass this beggar with a clear conscience. Are you sure that that rand was put to good use, and is that rand the only thing that this person wants! You know, a blind person is very lonely and at times he needs comfort.

Unfortunately begging is making this person even more helpless and reluctant to work. They think that it's an easy way of making money: standing on the street corners and begging. It takes a lot out of them, because they have to wake up early in the morning and go home quite late; depending on the takings they've collected. At times it starts raining in the afternoon. Sometimes it rains in the morning. They can't go begging. What do they live on? Because of the heat and cold that they are going through they get ill! When they are hospitalised, what happens? Whereas if they are put in a job they are more useful to themselves. If you're in a job and you get ill, you can take sick leave or something. You see what I mean?

When you are employed in a firm as a blind person unfortunately the other employees think you are being done a favour. They don't think you are as professional as they are in your capacity. In fact, this is, I think, what all blind persons feel when they are in a job. The problem is that you can make tea in your house because you know exactly where the facilities are. You can move about freely. Now when you come into an office, tea has to be made for you, and you are kind of served. Alright, in some offices tea is made for everybody and it is brought in, but for you for some reason the very 'tea girl' feels that she is doing you a favour. They feel that as a black you should stand up and make your own tea and what have you.

At a recent job I had, the private secretary to the director



Elda Oliphant, Photo Paul Weinberg

could hardly spell. There was always a time that I had to stop to help her, whilst busy with a ten-by-fifty switchboard machine. She would even ring me on the intercom. It would make her feel guilty, to stand there and try to talk to me when I couldn't, so that I must spell this, that or the other for her.

And yet if I would ask her to do something for me, even address an envelope, she would feel that I am making her my servant — more so because she is white. But I had every right to do spelling for her — because I am black. Her work was turned into a part of my work.

She would take down a letter in shorthand. She hardly knew how to reconstruct a letter. Executives just give you a list of sentences that you should make presentable. She would come with these funny things and read them to me. She could hardly spell, so we had to find out what some of the words meant. In the end we actually had to reconstruct the whole letter together. She wouldn't admit that it was through my help that we made it, after all! In the end, when I had realised that they were taking so much advantage of what I was doing for them, it led to my losing that job. She had a way of complaining about me to the authorities about this, that or the other . . .

I heard from the people who phoned for the vacancy that I had lost my job. They telephoned their enquiries through me at the switchboard. I asked the personnel manager if I had to put the enquiries about a switchboard vacancy through to him? He got such a shock, because he thought I couldn't know since the advert was placed in the newspapers. That's a very short-sighted way of thinking. People would read it to me and people knew that I worked there. So, they had to find out whether I was leaving or not. He got such a shock. But he decided to take the calls.

After the calls lulled down at about three or four in the afternoon, he came to me and said, 'Now that you know that people are looking for a switchboard vacancy . . . much as we like you it is just that we feel you cannot cope in the company. It is too busy for you!' I had nothing to say. He had gone far enough. These are some of the things he could

have told me before he advertised the job. He continued 'Don't worry, we are going to give you a generous salary in advance and a month's notice. And if you don't get anything going, we will keep you on a little longer.'

We all know the strategy of white people. Because of the dispute I had with Michele, the private secretary — she is un-touchable — she probably went to the personnel manager. They must have discussed this with the managing director. He came and discussed my dispute with Michele. I had decided to leave the company. The strategy was to find someone at their own leisure time, while the work was going on. As soon as they got someone I would be dumped like junk. That is the part they couldn't get from me. When he told me to continue working until I had another job, I just kept quiet and he said, 'Is that all right, Elda?' I told him: 'It is just that I don't believe in that sort of arrangement. Whatever you are saying to me right now I wish you to put down in writing!' He thought that would be okay and since this was a Friday afternoon he would give it to me on Monday. He was going off early that day. I said, that's fine.

On Monday I phoned him and reminded him about my letter. He said he would do it as soon as he could. I told him he'd better do it now, because I was leaving that very afternoon. That was a shock to him.

I felt very humiliated as a black person and also as a disabled person. But I was not going to give in on that. I realised that this was a white staff in the first place, and that they had never had a black person working for them at all. Well, they had tried an Indian girl and she hadn't made it.

How could they sack a worker and in her place put in someone who was still learning? That alone was not right. In any case, in the end I thought that I was a disappointment to them in the sense that when they thought along the lines of trying a black, their first target was a disabled person. I wouldn't take any humiliation from them because of my disability and my colour.

When I started to work there, they were all very happy to help, because you know what the feeling is in South Africa up to now: 'Blacks are not ready yet.' They knew that as a blind person I wouldn't make it. So everybody was all out to assist me, knowing that it was a waste of time. And of course to the world it would be: 'Well, we tried to help a black woman. They say they want equal work, equal pay. Here was a black who was unable to do the job.'

What I actually wanted from them was just to show me the board. I know how to work with the switchboard, it is just that the boards are not the same. You have to know the orientation. When I started to work on the board I realised the opposition that was there from the onset. Even some of the department managers would complain over nothing: 'She makes us hold on for too long before we get a line. She cuts us off.' Making a person hold on too long waiting for a line depends on what you are doing. You receive calls from as far away as Kenya at that company. Can you leave a call from Kenya or Zimbabwe just to give someone a line?

I walked out on them before they got the right person. I tried to get into two or three jobs. I think they are actually blacklisting me. They can't forgive my walking out on them. I want to go to the legal clinic for advice, because I don't think they have the right to blacklist me for anything. At times they try to deny the fact that I worked for them for nine months before they discovered that I wasn't good enough for the company. Of course, I worked for nine months as switchboard operator. You cannot keep a person on for sympathy. You can't, because it is to the detriment of your company. At times when I was out somewhere, someone else stood in for me. When I got back I would find everybody so cross because things were not going the right way. It was only then that they realised that I was worth something. ■



*Blind guitarist,*

*Photo Paul Weinberg*



*Blind beggar in a train,*

*Photo Judas Ngwenya*

# HOT BEANS

An excerpt from the novel 'To every Birth its Blood'

by Mongane Serote illustration by Thami Mnyele

Boykie laughed. 'You understand the rules or you don't, that is all.' Alexandra began to show ahead of us now. The smoke, hovering in the sky, above the rusted tin rooftops, seemed to proclaim our world doomed, doomed forever. I slowed the car down, indicated to the left, and turned. Many people in the streets, walking, standing and talking at the corners of streets, children running, playing in the streets.

'Take me home boy, and tomorrow, if you still want to keep the man's job, report early at work, tell them I will see them when I am rested, right now take me home.' Boykie's determination, his voice issuing orders like that, made me feel mocked, made me feel ashamed, alone and angry. I dropped him at his gate. He said nothing, just took out his bag and left. I drove down Selborne

Street, terrified by my aloneness, among the many, many people, some of whom waved at me, and I merely nodded, feeling betrayed.

Now I could not bear to relate what had happened to anyone. It was my secret. Suddenly a strange, heavy sadness set into my heart, or wherever it is that these things happen. It was as if the car would go out of control.

I took a shower at the gym, then drove to my home, to my parents, for a meal. My mother was there, so was my father. They were sitting at the table and my sister was in the other room. After I had greeted my parents and sat down, they asked where I had been because Lily had come looking for me several times. 'Why does she look for me, does she not know I work?'

'Go to hell, you always think you

live alone in this world. Other people are concerned about you,' my mother said angrily.

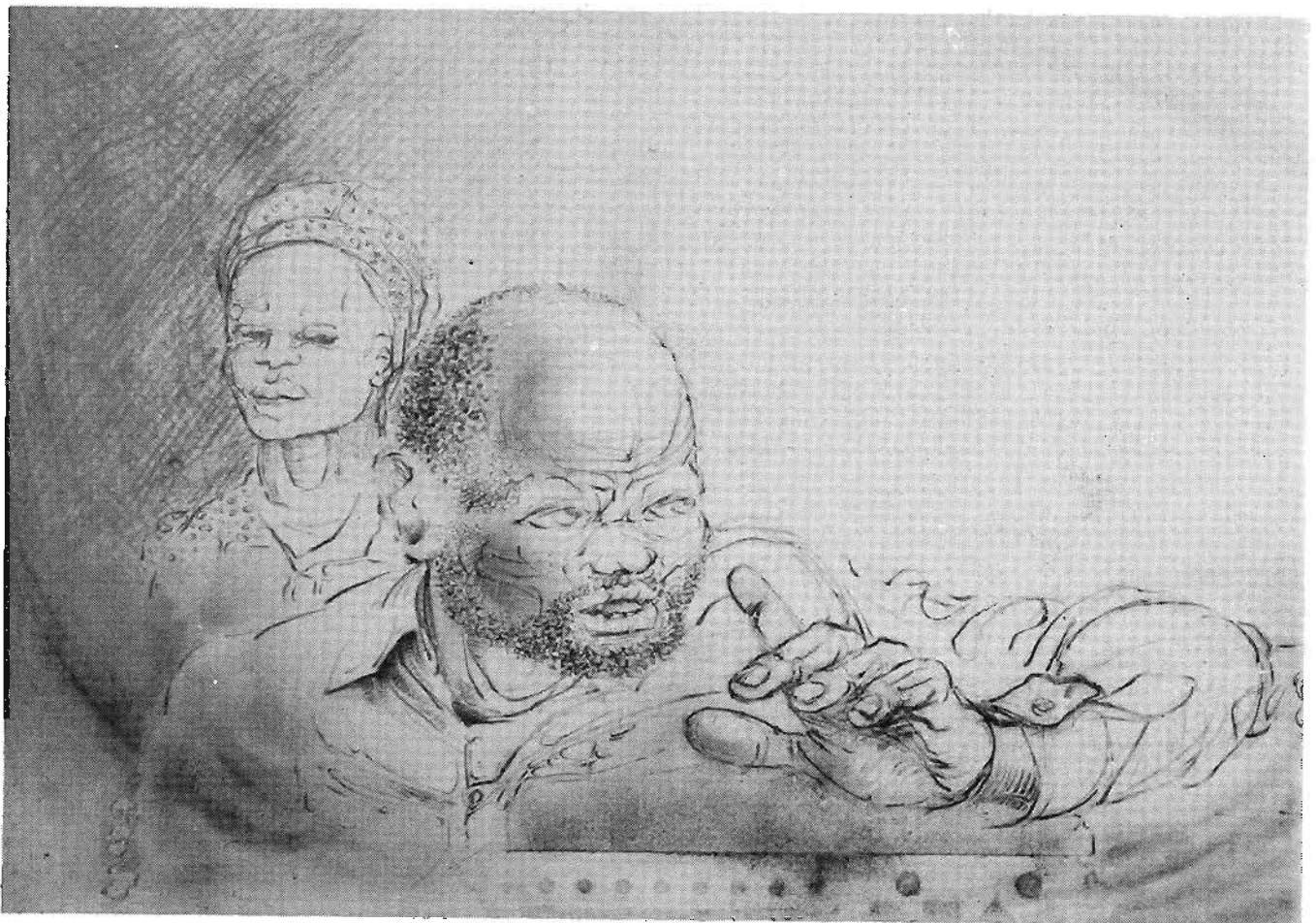
'Well, I will go to hell. Next time, tell them not to come asking after me. Tell them I am in hell, that is all,' I said.

'Who you talking to like that, heh? Rubbish, a thing without a sense or manners, all you know is run after girls, and run in the street like a dog. I wish they kill you there, what do you want all the time at night in the street? Sies!' She spat or seemed to spit on the floor.

'Don't worry about what happens to me,' I said.

'Tsietsi, Tsietsi, if you think there are two bulls in this house, you better choose to go through that door,' my father said. He was looking at me through his broken spectacles.

'Came home to see you all,' I said.



'I said the door is there, if you think you are a bull. That is all. No word from you.'

'We sit here worrying about you and now you come talking as if you are farting,' my mother said. I nearly laughed. But instead, I stood up and went to the other room where Mary, my sister, was. When I stood staring at her from the door and she saw me, she giggled.

'You got some hot beans,' she said.

'How are you?'

'Okay,' she said, still giggling.

'What's funny?'

'Nothing,' she said.

'Okay then, stop that laughing.' She hugged me and kissed me on the chin. But she was still giggling, so I began to laugh lightly too.

'Where were you?'

'Around,' I said.

'We have been looking for you. Ndo went to your place several times, and did not find you. I went to see you, you were not there. Where have you been? And Lily was looking for you too.'

'I was in hell,' I said. She laughed.

'And I met Anka, he asked where you were.'

'Okay now, talk about something else, unless you are considering making more hot beans for me.'

'Do you want tea?'

'God, I would love that,' I said. Mary went out of the room and I sat on the bed, looking at what she was reading, something about true love and romance.

Her room smelt of perfume, was neat, filled with strange fucked-up books, about how to make love and enjoy it, and true confessions. She came back with a tray and put in on the table. I looked at her, and I thought, shit, you may as well have it, you bitch!

'Why are you reading all that shit?'

'What?' She turned to face where I was pointing.

'All that?'

'That is not shit.'

'Do you think there is anyone who can teach you how to make love?'

'Ah,' she could only say.

'Why don't you read better things?'

'What's better things?'

'Better books.'

'Which?'

'Why don't you come up to my house and pick up a few books that you can read?'

'You have not been there.'

'Ah, Mary, come on now.'

'You have not been there, you are always all over the show,' she said and passed me the tea.

'Would you read them if I brought them?'

She shrugged and went to look out of the window. While she stood there, with her back towards me, I saw her body, full. I could see the shape of her breasts, protruding forward. She was no longer the little girl we used to tease and occasionally thrash. I recalled how once she tried to make a pee standing up, and

the urine ran down her legs, and our mother, angry, looking ashamed, slapped her and pushed and pulled her to the house screaming at her. How we laughed at her and teased her for days, that she could not pee like we did. Now that seemed so long, long ago, when she would be crying, running to our mother to tell her what we had said, and mother would run after us, with a stick in her hand. Mary was no longer that little girl now. She wanted to know about true romance and true confessions and how to make love. But she seemed to be in her room all the time. Always sweet, wanting to make tea for us whenever we came home. Somehow, I felt there was something very unreal about her. I feared for her, the day she found out what the street had for her. The streets where her mother would not be there, with her biting tongue, to tell her that she would be climbed, made to take journeys into the centre of the sea, and be left there, to be mocked while she was fighting the current. On the other hand, she seemed to sense it, and as a result, she kept in the house, in her room reading her stupid books and washing several times a day, and singing with the radio.

I had tried to take her out on several occasions but every time I tried to do it, mother came between us, with her church tongue, getting spirits about me taking her child to the dogs, cursing her, and not wanting to have her child join me in my miserable ways. Mary wept, and I realised then how much pain and conflict I caused. And every time we walked around with her, she would be right next to me, like a frightened dog, not wanting to stray because other dogs were barking and wanted to bite it. I at last gave that up, but now and then snatched her to a movie, in those days when we still went to the movies, or to a jazz festival. But she was always right next to my skin.

'What are you doing in there?' my mother shouted.

'I am choking Mary to death,' I replied. Mary came rushing at me, slapping my back and wanting to hold my mouth.

'Abuti-Tsietsi, ah, shhh,' she kept saying. The old lady was quiet. I knew she was angry.

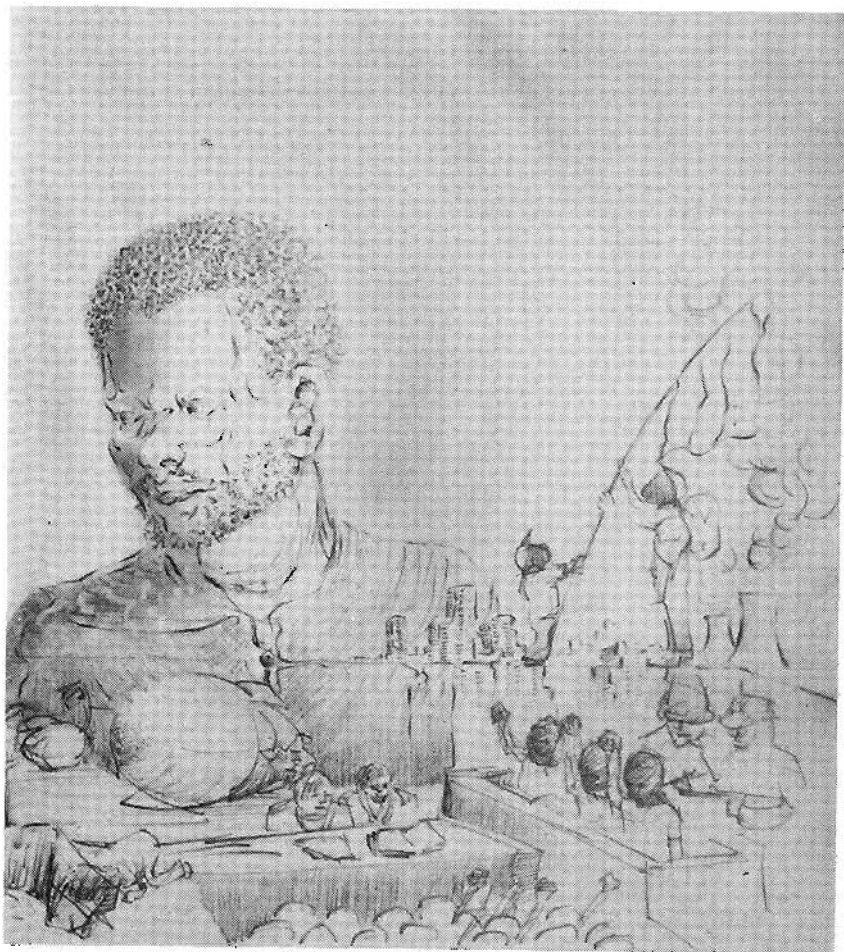
'I know you can do it, your mother's head,' she said.

'That does not sound like a mother of prayer,' I said.

'Ah, shut up!' Mary said, shocked.

'Your mother is crazy,' I said.

'Ah, yooooo,' she said and left the room. I lay on my back thinking, feeling rested, choking in the perfume of the room, and wondering about the rubbish books that kept dancing their titles at me: Romance, Confessions, Love,



Loving. If you know what love is . . . About me . . . Then I heard the dishes and cutlery being put on the table. It was when I lifted my head and looked outside that I realised that it was getting dark. The sun had gone now, the shadows were growing.

I was looking at my father's face as he dug into his plate, opened his mouth, and chewed, thoughtfully, now and then saying something to my mother. I thought about the scene at the police station, the scene on the counter, how I screamed, how I fell, how I lay on the ground, weeping like a child. I wondered, I wondered how my father would have handled that scene! Would he scream? Would he weep? What would he do when he shook his body out of its slumber and found himself lying there on the floor in shame? Yes, it could happen, it could happen to him, like it happened to me. It could happen to him. Suddenly, he looked very old, weary and feeble as I looked at him and the thought crossed my mind. I thought of the many times he had driven along the same road, the same road where we saw a man, lying on his back, in the dark, in the middle of nowhere, surrounded by red and blue flickering lights. My father had driven many, many times along that road. He had driven many times, even before I was born, along that same empty, dangerous road, where the red, blue lights flicker in the dark. In the vast empty fields, that run for miles and miles into the dark horizon, with my mother, all by themselves, alone, in that darkness. Now, as he sat there, chewing slowly, tasting his food and looking away, staring into space, he suddenly became a stranger to me. I could not place him on that terrible and bloody road, or in that terrible and smelly room, where hands stalk for balls or even, in the dark, dark streets of Alexandra, where women are raped, men killed, shot, stabbed, run over by cars. I could not place him anywhere in the city, where the rule is signs about blacks going to the back; where white women are dirty-tongued, find delight in humiliating black men of any age; where looks can take away any black man's life. My father was a stranger to me, his son, as he sat there chewing. How did he make his journey? I began to understand why he never wanted me to talk to him about the streets, or the city, or the police stations. I began to understand why he had forbidden that in his house. I wished he could die, and rest.

I began to understand what kept him so quiet. I began to understand why he seemed to be frightened by us, Fix, Ndo and myself. I began to understand why he was so close to his daughter, so far away from his wife, and I realised what

**‘ . . . he talked about Kaunda, Nyerere, Nkrumah . . . he had to believe that they loved him and were going to build Africa for him . . . ’**

his eyes were saying, with their ever weary, bloodshot look. I began to understand why his shoulders were so bent, why his movement, as if carrying an unbearable load, seemed to creak, I began to understand. But then, that was just the beginning, it was just an understanding, I trembled to know, I had my own journey to make. There was nothing I could talk to my father about, if I could not talk to him about what had happened to me in the past seven days. There was no way I could talk to him and not hurt him, or kill him. I had no courage to hurt or kill him. He sat there, as if the fork he lifted to his mouth was too heavy for him, for his abnormally huge arms, which seemed to be making inconvenient excursions.

Yes, I could understand how it came about that every time he talked about Kaunda, Nyerere, Nkrumah, he became irrational, he became like a small boy, talking about heroes in a movie he had seen. I understood now, as he sat there, that he could not afford to see any fault with his heroes, he had to believe that they loved him and were going to build Africa for him, that they were almost like God. Every time one of them made a statement in the press about South Africa, he seemed to memorise it word for word, and he would talk about the article to everyone he met, and then shoot them with the lines they had said. He had to believe that one day, his heroes, his supermen, were going to fly into South Africa and seize it out of the terrible grip that now held it. He never listened when we talked about them and always had butts; then he would shout about what they were capable of doing. They were the ones who would punish the white man, why did I not see it like that? Education had fucked my mind up, he would say. His heroes were old men like him, who knew the law, who had respect, who were not like me, reading what white people said and believing it, and then walking the streets at night, hardly having time for God, cursing him for creating day and night instead of a long, endless day. ‘You ashame us, you young people,’ my father would say.

‘Abuti-Tsi, when are you bringing my shoes?’ Mary said. There was silence while I tried to think what shoes she was talking about.

‘You will never see those shoes. Why do you want to break your heart over nothing?’ my mother said, looking at her daughter.

‘Ah, shoes? Where did you see a man working who calls himself a writer?

How can he buy shoes? He is always in these funny trousers of his,’ my father said wrathfully.

‘You will get your shoes, Mary,’ I said, ignoring all the words that were meant for me, but directed at her.

‘Stop making a fool of my child,’ my mother said.

‘Why do you say that? You sound as if I was not your child.’

‘I am ashamed of you,’ she said, standing up and walking to the sink.

‘Ashamed or not ashamed, you are stuck with a son like me. You are Ma-Tsi, there is nothing you can do about that.’

‘Hey, I said there can't be two bulls in here, and you know what to do if you feel like a bull,’ my father said.

‘Why are you all so angry with me?’

‘Abuti-Tsi, be quiet you too,’ Mary pleaded with me.

‘He better,’ the old man said.

‘What have I done?’ I asked.

‘Nothing, that is the trouble,’ my mother said. ‘You go on as if you are the only person alive, everyone must worry about you and you think about yourself and that is all.’

‘But what has that to do with Mary's shoes?’

‘Don't talk to me about that, I said leave that alone. We don't want those shoes. I can buy her shoes, don't bring stolen things in my house. If you are a pagan be a pagan in the street where you live not here in this house, and you must leave that poor child Lily alone. I don't know what she sees in you, a dirty, foulmouthed rat, that has nothing; that sleeps in stinking blankets. You leave that child alone, that is all. Don't make that poor child miserable.’ She was breathing heavily. I knew, I knew it was time for me to go. That is if I needed to sleep.

I began to swallow the food quickly, pushing it into my mouth.

‘Sies, you bring up these children and then they think they know better than you do. Look at Ndo, always drunk, beating his wife, sies, you make people laugh at us . . . ’

‘It's like they have never ever been taught any law, no law for living,’ my father said, switching to English at the end.

‘These are dogs, how can they know any law?’

‘And when you see that Ndo, tell him to bring back my wheel spanner. He came here and took my car and lost my spanner, tell him I want it back,’ the old man said, banging on the table.

‘He has not brought that back yet?’

‘No, the fool,’ the old man said. I stood up and put the plate on the sink.

‘I have to go,’ I said. There was silence. ‘I will bring your shoes,’ I said to Mary and closed the door behind me. ■



# A journey to ... asazi



# A SEED MUST SEEM TO DIE

*poems from a collection dedicated to 'all the children of the world  
whom tyranny has robbed and continues to rob . . .'*

## DO NOT ASK ME

Do not ask me, mother, if they're gone  
I fear to tell you  
they left in the middle of the night  
turned their backs on the warmth of the hearth  
and for the last time  
heard the home rooster crowing

Do not ask me, mother, where they went  
Tracks on watery dew-bells  
as puny feet brushed the morning grass  
have evaporated in the heat of the sun's kindness  
and the hunting bloody-snouted hounds  
have lost the trail

But to you I will whisper:  
Look where the willows weep  
The willows of the Mohokare River  
have seen the forbidden sight  
tiny feet in a mad choreographer's dance  
from shore to shore  
wading on the sandy bed  
And the waters washed and levelled up the sands  
Nor will the willows point their drooping limbs  
to say where they've gone

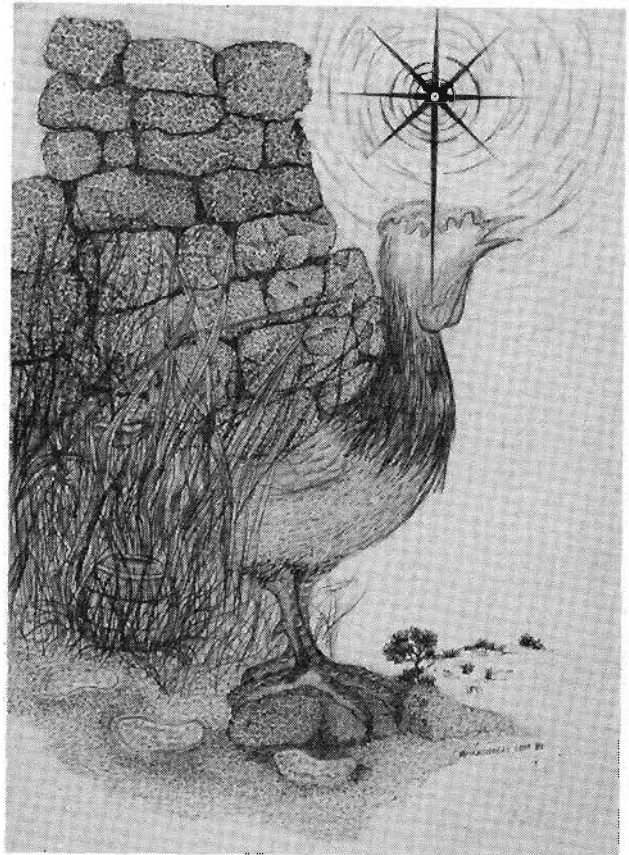
Do not ask me, mother, why they left  
Need I tell you  
They took the amasi bird out of the forbidden pot  
and bade it fill their clay-bowls to the very brim  
they'd been so hungry  
so long

Then an army with giant boots  
came towering over them  
Brand new guns  
made to silence little children who cry  
glinting in the African sun  
The gun-toters threw the amasi bird  
back into the pot  
and wrote on it with the government's ink  
*For white children only*  
and henceforth it was guarded night and day  
by one hundred bayoneted soldiers

And the children raised their fists  
and shouted:  
Amasi! Amasi! We demand the amasi bird!  
Amandla! Amandla Ngawethu!

Now they've been gathered up  
in the wings of the Giant Bird  
to the place of circumcision  
far, far away

And the village waits  
for the day of their return  
to conquer



## THE SOUND OF SILENCE

I saw the sealed lips  
of ancient walls  
And though I asked  
Who lived here  
Who peered through that window  
to watch the gathering storm  
or the gentle evening  
congealing to darkness  
or morning  
melting to smiling skies  
Who cooked in that hearth  
now sewn together  
in a shroud of jungle grass  
I heard not a word

I saw gashes  
time-inflicted  
time-healed  
on the half-demolished stone-walls

and the lizard  
hated messenger of death  
slid-wriggled  
flashing for one moment  
before disappearing  
into the stony silence

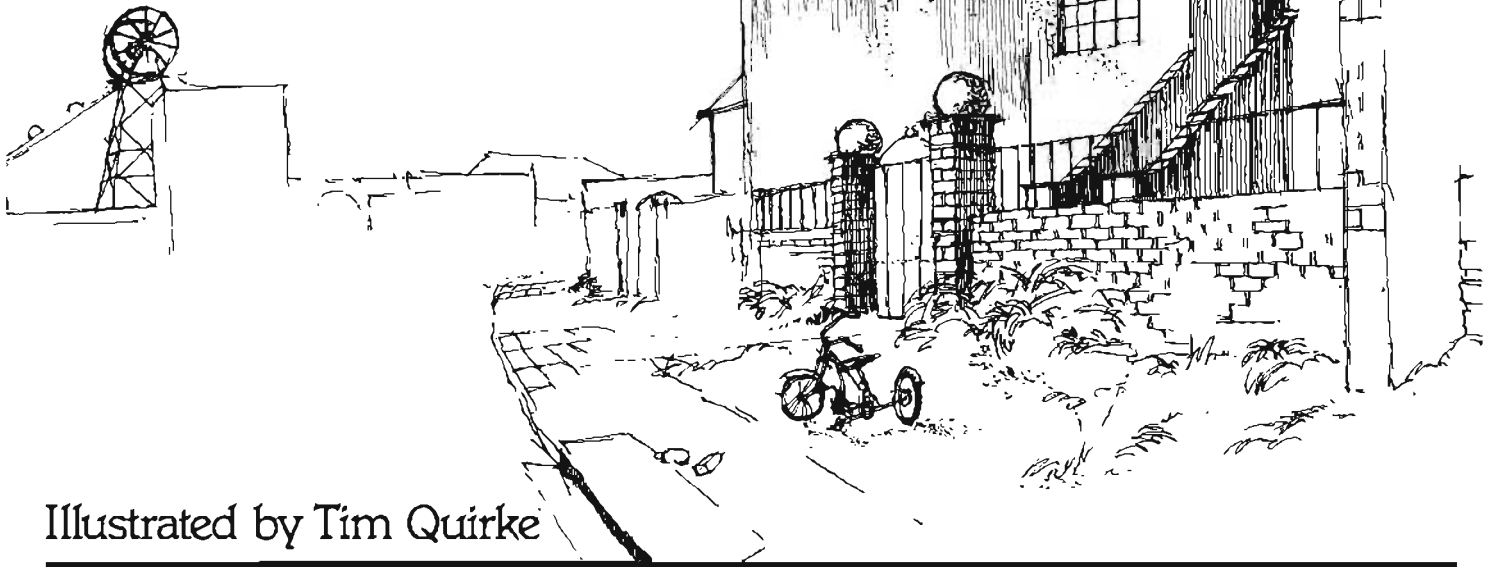
Then, looking at the silence  
I knew the answer.



The Messenger

# Mineworking

A Story by Greg Latter



Illustrated by Tim Quirke

When you come into Boksburg from the north-west, that is from the Johannesburg side, off the highway going west to Witbank, you see a sign: E.R.P.M. LIMITED – GOLD MINE. A big gold and green sign. Underneath it is a more modest sign saying 'Welcome to Boksburg'.

'As I was saying, my China. This bony had a vibe of its own. Check, I got a photo.'

Dick began to search through the papers, magazines, records and other junk that covered the floor in one corner of his room. It was an old garage that someone had converted into a bedroom. He rented it for next to nothing. Most places in Boksburg went for nothing. It was the rough part of town.

'Here it is.' He'd found the photo. 'Picked it up off a dude in Brakpan. A half-way job like, but me, I stripped it, did a re-bore and a re-work. Ag it's not a very lekker photo. You can't check the colours. It's black, hey, with red tongues of fire – the frame is chromed. Genuine leather scoop saddle and ape bars. A real smooth ride.'

'I like it,' I said.

'Ja! But ask what happened to it, man. Come on, ask me.'

'All right,' I sipped my beer. 'What happened to it?'

'Shit, man! I wiped it out on Central Avenue. Fast, coming around the corner by the prison. Don't ask me. I don't know. Woke up in hospital – concussed, fractured, you name it – I had it!'

I also lived in the north. But further west, next to the golf course. E.R.P.M. Single Quarters. Dark rooms lived in by miners, shift-bosses, winch operators, mechanics, fitters, surveyors, even a male nurse and a clerk. The only woman was a toothless ex-boarding-school matron who looked after the place.

'Listen, Greg, the thing with a stope is this, my China. You got to watch it like a woman. The moment you stop supporting it, it runs away from you and Boom! – all the shit hits you when you're least ready for it.'

He was referring to pressure bursts. In mining language they are called 'bumps'. Technically, these occur when the pack-support hasn't kept pace with the mining face advancement. The pressure of unsupported rock rises until it can't be held any longer.

It explodes out at speeds of up to six metres per second.

When a thousand tons of rock hits you at six metres per second, you're usually dead.

The strange thing about a bump is that you only realise you've been in one after it's happened. It's that quick. A bang, the white dust of shattered rock, and slowly the screaming starts. It builds up, then the lights from the lamps appear as the workers dash between the packs in the worked-out areas, trying to find the gully. Once they are there, it's out along the gully into the tunnel running along the tracks to the station. If you don't ring for the cage to come to take them to surface, they'll kill you.

Once, more workers were injured running away from the scene of the burst than in the burst itself. They tripped over the sleepers, cracking knee-caps. First the survivors go up, then the injured, then the dead, if you can dig them out. You go up last.

I've been bumped twice. I got out the first time. The top of the stope I was in was a bad spot. I was still a learner, under an old miner called Oom Hennie. The heads of the stopes are the hottest spots in the mine. Very little ventilation up there. The air flow is deflected off the mining-face up into the worked-out areas and then into the gully so that it can find its way into the stope above.

The heat is unbearable. You walk ten metres down and there on the face cool air blows from a plant in the gully, but further up in the head it's hot and stale.

Anyway, this particular day wasn't unlike the others. The heat was evident, my eyes were stinging from the sweat. But I must tell you, I was getting used to it. Six days a week for six months I had been there. Four kilometres from surface.

Oom Hennie looked at me once in the morning. It took us 45 minutes to get from surface to stope 60. First the vertical shaft, then the small diesel loco to the sub-vertical; down that and into another loco that would take some of us to the east shaft, others to the west incline-shaft. Down the incline-shaft where we got out along the tunnel and into the stope. By the time we reached the working space, our overalls were wet with sweat.

Oom Hennie would look at me and then say, 'Boet – gaan kop-toe.' I'd drag my sweaty body up to the head and

start work. Every half hour or so I'd go down to where the gully meets the face for some cool air and there old Hennie would be sitting comfortably smoking his pipe and twak.

'How's it going up there?'

'All right, Oom, we're just putting in sandwich-pack.'

'Goed, Boet.'

I'd turn around and crawl back up. That was the only good thing about the head. It was such brittle ground that the hanging was high, maybe four metres in places. You could stand up easily, but in the stope it was only about a metre high, so you have to wear an arse-protector — a rubber mat tied to your bottom. Going up the face you'd crawl, but going down you'd slide on your bum.

The reef conglomerate ran at about 12 degrees so you had to mine on the same gradient. The working area, the stope, had to pursue that reef through dykes, faults and pure hard rock, no matter what. You couldn't see the glitter of gold in the conglomerate, just assorted pebbles, once the bed of some vast lake.

The day of the bump we were busy with a sandwich-pack. Some hanging rock had fallen during the night-shift and things were looking dangerous, so we had to put in supports. We had been busy on the job for about four hours when it hit.

The first thing I remember was this wrench, my overall pulling itself off my back. My hard-hat was knocked off. The lamp broke. I couldn't see anything — just thick dust then these beams of light cutting through it, off in the worked-out area.

I couldn't move my arm. My right arm. It was under rock, but it seemed all right. Twisting I reached behind me to feel my back. My hand came away sticky. Then I knew I was in shit. I shouted. There in front of me stood Oom Hennie. I didn't know it was him. He was just a black figure with this light coming out of his head. Then he spoke:

'Ja seun, first blood, hey? Don't worry, Oom Hennie'll look after you. Where you hurt?'

My back. I didn't know. I couldn't feel any pain. Just my breath keeping pace with time. Oom Hennie shone his light around. Slabs of disjointed rock were hanging above us. If we had an echo-bump we'd be gone. Oom Hennie swore. I'd never heard him swear like that.

He was pointing his lamp at something. I couldn't see what. Then this low moan came out of space behind me, a deep resonant gush of pain. It was the last thing I heard before I lost consciousness.

Coming out of it was a nightmare. For a few seconds I didn't know where I was. People were talking. I could see these faces, but the lamps were distorting them. Throwing them into grotesque masks. I fixed my eyes on a row of teeth. They were bobbing up and down. Then the teeth belonged to a mouth. The mouth to a face and the face to a head. Oom Hennie.

I was in the cage being taken to surface. My body was strapped to a stretcher. The stretcher stood upright in the small cage. The movement that had distorted the faces was that of the cage as it squeaked and jostled its way to surface. Next to me was another stretcher with a body. I heard later that it was Mabonyane, a Shangaan who operated the jackhammer in the head. The last time I saw him he was tucked under a ledge at the face, drilling those endless holes. It was he who had let out that sound before I passed out. He died at the mine hospital from internal injuries.

Three weeks later I was back with Oom Hennie. All I had to show for the incident was an ugly scar running across my right shoulder-blade.

I still had Dick's photo in my hand. He cracked open another beer and gave it to me. I took a long drink. The frothy liquid exploded in my throat but it didn't quench anything. After two years underground my throat felt caked

with dust forever. I burped. Dick laughed. We were both quiet for a while. That was how it always was. I'd be silent most of the evening and Dick would talk. Not all the time, but he had the kind of energy that would lie dormant for maybe a full minute and then rush up and release itself as a monologue. Inane talk that you could listen to with half an ear. I didn't wait to hear him. I downed my beer, picked up my helmet and took a fast ride back to the single quarters.

Bruiser was in the snooker room next to the mess. He had the table set up for a game. It wouldn't be the first time he'd caught me. He looked like a pig, a sweaty pig hanging onto the cue for support.

'Wanna play a game wif me?' Off the job Bruiser was drunk, permanently. Even on Sundays. Nobody refused Bruiser. The story was that he was a mercenary in the Congo but on the mines anyone who's a bully trying to forget his past is an ex-mercenary. What can you believe? Nobody ever challenged him over the issue. You just played your game and went to bed. If you were clever enough, you'd let him win without making it look too obvious.

Bruiser always wore the same jeans. Levi's with a red rubber belt which you couldn't see from the front because his belly hung over it. His shirts looked too small for him. You could see flesh bulging out between the buttonholes. He shaved once a week. On Sundays.

I met Bruiser the first day I went down. I got into the cage on surface with Kourie, a Lebanese guy who started mining the same time as I did. We'd spent some time at the Training Centre together, but this was our first time down at E.R.P.M. We'd heard that they initiate you on your first day.

There were eight other miners in the cage. Mostly older than Kourie and me — Dick was there, so was Bruiser. They were all smiling.

Kourie whispered, 'Let them try. I'm the moer-in anyway.' He was stocky, tautly held, and when he spoke, he tightened the corners of his mouth. I felt all right getting into the cage with Kourie. I placed myself in the corner. Kourie was in front of me towards the centre. I looked up. There was a metal plate filled with holes above me. Boots were moving around on top of it.

The black workers never travelled with the whites, unless they were injured. They travelled in the same contraption,



but above us. Before the cage cropped, they started singing. They knew we were below them. The sound was directed.

I saw Bruiser just as we pulled away. His cut-off-shoulder overalls were open. He had a tattoo on his chest. I couldn't make out what it was. He laughed out loud, then switched off his lamp. The other miners switched off, one after the other, until only Kourie and I were left.

My lamp was on my hard-hat, catching faces as I looked around. Kourie had his cord wound around his belt, the lamp dangling, the light picking up boots on the rusted metal floor. Chunky, black industrial boots. Boots, lamps and hard-hats. Sweat.

The crew above us grew silent. The singing stopped. They too switched off their lamps. Just Kourie and I now. The cage was picking up speed. Dropping. The initiation began. Someone wrenched my hard-hat off and my lamp went with it. I tried to pull it back by the cord but someone was kicking my hands. Suddenly, there was no light. Kourie had lost his too. Bruiser was laughing right in my face. He was laughing so loud it must have been him. He grabbed at my balls and I went onto my knees. Kourie was yelling and then something hit me on the side of the head. The cage was slowing down. Lamps were being turned on. I got to my feet and found my hard-hat. As I put it on, the doors opened. We were at the subvertical off-point.

Bruiser yanked me out of the cage by my belt. He was yelling something to the crane-driver at the wall. Then this cable dropped from the ceiling with a hook on the end. Bruiser grabbed it, hooking it under my belt. He signalled the driver and the cable started going back. I was pulled up about 12 metres, left to hang. Bruiser got hold of a compressed air and water hose and he blasted me until I was spinning so much I lost sight of him.

When they let me down, I took two steps and dropped. The rest of them walked on ahead to catch the loco to incline shaft. Kourie was among them, being pushed around. A mobile gauntlet. I puked in the drain. Next day, we were all friends.

If I didn't have a drink with Bruiser at the Red Lantern, he'd beat me up. I could drink more than him without getting drunk. He only needed two scotches to get him pissed, but no matter how many more he drank, he'd be the same — nostalgia for a machine-gun and a black woman he'd met in some Congo village.

We were in the Red Lantern one night. Dick, Bruiser, Kourie was there, myself and a couple of other contractors. Bruiser had got hold of me after supper.

'Hey, Pally! Get your bike — we going for a dop.'

'I'm not into it, Bruiser.'

'That's okay, Pally. That's fine. Just come.'

I didn't push it. We got on our bikes and left the mess. Bruiser had one immaculate thing in his life and that was his 1,000 c.c. hog. And he could ride it! Give him a long corner to go into and, if you followed him, you could see the sparks as his exhausts touched tar. He lays the flat bike. A Kawasaki. I had a more regular bike. A Honda 4 750 c.c. My exhausts also had cornering scars but I no longer gunned it. I had fallen once and my nerve was no longer steady.

We pulled in at Dick's place and the three of us rode off to the Red Lantern, a bar at the Boksburg North Hotel. Dick and I parked in the street. Bruiser rode up to the entrance and put his bike on the pavement outside the swingdoors leading into the bar. Inside we met Kourie and the others — Jerk, Toots, Almeida and other miners from different shafts.

Kourie had really joined the gang. He'd fitted in well. I didn't spend much time with him, but when we were together the feeling was always tense. For some reason, the initiation had pulled us apart rather than together.

The walls were decorated with tourist pictures of Rome,

Venice, Paris, Madrid and in one corner they had managed to find five pictures of Norway, which they had stuck one next to the other. The dartboard was to the left of the bar. Darts and drinking passed the time. We usually played 'killers'.

After about the fourth game, Dick waved a R10 note in the air and challenged anyone for a game. Someone from the back of the bar took him up. I didn't know him. They played and Dick won. Then the trouble started.

The guy who lost wouldn't pay Dick his R10. He crossed the bar, picked up his jacket and started for the door with a friend of his behind him. They reached the swingdoors and Bruiser stopped them.

'Hey!' he shouted, deep in his throat and looking at his empty glass. 'Hey, China.' They turned to look at him.

Bruiser held the pause for as long as it takes a man to sweat. He turned to the rest of the bar. 'Someone lost his game and he won't cough up. Jaaaa. Hell, man. Play fair, Pally. Play fair.'

He picked up Dick's glass and gave it to him. 'Drink, Dick, then go fetch your winnings. You just hit the jackpot.'

Dick would have done nothing but Bruiser's voice lifted him to his full height and propelled him to the door. You could hear them breathing. Dick licked his lips and held out his hand. The hand trembled, then the other guy pulled the money out and gave it to him. Then the two of them walked out. I thought it was over, but then those guys made a big mistake — the kind you don't make twice. They pushed Bruiser's bike over. We were still sitting in a vacuum of silence when we heard the crash. I didn't even see Bruiser move to the door. All I could hear were these screams and thuds as he laid into them outside. After a moment, the screams stopped but the thuds carried on. Kourie and Dick went out to stop him. They couldn't do it. The rest of us went outside. I couldn't believe it. Bruiser had laid the two guys out on the pavement. He had then picked up his bike and dragged it over them. He was now standing on top of his bike, doing a dance to some silent music from a village deep in the Congo.

I kicked my bike into life and rode the highway to Johannesburg. I bought a roasted chicken at High Point and choked on the bones.

I was in the garden.

The trees were huge pines, ancient and spread-out so much that their branches spilled into one another. A thin tar road wound around a group of these trees. At the edge of the road stood the mess with its snooker room. The matron lived behind it. The rooms were to the left of the mess. A long, thin rectangular building with a dull, red corrugated iron roof. Opposite this was the gate, designated such by two blocks of concrete, one on either side. The fence was collapsing slowly. Between the mess, rooms and gate lay an umbrella of cool shade.

Cars were parked there to cool the fierceness of the sun. Bikes were tuned. Greetings exchanged. Beers drunk.

I'd been reflecting. Pushing things out. Almost placing them in an area that explained itself. Like thinking that Bruiser was a bully and nothing else. That settled him. Ejected him. And Kourie. We had started together, at the same time. It had put us on an equal footing. So equal that we felt a competitiveness. I ignore the competition, let him race his bike ahead whilst I stay behind, infuriating him and making it more tested.

But where do you take it to? I could talk to him, but I'd have to be careful. Restrained and polite. It's got to where we don't trust. Is Dick ever going to really say something to me? His bike. His chick. His beer. A game of darts? Is Bruiser so dumb?

Then the mine. The whole place. Its vastness that at every point is self-contained, self-sufficient. So big that it doesn't need me and I don't need it. Just this fat cheque at the end

of the month. Keeping me there. I don't remember what I expected. I was tired from thinking it. The constant monologue. I looked up.

From under the umbrella, the trees took on a different form. Firstly, they had a funnel shape receding towards the sky. The colour was brown, not green. A web of small brown leafless sticks matted its way to the tree-tops. Under my feet the earth was brown and hard, with patches of motor-oil mottling the surface. No grass grew under the trees. They were older than the buildings. Ancient trees. They leant away from the road circling them, towards the centre.

I stepped out of the space, crossed the road and went up the steps to the rooms. On both sides of the steps stretched a flower bed, long gone to waste. Parallel to this ran a concrete corridor with rooms leading onto it. Behind these rooms an identical corridor faced a fence which was the mine golf course boundary. I never played golf.

I climbed over the fence and went and sat on a log in the rough next to the fence. Three men and a woman. They were so drunk they didn't even see me. They approached slowly, walking on the side of the fairway. The woman was quite far behind, yelling obscenities. She was angry because she couldn't keep up with them. They waited for her and when she got to them they knocked her to the ground and fucked her. Before they finished, I left, quietly.

Every morning the same story. I'd get to work as the sun rose. In winter, I only saw the sun after work. Putting on overalls, boots, a hard-hat and then strapping a battery to your waist with a cord with a lamp on its end, is a way of slipping into a different skin. There was the smell that went with it. It'd hit you the moment you walked into the change room.

First the smell of dried mud and then the stench from the piss trough. Even that didn't have a pure smell — it was blended with disinfectant. A must for the inspectors.

There were no change rooms for the blacks. They come out, handed in their lamps and walked three kilometres through the veld to the compound. Singing, taking huge strides.

I'd been taken' on a compound tour once. It was while I was still at Training College. We were introduced by our instructor as 'future' officials. It made me feel as though I still had to be something. I left the course for 'future' officials as soon as I got my blasting ticket.

The proud manager of the compound took a group of us slowly around. In a crisp, optimistic voice he described the fully-equipped, twenty-four-hour kitchen. Then he showed us how the beer was made and let us each drink a cupful. It was tasty, but the texture put me off. Lumpy porridge.

'If you don't give these bastards beer, they'll kill you. No respect. What they want, they've got to have. Savages mostly.' He spat on the floor. I think I noticed a slight Scots accent. 'They get issued,' he laboured on the word "issued", 'with a kilo of fresh meat, raw hey! It's got to be raw. They like to prepare it themselves. They get it every day. In a yellow plastic dish. A kilo between six of them.'

'Six?' someone was interested.

'Ohhh . . . yes. Six to a room, see. Here, I'll show you,' and he led the way in his khaki shorts and shirt, looking something between a policeman and a game ranger, to one of the blocks of rooms.

Needless to say, the rooms were depressing.

'Mostly Shangaans here. Did you know that?' We were tired of him. The attention had dwindled. 'Few Malawians, but they don't want to work, see. Not like a Shangaan. They come from Mocambique. Did you know that?'

'Bye-bye. Thank you. See you again sometime.'

One night Bruiser visited me. He'd never come into my room before. I'd never gone into his. We all had to have a private space and anyway, the rooms were inhospitable and dark.

A cupboard, a dressing table, a bedside table with a lamp

on it and a bed. My ceiling had a patch of continuous moisture that looked like a piss mark.

I was reading a book when Bruiser entered. A book of poetry:

*Die Here het geskommel,  
Maar die dice het verkeerd geval vir ons.  
Dis maar al.*

He didn't knock, just pulled the gauze door open, pushed the inside door out and stood in the entrance.

I was lying on the bed. The lamp was on. He walked over to me and took the book out of my hands, looked at the cover, then threw it onto the dresser. It knocked a can of deodorant onto the floor. Mum for Men. The can tinkled around for a bit and then only the clock ticked.

I went bland. He'd only talk when I was sweating. That's why he felt happy underground. After half an hour underground, you sweat. In the Congo, you sweat. Bruiser enjoyed sweat the way a man likes to smell perfume in a cinema crowd.

I had socks on my feet. If only my boots were still on.

I lifted my body from the bed, still bland. Bruiser checked me. I sank back, licking my lips. The blandness was gone.

Bruiser spoke. 'I know you, punk. You give me a look like you don't believe a fucking thing I say. Well, you better believe this.'

The bastard. He was coming for me. Coming to get me in his bored, lazy way.

If I stayed lying down I was all right. Maybe he wouldn't hit me, but that wasn't what worried me. Not really. I wouldn't mind being hit. I knew he wouldn't hurt me — that would be like shitting on his own doorstep. He wanted to assert himself. To make me know him in the same disgusting way he knew himself. To mix sweat.

What worried me in that moment was my own fear. The fear of the scapegoat. An object of someone else's terror. Bruiser was getting to me.

Kourie walked past the room. He came back and stepped into it, into the silence. Bruiser lashed out at him. Kourie ducked out, missing the weapon of a punch, and Bruiser was gone, running after him, shouting obscenities.

I breathed.

I started to count. One, two, three, four, five . . . and on.

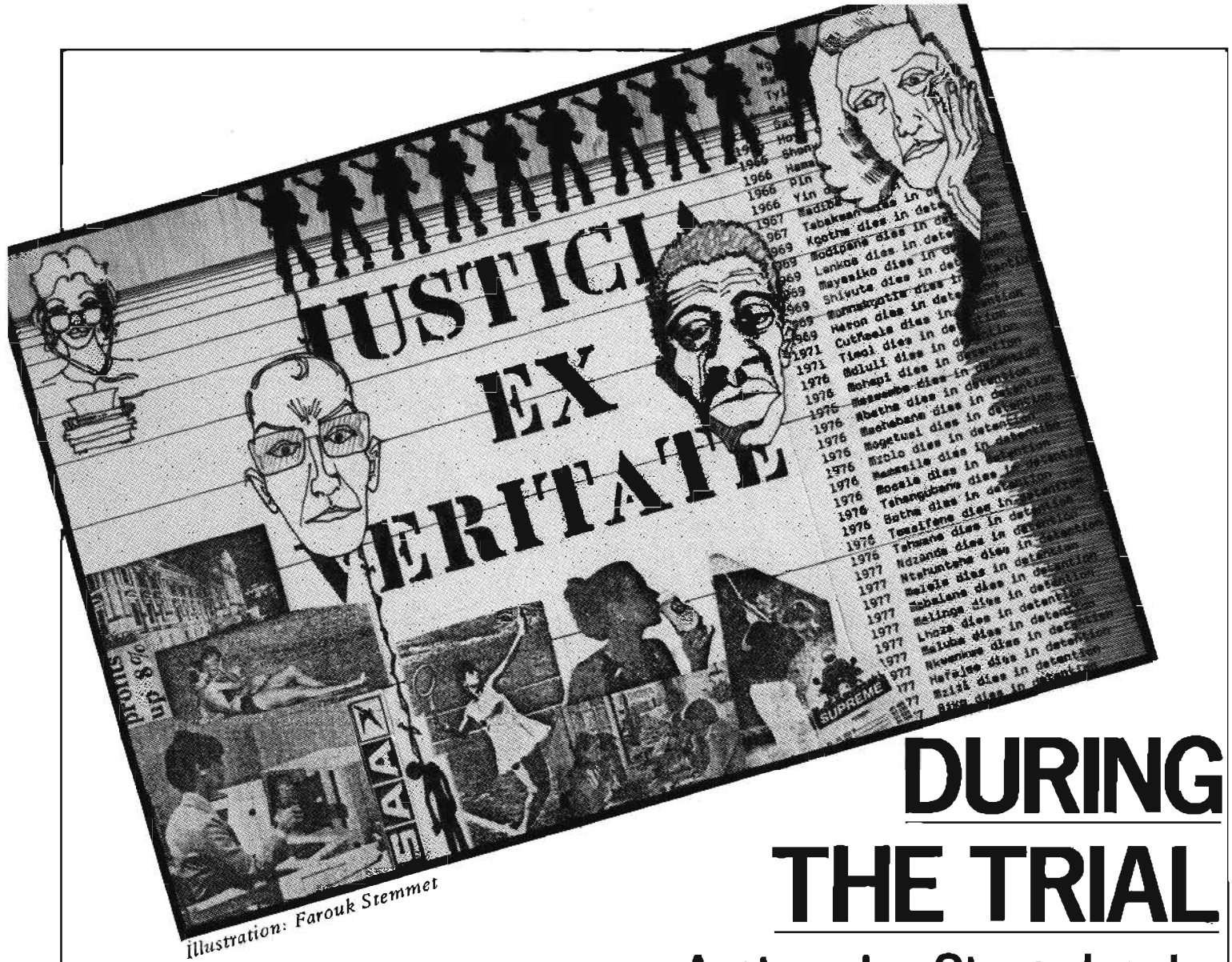
Bruiser wouldn't come back. Kourie had taken my place. The next morning at breakfast, Bruiser smiled at me. That same day I nearly lost my job.

About half-way through the shift, I was called down to the gully. The winch driver was dead already. The winch was still running, pulling its scraper filled with rock along the face. He'd left the controls running to go and untangle the cables. Somehow, they had become stuck together and were hindering the ease of pull. You could only guess how it happened. His assistant was too far away to hear the man. The cable must have caught his overalls and pulled him into the winch. He had gone into the cable barrel and the cable had carried on winding itself onto the drum and over him until it jammed the motor. He had a steel bracelet around his right wrist.

I vomited. Christ! What a job. I had to get out, out of that stinking, fucking place before I exploded. Before I stopped feeling. Before Bruiser got to me. Before I sweated myself dry. Before it bumped. Before the cage just carried on past the sub-vertical into the dirty, hot hell at the bottom.

There was a commission of enquiry. I was found not guilty of irresponsibility. No-one was to blame. An unfortunate accident. However, they'd needed only a few thousand more shifts to win the million fatality-free shift shield of their section. Tough shit!

Bruiser smiled at me when he heard about it. ■



# DURING THE TRIAL

A story by Steve Jacobs

'I was beaten,' Mafela said. 'They put a wet canvas bag over my head so that I could not breathe. Then they beat me.' I looked at the judge. He was listening, very attentively, his head turned to one side as he contemplated the accused. How many times had he heard this type of story? How many times had he rejected it?

'Go on,' I said.

'Then they took off the bag so that I could breathe. Then they told me that I must sign the confession. I said: 'No, I won't sign. I didn't do anything'.' He fell silent, looking dully around the court-room.

'Who put the bag over your head, Peter?' I asked. 'Are those people in court?'

Mafela nodded from the witness box and pointed toward the back of the room. Then he shook his head.

'That white policeman, that tall one with the fair hair. But he is not in the court now. He was here this morning.'

'You mean Detective-Inspector Swanepoel?'

'Yes. He beat me. He put the bag on my head. He took it off and then told me to sign.'

The judge made a note on his writing pad. Viljoen, the prosecutor, was writing furiously, looking up every now and again to see the expression on Peter Mafela's face, to assess whether or not he was lying.

'What did you say to Swanepoel, Peter? When he asked you to sign. Will you repeat to the court?'

'Yes sir. I said: "I won't sign. I didn't do anything to that man." Then he put the bag over my head again, and again I could not breathe. But still I refused to sign the confession.'

Peter Mafela hung his head, as though in shame that he had been subjected to this kind of treatment, as though the bitterness of his humiliation was as intense as the actual pain that he had suffered.

'Then he beat me again. He and the others. The others with him.'

'Who were they, Peter?' I asked. 'Do you know their names?'

'The big fat one, and the small one with the scar on his cheek. Their names are Mamlaka and Hlinza. They were also in court, but no longer are here.'

'Did they beat you with their fists, or with their open hands?'

'They hit me with their fists on my body, and with their open hands on my face. When I fell down, they kicked me.

All the time they told me I must sign the paper.'

'Did you sign the confession, Peter?'

'I signed, but only because they beat me.'

I turned to address the judge. 'There are no more questions, my lord.'

And I sat down, smoothing out my black court gown on the chair behind me. The court-room was hot; the air-conditioning was not working properly, as usual. The judge looked at his watch.

'Mr Viljoen,' he said, nodding to the prosecutor, Viljoen stood, and reached for his glass of water. It was a reflex nervous action, as he prepared himself psychologically for his cross-examination of Peter Mafela. He fumbled with his papers. But the physical appearance of unease was misleading. Gerrit Viljoen was a seasoned campaigner.

'As your Lordship pleases,' he said, and then focussed on the accused. 'Where did this alleged beating take place, Peter?' he asked. 'Was it in an office, or a cell, or what?'

Mafela's eyes were bloodshot. I could



sense his anxiety, his desire to answer the prosecutor's questions correctly, and without falling into any traps. I had warned him, earlier, down in the cells, to be careful. I had told him of the technique of cross-examination: to build up an edifice of words, to block off every possible escape route, and then, with the witness cornered, to loose the crucial question.

'They hit me in the office after I was arrested, and then they took me to the cells and they beat me there.'

'When they told you to sign the confession, where were you beaten?' Viljoen repeated. 'In the office, or in the cells?'

'In the cells,' said Peter. 'At Brakpan.'

Keep it simple. Tell the truth. Answer the question. Don't volunteer information that you have not been asked. I had told him all that earlier, as I sat across from him at the small wooden table in the cell below the courts where we interviewed the prisoners.

'Who beat you?' asked Viljoen.

'Swanepoel, Mamlaka and Hlinza. I have told this to the court already. They beat me.'

'On what part of your body did they beat you?'

'On my face, and on my chest, and my arms. All over.'

'Was this beating severe? Did they beat you painfully?'

'Aau. They beat me hard.'

'So hard that you were bruised?' Viljoen was relentless.

'I was bruised, yes.'

'Where were you bruised?'

'On my arms, and on my chest, and on my face.'

'And were you bleeding?'

'Yes.'

'Where were you bleeding?'

'From my nose and from my mouth. Because they slapped me in my face.'

'And they beat you so hard that you signed the confession?' Viljoen played with the tumbler of water. The judge made intermittent notes. The stenographer looked bored. She had heard this all before, many times.

'Yes, that's why I signed the confession.'

'How long afterwards were you still bruised?' asked Viljoen.

'For about a week,' said Peter. He looked, hesitantly, at me. Was he saying the wrong thing?

'Did you see a doctor?' asked Viljoen.

'No,' said Peter.

'Are you certain?'

'I did not see a doctor. I asked for a doctor because of the pain. But they did not let me see one.'

'I see,' said Viljoen, and straightened up from the bent-over position he had

adopted. He was a tall, dark man with an aquiline nose. He had been on the chase, and he had hunted down his target. He was satisfied with the result. And, unfortunately, I knew what the outcome had to be. Despite all the cautioning. I had been through too many of these trials.

Viljoen asked a few more questions. Peter Mafela answered them, smiling slightly, at me, at the court-room. That had not been so difficult. He had come away unscathed. He had not been cornered.

Viljoen completed his cross-examination. He sat down, without looking at me, and continued writing. I stood briefly, and closed my case. Of course, there had been no witnesses. No one had seen the assault take place. Beside those who were alleged to have committed it. Then the judge adjourned for lunch.

'Silence in court!' bellowed the policeman, standing bolt-upright. Everyone stood, immediately. The judge made his exit, an alarming figure in his red robes; red being the colour worn for criminal trials. The spectators, all blacks, left the room in dribs and drabs. I approached Peter as he was stepping down from the witness box. But the policeman, a man whose name I never knew (he was one of the stalwarts of the courts, as part of the place as the dust), took Mafela by the arm.

'Come,' he said. The policeman was not malicious. This was just his job. He had to take the prisoners back to the cells at lunch. A simple security precaution.

'You can talk to him downstairs,' I was told. I nodded. Actually there was nothing really to say. Mafela's role was over in the 'trial within a trial' as this part of the case was called. I hung my gown across the back of my chair, and went out into the streets of Johannesburg.

The people; black, white, and in various shades between, jostled impersonally, for the right to walk on the pavements. Secretaries, messengers, lawyers, all became equal in this melting pot. You could be a judge, or a factory worker, and still be mugged, and your social standing or skin colour made no difference.

I walked past a butchery. A smell of blood had leaked from the shop, and was fouling the air outside. I hated the place; I had to pass it regularly on the way from my office to the courts; but it also held a strange fascination for me.

They kept skinned sheep's heads in that window. The eyes always called out to me: 'Look what's become of us! We were good sheep, and look how they've repaid our loyalty!' Sometimes, the window was clear of heads. I played a

little game with myself when passing that butchery. If no heads were on display, it was a good omen, and I would do well in my case. If the heads were there, I would do badly. Of course, my results were not dependent on the presence or absence of that bizarre exhibition. I often wondered if any of my colleagues thought along similar lines.

'Silence in court!' bellowed the policeman. The judge entered alone. In a trial within a trial, he dispensed with the services of his assessors. He decided alone, whether a confession should be admissible or whether it should be excluded because it had not been freely and voluntarily made; whether it should form part of the court record or not. The truth of the 'confession' was irrelevant to its admissibility.

'Give your full name, please,' said the judge's clerk to the big man in the witness box. He was dressed neatly, in a dark suit; he was blond and exceptionally good-looking. One could feel his power in the soft way he walked, in the gentle, polite way he answered, in the hard expression in his eyes. He was, for me, Orwell's 'Big Brother' in the flesh.

'Johan Jacobus Swanepoel,' the man said. The judge's clerk seemed to be captivated by him. A brief moment passed, a moment of silence while she looked at his face. I had encountered Swanepoel before, and I had experienced, previously, a similar impact on a court-room. Then, with a touch of embarrassment, the spell was broken, and she continued.

'Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?'

'I do,' he said quietly.

'Raise your right hand and say: "So help me God."'

'So help me God.'

'Johan Jacobus Swanepoel, you are a detective-inspector in the South African Police Force, East Rand Division?' asked Viljoen.

'I am.'

'Are you the investigating officer in this case?'

'I am.'

'On 23 June 1981, did you assault the accused, Peter Mafela, in the Brakpan police cells, after his arrest on a charge of murder? Did you force him to sign a confession against his will?'

Swanepoel smiled, and addressed the judge directly.

'My Lord, I did not at any time assault the accused. I did not force him to sign a confession against his will. After his arrest, he voluntarily confessed to the commission of the offences with which he has been charged.'

Swanepoel even smiled at me. We were all playing a game. We had been opponents before. We knew each other. How charismatic he was. What an asset

to the sullied image of the police force. Here was someone who was honest and upright, and we could sleep securely at night because of people like Swanepoel. Even I found myself believing him, despite what Peter had told me, had told the court, despite the unlikely incident of Mafela voluntarily signing a document that could result in a death sentence for him. But then I regained my professional senses.

'Detective-Inspector,' I asked in my cross-examination, 'please can you relate to the court the circumstances, after the accused's arrest, until he signed the confession.'

'Certainly. He was brought into my office. I asked him to sit, which he did. I told him that he had been arrested on suspicion of murder and robbery, and that anything he said might be used as evidence against him in a court of law. Then I asked him what he knew about the crime. At first, he denied all knowledge of the events, but after a brief interrogation, he made a full confession. At no stage of the interrogation did I assault the accused. Throughout, I adopted standard police interrogation procedures.'

'Detective-Inspector, is it not strange that the accused should have had such a change of heart without some external inducement?'

'Not at all, sir. This happens frequently with prisoners.' He stood with his head slightly bowed, his arms relaxed, his hands clasped together in front of his body. A small crease of the forehead was his only indication of ten-

sion. I probed at his story from different angles, built different edifices from which to attack, but in the end, I myself was defeated. Simply because I had no ammunition. The only empty consolation I could find was that I had tried my best. But why berate myself? I had known it would be like this.

'I put it to you, Detective-Inspector Swanepoel, that you severely assaulted the accused, Peter Mafela, and that by so doing, you forced him to sign a confession implicating himself in the crimes with which he has been charged.'

'I deny that, my Lord.'

'No more questions,' I conceded.

And so it went with the big, arrogant Mamlaka, and the small, scarred Hlinza. Whatever had happened inside the Brakpan police cells was not going to be revealed in this court-room.

'We arrested the accused, Constable Mamlaka and I,' said Hlinza. 'Acting on information we had received, we went to a certain house in Thembisa, and we found the accused in bed. I told him that he was under arrest, and I showed him the warrant. He came with us quietly. He did not fight at all.' Hlinza was talking to the gallery as much as to the court. A pretty, young spectator had shown a shy interest in the policeman throughout the proceedings. 'I did not hit him. I also did not assault him in the cells.'

The court was sultry. My shirt was wet under the armpits, and my robes hung heavily on my shoulders. The stenographer listened to the evidence through her earphones, and every now

and again she made notes. She went through her work as mechanically as the machine she operated; she and the policeman, essential components of the judicial system. Occasionally, she winked at me, the two of us, conspirators in this play of justice.

'I call Dr Harold van Wyk,' said Viljoen to the court, and the policeman walked briskly to the door. His 'Dr van Wyk' echoed in the corridors outside. This was the final nail. It had to come. Peter sat nervously in the accused's box. His head hung on his chest.

Was he guilty? Why had he signed the incriminating confession? I would never know for certain. The decision-making process of the courts revolved around probabilities, not certainties.

I had to push these thoughts from my mind. They were irrelevant to me. I was simply Peter Mafela's legal representative. I simply put to the court, with the benefit of my experience and my training, what Peter himself would have said. It was not up to me to become emotionally involved with my client and his case. And yet I liked Peter Mafela. His face was a battered portrait of a violent township, where life was as cheap as a packet of potato chips, where Friday nights became a time of survival, as the alcohol, taken to cure other evils, stirred up demons in the soul.

'I was not seen by a doctor,' said Peter to me in the cells during one of our consultations before the trial began. 'They never took me to a doctor.'

'Are you sure?' I demanded. 'You've got to tell me the truth. I can only

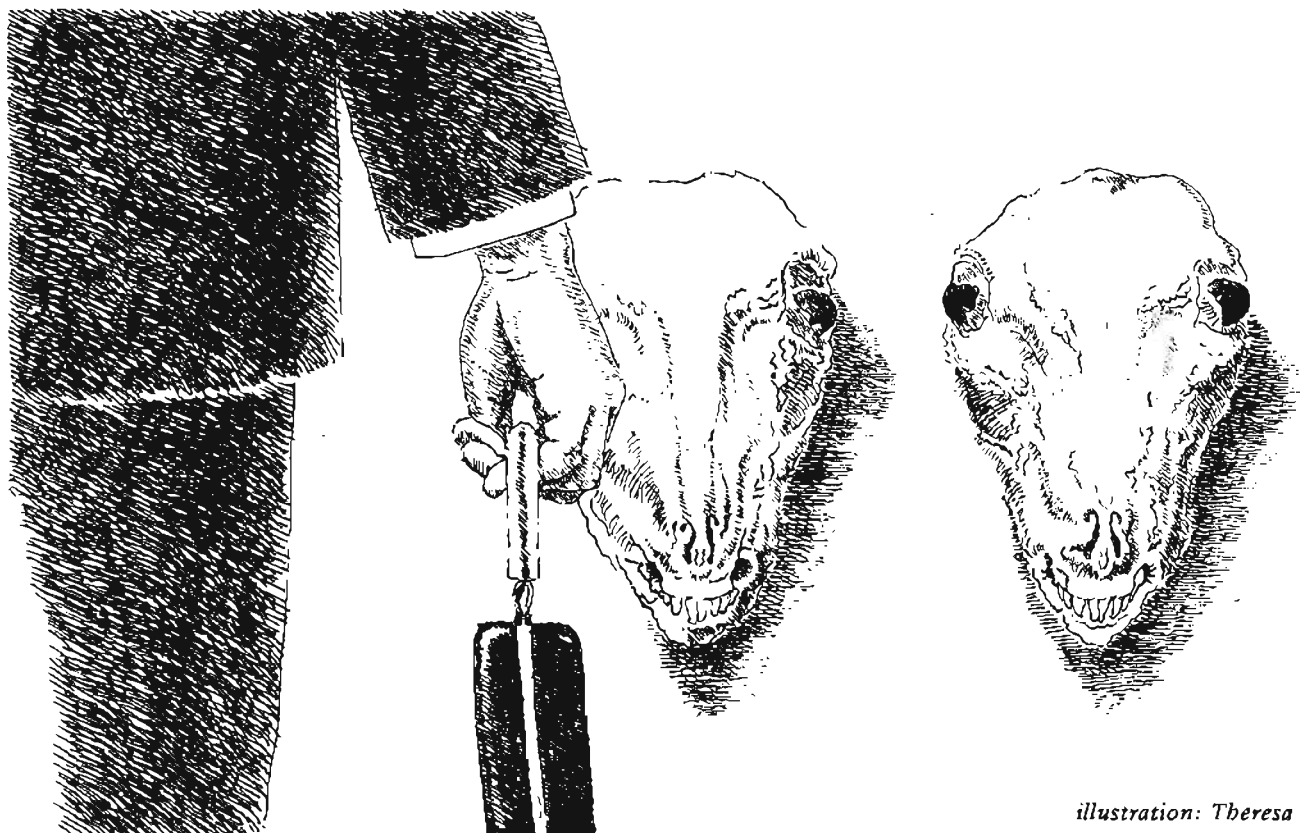


illustration: Theresa Buys

cross-examine the State witnesses on what you have told me. It was a long time ago. Are you sure?’

‘No doctors,’ said Peter. Then he smiled. ‘I should know. Why would I lie to you?’

Mafela and Swanepoel. Each with his own peculiar charm. Each one, almost archetypal of his particular social group. The two, opposed, in this microcosmic version of a larger struggle.

‘You are Dr Harold van Wyk, district surgeon,’ said Viljoen.

‘I am.’ The little man wore a white safari suit top. A stethoscope listened to him from one of the pockets. He appeared to be in a hurry.

‘Dr van Wyk, did you examine the accused, Peter Mafela, on 24 June 1981?’

The district surgeon ruffled through some papers.

‘I did.’

‘What were your findings, Doctor? Was the accused extensively bruised about the body and face?’

The stethoscope was a government-issue item.

‘I see from my report that the accused was suffering from a slight ear infection,’ said Van Wyk. ‘That is all. There was no bruising.’

That was all. I went through the motions of a cross-examination. I could do no more. Viljoen and I then presented argument to the court, while they listened politely, without interruption.

The climax to the proceedings was an anti-climax.

‘For reasons which I will give at the end of the trial, I find that the confession made by the accused, Peter Mafela, was made freely and voluntarily,’ the judge said. Accordingly, the confession will be admissible as evidence, and will form part of the court

record.

‘The court will now adjourn until tomorrow morning at ten.’

Automatically, we stood in response to the policeman, and the judge returned to his chambers. Peter did not look at me as he was led back into the cells.

Viljoen was chatting to Swanepoel. The stenographer was collecting her tapes. Hlinza and Mamlaka were showing off to their admirers.

I gathered my file together and left the court-room. The words from the emblem of justice on the wall above the judge’s chair burned in front of my eyes. ‘Justitia ex Veritate,’ they read.

Justitia ex Veritate.

As I walked slowly back to my office, I passed the butchery. In the window a row of sheep’s heads was on display. ■

## Poetry

Omarruddin

# Two Poems by Mohammad Omarruddin

GIOVANNI AZANIA . . .  
(on the birth of my son . . . 13/3/1981)

Yesterday,  
You were but a Thought  
In our minds,  
A clot of Life  
In your sweet mother’s womb  
Touched by my spark,  
Nourished by my flame

Today, a child in my arms  
Feeling the nipple  
Drinking the milk of our Twilight;  
Carrying the mark of our slavery . . .

I search for God  
In your soft, bright face  
And taste the silky fibre of your saliva  
On my unquenched lips  
And I hear Africa singing,  
Unwrapping a soul from the bondage  
Of painful sleep and tortured memories . . .

O my heart reaches out to Kilimanjaro  
Mountain of my refuge  
Sand and stone of black nativity  
Rock of my deepest love.

O flower of a new spring  
Fruit of my being  
I hear you cry mama  
And your voice affirms my commitment  
And deepens the meaning of my quest . . .

As now I am bound,  
Tomorrow you shall be free!

BITTER SEED . . .  
(for our children)

It is a bitter, bitter seed  
They sow  
These pretorian creatures of darkness  
Seed whose contagion  
Afflicts the land  
With nightmare anguish.

Blood seed  
Taking root  
Deep in the entrails of Today  
And Tomorrow,  
They will harvest hatred.

I hear a fresh wind calling  
Across tyrant frontiers  
And compounds of slavery  
Echo our final commitment:  
No charity in bondage  
No comfort in chains  
The soul is obedient to fate  
And gunpowder cannot tame the heart  
That cries  
ENOUGH!  
GOD  
WE  
HAVE  
HAD  
ENOUGH . . .

# ART and SOCIAL STRUGGLE

Interview and Photography by David Koloane

Twenty-four-year-old Soweto artist Lucas Seage recently won the Konrad Adenauer Foundation Prize for sculpture in a national art competition of work by black artists organized by the Haenggi Foundation. The prize entitles Lucas to a scholarship of one to one and a half years at a leading academy in West Germany.

*Lucas, your work is very unusual and nothing like it has been attempted by a black artist before. You seem to have taken an approach in contrast to the run of the mill work of most black artists which is dominated by township subject matter such as mother and child, musicians and so forth.*

It is not enough for black artists to rely on environment for subject matter and a few techniques in order to sell their work, it is important to borrow from other cultures as well. I felt it was important for me to fuse Western and African cultures in order to strengthen and develop my creative expression. I attribute this to the fact that I have studied under different teachers. I am always searching. My studying under Bill Ainslie introduced me to the Dada and Surrealist movements in art. I learnt a lot from the Bill Ainslie studios.

*What is it that actually fascinated you about the Dada and Surrealist movements? How did they relate to your creative development?*

I was drawn to the Dada movement because of its unique manifesto. Dada did away with tradition in painting, it eliminated formal elements like colour, form and lines. It only concerned itself with expressing an image without the required academic norms.

*How do you then approach the challenge of creating a painting or a piece of sculpture without the necessary guidelines handed down from past*

*tradition?*

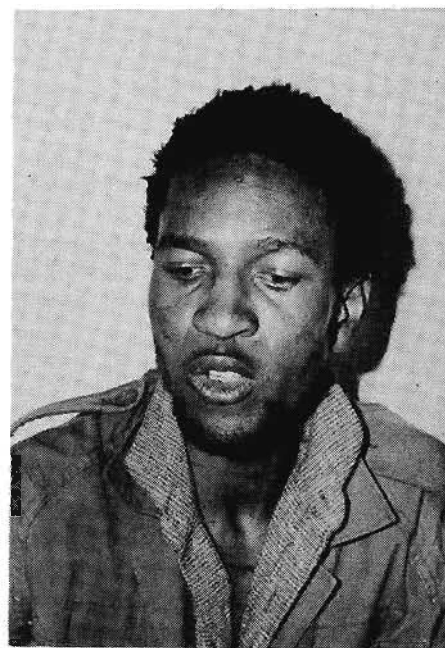
This is where Surrealism comes in. Surrealism teaches an artist to rely on his intuition or what could be called illogic. It also encourages one to make use of chance and inspiration. Chance is a mental phenomenon. In order to be guided by chance, an artist must start afresh. He must sweep and wipe away all rational influence.

*How do you see the role of the artist in society?*

I believe every black artist must participate in the social struggle. Artists must open the eyes of our society to the injustice around them. Black artists are exploited by galleries and other liberal institutions. This will not stop until the system of apartheid is done away with. As a result of this, most artists are incapable of portraying real frustration, anger and isolation. Because they are caught up in the commercial trap, they only paint to please the buyer.

*Do you think the man in the street identifies with your work, or do you think it can only be appreciated by enlightened members of the black society?*

I try to conscientise people through my work. I try to make people aware and at the same time I try to crack the apartheid system and even if it is a tiny, tiny, little crack I manage to make, I know it is something. My message is directed to the man in the street hence I use symbols he can easily identify with



Lucas Seage

— such as a reference book, a bible, chains, a chair, a primus stove and so forth. I regard art as a weapon against injustice.

*Do you think you will ever be able to live off the sales of your work now or in the future?*

I don't care if I don't sell my work. I've always managed to survive somehow. Beauty does not exist in my work. To me beauty is a dynamic statement. I destroy anything which is beautiful but meaningless and leave only that which expresses truth, so I never even think of sales.

White people, who also happen to be the people who buy, find it difficult to live with my work in the same house. All black artists must constantly seek for new ways of improving and developing their creative expression. An artist is like a hunter. He never tires of exploring new ground. ■

*Lucas Seage's contribution to The Haenggi Foundation Prize. On the left is the photographic detail of the sculpture (right).*



## HOUSE-ARREST

I must get used to the house  
For it is my only world now.  
In the years to come I shall  
Map its geography minutely:  
Pinpoint all difficult terrain,  
Note how sunlight falls in rooms  
In different seasons, hear the clock  
Adding up my silent minutes.

Hours are longer than ever,  
No-one calls or writes.  
Already I listen for noises:  
Wind under the door, creaking floors;  
And it would be easier without  
Laughter from the street.

Mike Nicol

## ELECTION NEWS

Such outcries — East to West, North to South:  
R20 a month, R20 a mouth!

I know an ancient one on such a pension,  
He has no teeth, no hope, no hypertension!

So this is it, what makes him so healthy:  
Shut off from the full plates of the wealthy.

Often it happens he has to miss dinner.  
Slowly he gets healthier, slowly thinner.

All those wire services — Reuters to SAPA:  
*Woza sidle manje. Epi? LAPA!*

Mutiswayo A. Shandu

## CARDBOARD

So, there's going to be a new day  
A brand new dispensation  
I explain it to the Auntie  
At the back of the supermarket  
While she is folding cardboard.

She turns piles of cardboard boxes  
From cubes and oblongs into  
Parallelograms and other shapes  
Which she deliberately treads flat  
Then she lifts the armful of cardboard.

She ties each armful to the frame  
Of an old wheelbarrow wheel.  
Slowly the mountain grows until  
She can hardly see the top  
Of this undistinguished cardboard.  
Then she picks up the handles  
Panting heavily, straining to push.  
The dangerous mountain wobbles  
When she steps sideways for balance,  
'Five mouths,' she grunts at the cardboard.

'Five mouths,' she grunts at the mountain,  
And 'Five mouths' is all the answer  
I receive left standing there  
Explaining important matters  
To pieces of discarded cardboard.

Mutiswayo A. Shandu

## THE END THAT HE SOUGHT

But truth  
Evades all blades;  
And with a mocking smile  
And lithe swaying grace  
Dances away  
To don another mask for  
Another day  
Another seeker  
Another castle.

*Question.*  
Somewhere sometime  
Someone  
Once said  
That the pen is  
Mightier  
Than the sword;  
He was not of  
Africa.

What are we  
Who  
Weave our dance of  
Words  
To the pulse of an  
Unseen drum?

While poets dream and  
Scheme of  
Possibilities  
Politicians plough the earth of  
Actualities.

Melissa King

## BUS TO TRANQUILLITY

Without the strength of many  
Such trips I moved uneasily.  
Through the confusion  
Of compassion and luxurious self-indulgence,  
I felt the presence of the same, the pain, the words  
That could not come  
To cleanse the cry, sharpen the howl and  
Blight the mouth of ludicrous well meaning,  
Were joined in the sound . . . Umntwana . . .  
After we ordered a man off  
The impatient bus to Dimbaza.  
His child was not a ticket.  
Take my place, brother, take this bus!  
Tranquility is just . . . some place to die.

Christopher Lewis Rees

# Kieppie's Memories

The early days of Jazz, the Harlem Swingsters, the Manhattans, the musical 'King Kong', and the emergence of Zenzi Miriam Makeba and Dollar Brand.

In my family we were music inclined. My brother, Jacob, is a pianist — he was taught by a white woman. Father played the organ and mother would sing hymns. The whole family was like that. It is only my sister who was not into music. I took up music at twenty and taught myself to read it. My late brother, Andrew, used to sing bo-Itchi Mama, old harmony songs.



Kieppie Moeketsi, photo, courtesy The Voice

Every time I saw him I would ask: 'Kana, tell me, man. How do I know the clarinet keyboard? Where must I place my fingers?'

He would shout at me, 'Hai, no. Put your fingers there!'

Then I would ask again, 'What is a crochet?'

He would say, 'Aga man, you're worrying me. It's a beat.'

And from there I had to see to it myself. I had to find out on my own what a crochet was. He left me there!

I also read music books. I would say it is the Ortolandi that taught me music. I learnt to play the clarinet with a saxophone book. 'Strue, that's how I taught myself music. I can still play the clarinet. I didn't practice how to play the saxophone, I just play it. Yah, once you know a clarinet, a saxophone is a boy.

The first group I played with, 'The Band In Blues', broke up firstly because I didn't want to play in Denver, esidigigini. The other guys liked to play at the Jorissen Centre and other such places.

In those days the tsotsis were rough. Musicians used to get a hiding from them now and then. They would say to us that we were thinking that we are clever, and better than them.

Sometimes we would play from 8.00 pm to 4.00 am non-stop. It was like that. Sometimes the tsotsis would force us to play right through up to 9.00 am. By force! We played all the songs they wanted.

I remember one incident in which I managed to escape with my dear life. It was in '48 when we were still playing at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. Tsotsis came, man. There were about seventeen, carrying tomahawks, and chopping everybody in the hall for no reason. After they had finished with the audience, they came onto the stage while we stood glued there, frightened.

They then began chopping up our instruments and just then we ran for our lives with the thugs in hot pursuit. One of them chased me down Von Wielligh Street. It was about three o'clock in the morning. He shouted at me, 'Kom hier, jong, Kieppie!' His name was Seven. Fortunately for me, a police van appeared and the thug disappeared. The tsotsis were attacking us for the fun of it. They were from Alexandra township. I think it was not yet the Spoilers; it was before their time. Yah, musicians used to have a tough time during those days.

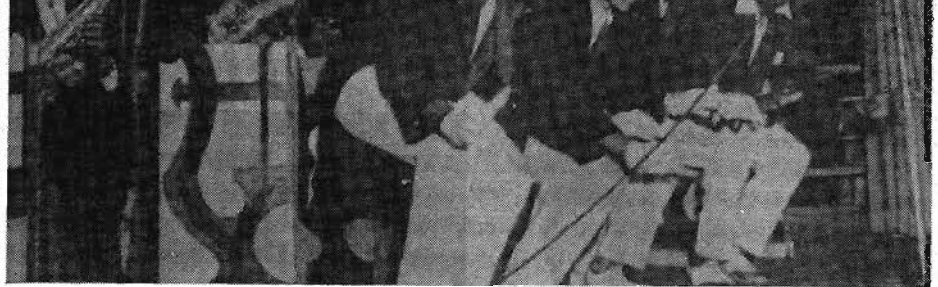
After the band broke I joined the Harlem Swingsters in 1949. We had chaps like Gwigwi Mrwebi, Skip Phahlane, Ntemi Piliso, Randolph Tai Shomang, Norman Martin (if I'm not wrong) and Todd Matshikiza. Sadly, the majority of the guys are all dead.

Those olden days, you wouldn't play in a band if you could not read music. Unlike today, where you just play. That's why I don't like today's music. I don't say I'm condemning it. I don't say it is backward. In fact, some of today's musicians are good. The trouble with them is that they are too commercial. The talent scout tells them, 'Don't play jazz because the audience don't like it.' You understand what I'm trying to say?

A year after I had joined the Harlem Swingsters, the band



Todd Matsbikiza



The Manhattan Brothers

Photos, courtesy Drum Magazine

broke up. Really, there were no reasons, except for financial difficulties.

In those days, big bands didn't make sufficient money. Yet, those were the days of the best big bands in the country — Jazz Maniacs, Swingsters, Merry Blackbirds, Rhythm Clouds and African Hellenics.

General Duze, Boykie Gwele and Mzala Lepere — I don't know who was the drummer at that time — they made a quartet accompanying the Manhattan Brothers. Duze said I should come and join them soon after the Swingsters disbanded.

I really enjoyed my long stay with the The Manhattans (who were THE group at the time), as a member of the backing band called the Shantytown Sextet. Oh well, we did fine some way or the other with our accompaniment.

I think the money was coming in okay — for me personally, and I got better money as we used to perform regularly, all over. Springs, Pretoria, Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom, Nigel and places like that.

We went on playing and then the late saxophonist Mackay Davashe joined us. I think, in 1951. Then Davashe later became our leader, I don't remember how. Dambuza Mledle was also our leader at one time.

But when we went to Cape Town, we found ourselves stranded, though the Manhattans were a big name.

We left for Langa location in Cape Town, playing to nearly empty halls. At one juncture, people started throwing stones on the roof of the hall while we were playing inside. Hey, it was terrible!

The people of Langa said we were playing 'nonsense'. Manhattan Brothers and all. They said we were playing the same kind of music the Manhattans always played. They wanted something new.

#### A CHAP CALLED DOLLAR BRAND

During that confusion, Todd Matshikiza disappeared from the cast!

And that's how we got a replacement on piano, a chap called Dollar Brand, from District Six.

I don't know how they got Dollar Brand, only Dambuza . . . he came with Dollar while we were at a hostel staying in Langa, stranded.

Dambuza came to me and asked me, 'Do you know this guy?' meaning Dollar. I replied, 'Yah, this guy I know . . . I saw him once at Rio bioscope in Johannesburg, playing at a concert with me and Gene Williams who was leaving for Germany.'

'Ya, I know this boy.' Yes, Dollar was still a boy at that time.



Dollar Brand

'Can he play piano?' asked Dambuza. I replied: 'I think he is capable.' Dambuza then said: 'Okay, let's take him.'

Dollar was scared of us. He was kneeling down, virtually begging us, man. I'm telling you. This Dollar Brand — things do happen, 'strue's God.

He wore big boots, looking like a skollie-nyana so-oo. Kante the chap is a good musician.

Hai, we took a train, the whole cast, to Port Elizabeth.

At that time nobody was aware that I had a lot of money with me then, because I used to sneak out every night to play at a certain nightclub. The chap who got me this private job is one of the finest guitarists we've ever had — Kenny Just.

I got ten pounds a night — which was quite a lot at that time — and used to make it a point that the other guys shouldn't know about this. When I ended my stint after a week, Kenny gave me a bottle of whisky and hotel remnants — chicken, sandwiches and things of that nature.

That's also when I started to be a buddy with Dollar.

It was in P.E. that we made a departure in our music. We said 'Now we are not going to play English music any more. We are going to play indigenous music — Xhosa, Sesotho and all that.'

Who came with this idea? It was Davashe and Dambuza.

You know what was the cause of all this? It is because of the reaction of the audiences in Cape Town where we didn't have a following. So, we got a stoke somehow or the other, that no, man, this (English) music, people are bored with it and we'll have to change it.

Change we did, yah. We could read and write music but were doing it all by ear — quickly. You know, African music is easy, and we didn't bother writing it down. All we did was to write down the keys; the melody line and tune, that's all. Afterwards we would arrange it our own way.

#### KING'S HOLIDAY

By the way, this show of ours was named 'King's Holiday' — by Dambuza — because we were then living like kings, enjoying life and eating the money. In East London, we played to packed houses for one and a half months.

We stayed in that area for two months, having parties every night after the show! We had made about a thousand pounds which made us feel really good for the cost of living was still low at that time.

Each member got sixty pounds as pocket money, but hey, when we went to Queenstown, none of us had a penny on himself. All we had were our train tickets.

We had lived up to the name of the show — King's Holiday. Dambuza came with all this idea, I'm tell you. Dollar was still with us. He was a small boy then, a 'yes, sir' boy.

We stayed for about a week in Queenstown and spent all the money we had earned, and went back home broke. I'm telling: no penny, no provision. Dollar also returned to District Six.

#### 'MIRIAM — THAT GIRL HAD NO CURVES'

A week after we arrived from the Cape, we went to play in Springs, and the pay I got there was the first that I was able to give to my mother.

Mzala Lepere played bass, Norman Martin returned to play drums and General Duze featured on guitar.

Dambuza Mdledle, leader of the Manhattans, one day said: 'Hey, gents, there is a girl who is singing with the Cuban Brothers. I don't know how I can remove her from them . . .'

That time, the only female singer with the Cuban Brothers was not known. She was nothing, man. She was just another girl who was trying to sing.

'How can we get her? She is a good singer . . .' Tapyt said, 'I heard her singing at DOCC in Orlando East the other



*Miriam Makeba in Lesotho 1980 (above, photo, Mandla Cebekhulu) and in her young days in South Africa (next page, photo, Drum Magazine).*

day!'

We coolly said, 'Naw, man, just bribe her with some money. Call her to a corner and talk to her ma-private . . . It does not matter even if you give her a pound . . .'

I don't know how Dambuza solved that, but after a few days, we saw him come with this girl who was singing with the Cuban Brothers. Just like that.

She had joined the Manhattan Brothers. Her name was Miriam Makeba. And it was with the Manhattans that she began to be noticed. To tell the truth, the Manhattans made Miriam famous. In those days, the Manhattans and Inkspots were the best groups.

When I say Miriam was made famous by the Manhattans, I don't mean they taught her to sing . . . As an individual, Miriam was shy and really scared of us. Oh, she was . . .

Well, the three of us — me, Mackay Davashe and herself, we used to sit down and practise — sometimes we would tell her how to use her voice; how to improve her vocal chords and all that jazz. And Miriam would listen attentively.

Before she became the famous Miriam Makeba she is today. You know, I must admit, I never thought Miriam would become what she is now. What I mean is this; at Orlando township while she was with the Cuban Brothers, I thought 'Ag, she'll never make it big.'

I thought she would never make our standards — you know we regarded ourselves then as the big-shots. We thought we were The Guys, if you understand what I'm trying to say. I regarded the Cuban Brothers and Miriam as small-fry, let me put it that way.

They were not bad, on the other hand, because they in fact started close harmonies in this country, based on the American group, the Modernnaires.

To me, Miriam was just an ordinary girl — a novice. Ons was die ouens then — the real guys — thing of that nature. You'll forgive me for my English.

Miriam was not that attractive — I mean, curves and all that jazz. I think our first concert with Miriam was somewhere in the East Rand — singing negro spirituals, you know. But still, I was not yet impressed, maybe because I was so influenced by this Negro guy — Charlie 'Bird' Parker.

Awright, we toured the Free State, Cape and Natal with Miriam. Before the show, Davashe and I would test her vocal chords, advising her here and there, and she would listen. Because, during my schooldays I used to be a singer — yah . . . with Duze, we would tap-dance. My teacher, Mr Ramokgopa, liked singing and he formed the group Lo-Six.

I came with a composition from the Chesa Ramblers band





in Getmiston – boSipho, bo mang-mang. Gange yaGermiston. Their song was Saduva. That later became our closing song in our concerts.

Yah, at 4 am before playing the national anthem, Nkosi Sikelel'i Afrika, we would play Saduva when we'd know its chaile – closing time. It is this song Saduva which really gave Miriam a boost because at that time, Dolly Rathebe was the number one girl singer.

When Miriam got onto the stage with the Manhattans, singing this song, she got the crowds raving. In those days we dressed smart – the guys with suits and bowties and Miriam wearing long evening dresses.

We played with her for a long time, until she left us and joined Alf Herbert's African Jazz. She was by now involved romantically with Sonny Pillay, who himself was a good singer.

#### THE COMING OF KING KONG

Then came this guy Spike Glasser, a lecturer in music at the University of Cape Town. Kante all the time Todd Matshikiza was writing the score for a musical work he was performing with us.

We were playing songs from the musical unawares – and I can remember well how we used to play the very overture from the musical – King Kong – at the Selbourne Hall. We were three then – Todd, General and me, at variety concerts.

Spike Glasser, came to us with his wife at Dorkay House, where we were all introduced. We were told he was from overseas and all that jazz.

We didn't know he was a local guy – you know we suffer from this complex that whenever a man is from overseas he's the end in life. 'There's nothing better than a man from overseas! Ha! ha!'

You know, daai gedagte – that kind of impression. Monna ga bare o tswa overseas ra mo sheba, man. Ra mo tshaba – when a man is from overseas, we admire him. We are scared of him!

Yah, Glasser, an MA in music from Cambridge University

in England, that guy. Musically-speaking, the guy was there, if you know what I mean. He came with some musical scores – aga man, I was just a scrappikkie of a laaitie then. Wearing my ysterbaadjie and my Hong Kong suit which was rather too tight on me.

Awright, present were the usual Dorkay crowd – bo-Mackay Davashe; Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, whom again? I think others like Todd Matshikiza and the late clarinetist Gwigwi Mrwebi. Then Glasser went away, returned some weeks later and chose me, Davashe and Sol to assist him to arrange the music of the King Kong show.

We sat with Glasser for a coupla months – I think two months if I'm not wrong – arranging the score, at Dorkay. At times we would go to Glasser's home in Orange Grove or Yeoville, spend some nights there. Or, go back home in the early hours of the morning at about three o'clock – with a bottle of whisky! This was to keep stimulating us, let me put it that way.

First stage rehearsals! Miriam Makeba was one of the leading characters together with Dambuza Mdledle playing the part of King Kong himself.

Really, I didn't concentrate on the play which was by Harry Bloom. Glasser, a jolly guy, not pompous, was the musical director and Leon Gluckman was the director of the whole show.

There I began to realise that this girl – Miriam – can sing!

I said, haw – I nudged Davashe during one of the rehearsals, do you hear what I'm hearing, Mac? This girl! Huh! We performed for sometime with Miriam then poof! – she's now up there.

Our opening night of the show at the Wits Great Hall had been fantastic – Oh, God, the reception was wonderful, man.

I then realised that, 'heh, this Miriam Makeba – she's so clever this cherrie . . . Klaar, klaar, she had recorded the song Lo-Six, the one she had been singing with the Manhattans. We had some professional jealousy. We toured the Cape and Natal with the King Kong show – I think in Cape Town we played to mixed audiences. At the Great Hall I could not see the audience because I was in the orchestra's pit.

It was not very long after Miriam had left for America, Masekela followed also – before the show went to London. Abigail Kubheka was Miriam's under-study – the script and the music.

I went to London a month after the whole cast had left because I had been hospitalised after an assault.

In London, I had to audition for my previous place in the orchestra! About a month after my arrival in London, something happened to my brain. I became beserk and had to be taken to a mental asylum in London – Ferreira Hospital.

Hah, I had to leave the King Kong show. A substitute was found – a white guy took my place.

I stayed for a month at the hospital. Then, one day one of the doctors took me to a concert in London where pianist Oscar Peterson and Trio were playing, including Ella Fitzgerald and her group.

I sat there, you know (the doctor wanted to find out whether I'm awright, because they suspected that I thought too much, musically, if you understand what I mean). They thought that my liking of music could have been one of the causes of my sudden illness that made me not to be quite normal.

Okay, I went to that concert. Well, I was normal then, you know . . . But when Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown (on bass) and Ed Thigpen (on drums) started playing there, I felt like standing and jumping, things of that nature. The doctor said, 'Sit down, sit down, Kippie!'

Hey, this Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen. Man, they were playing very well!

Continued on page 44

**IN MEMORIAM: Victor Ndlazilwane, Ben 'Satch' M**

# The Song lingers...

**THE SONG LINGERS**  
(On the death of bra Vic Ndlazilwane  
of the Jazz Ministers)

Ndicel'uphondo  
Ndlazilwane  
But the song lingers

Beyond the cold earth  
Your song lingers

Yintoni lento uyenzayo  
Ndlazilwane  
You will not die  
Without an argument

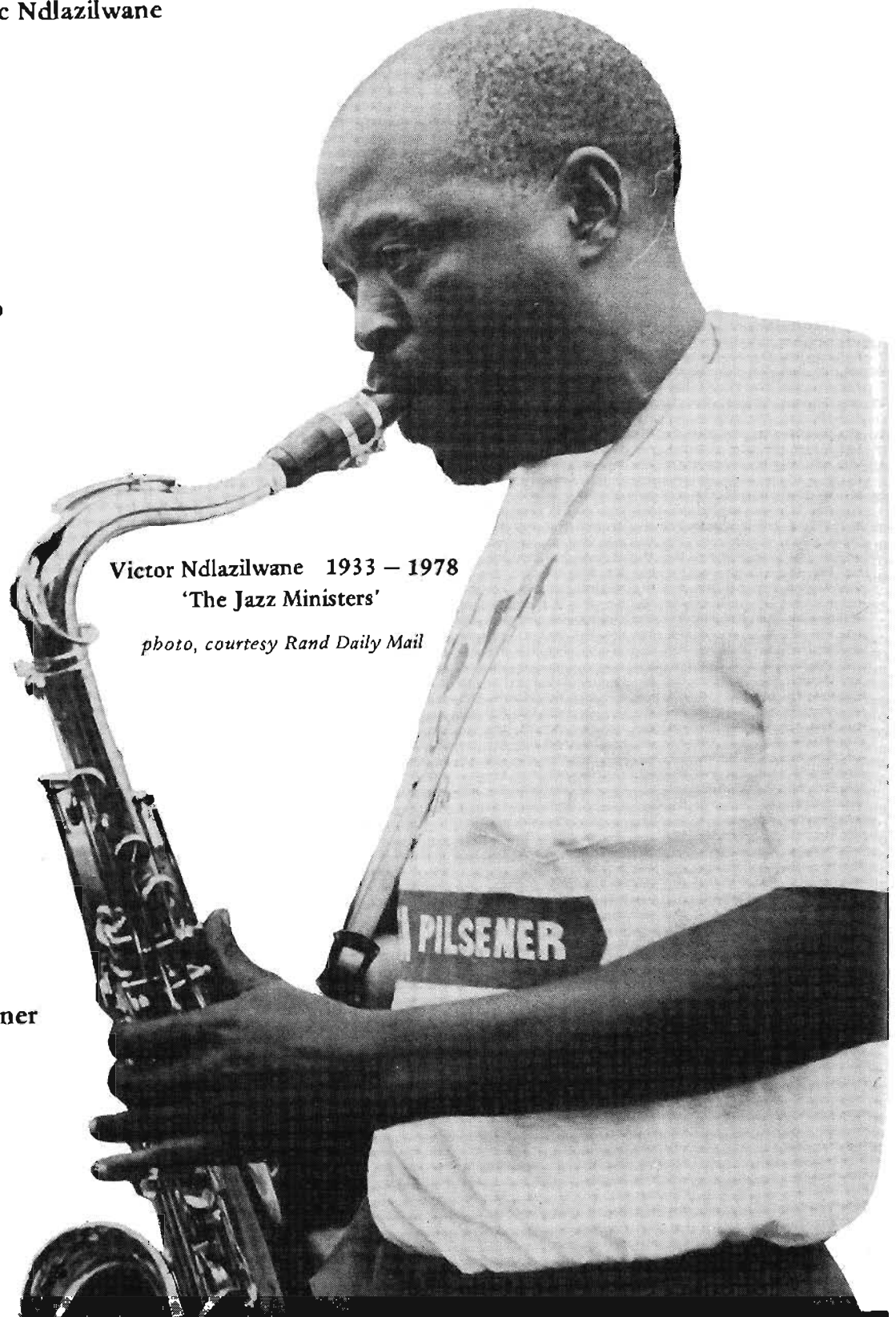
I am challenging you  
Mkhuluwa  
Is it your stinginess  
That leaves us  
In the midst of hunger  
For your song

But the song lingers

Hayi noko usiphile  
But we are greedy  
For more  
We are still hungry  
For your song  
And the taste  
Lingers

Ah  
When the worms  
Have made many a dinner  
Of your flesh  
And your bones  
Are fossils  
The taste  
Will always linger

Zanemvula Mda



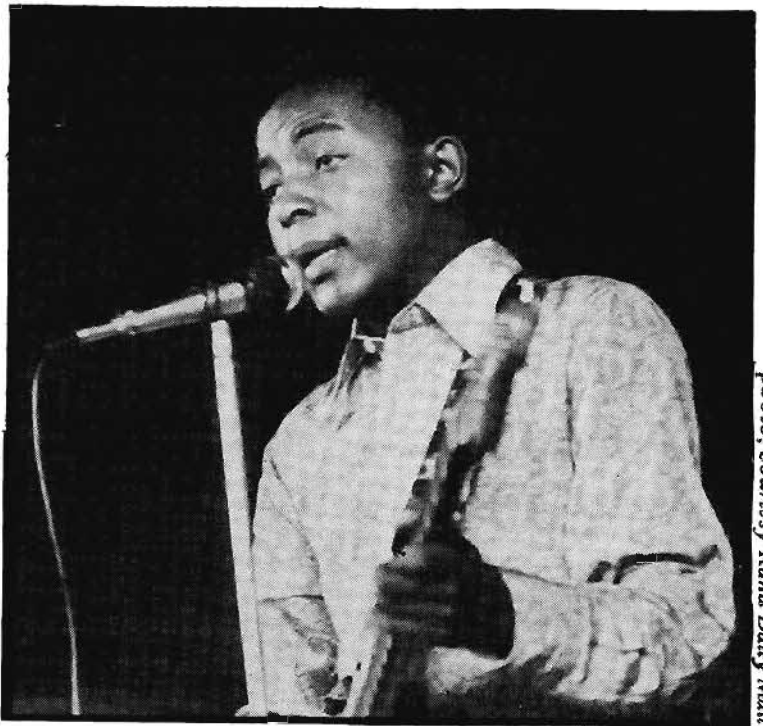
Victor Ndlazilwane 1933 – 1978  
'The Jazz Ministers'

*photo, courtesy Rand Daily Mail*



photo, Mabu Nkadimeng

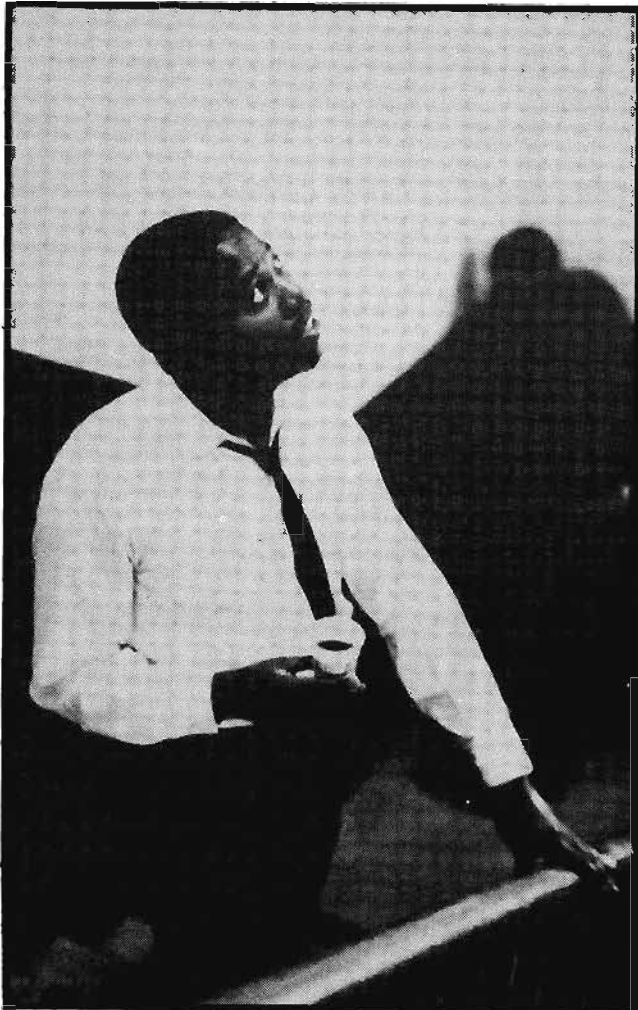
Themba Koyana, 1941 – 1979 'Batsumi'



photo, courtesy Rand Daily Mail

Selby Ntuli 1952 – 1979  
'Thiba ka moo'

Ben Satchmo Masinga, 1936 – 1981  
'Let The Good Times Roll'



photo, courtesy Rand Daily Mail

Zakes Nkosi, 1928 – 1980 'Our Kind of Jazz'  
photo, courtesy Rand Daily Mail



# GO HOME SIMPASA

A Story by Sy Moya

ILLUSTRATION BY MPIKAYIPHELI



Lagos had become moody.

Skies above were murky, hostile, and yet the city's gaiety continued to creep into my blood-stream. I thought I heard pulsating drum-beats from the distance, from the past, calling at me. Yes, it was true. Not imagination. My cousin's letter had said — 'The drum beats with a throbbing rhythm. Women sing with intensity and feeling . . .'

He had written to say this was the theme of the Zambia independence pageant, and in his letter he had rambled on to say — 'The Ngoni dancers are spell-binding. As they stamp, romp and bounce, they show precision, but then, with many African tribes whether a team is preparing for battle or hunting for food, discipline is the watch-word . . .'

I downed a glass of beer, the tenth since I had been in this Lagos pub. I was disgusted with myself, with life. Only three days ago I had picked a quarrel with my Ibo girl-friend. Spinky Odiaka was her name and with her tousled, pouting and sex-kitten look which symbolised naughty femininity she had told me — 'You're fit to be dead. You're not fit to be in Africa. You've lost your identity. You have sold your soul.'

The pub was teeming with customers, the colourfully dressed Nigerian men with flowing togas, others dressed in well-tailored suits; their women were mainly dressed in traditional attire and they looked dignified and charming.

I signalled to the waiter for more beer. Then I sat relaxing to a Highlife tune that came lilting from a four-man combo. Enchanting, I told myself. Barbaric simplicity of Nigeria. I heaved a deep sigh, appraising the sights before me. Beautifully clad feminine figures wiggling around and dancing their souls out.

I remembered how all the nightmare started. We had come in a bus from Ibadan when I told Spinky that I never liked the idea of using tribal dance for things like independence pageants.

'Aren't you proud of your past?' Spinky had asked.

'Trash, jungle stuff. Back to the forests again. Is that what you mean?'

She was defiant: 'Westernised fool. That's what you are. Indoctrinated so that you despise yourself.'

'Just think of it, Spinky, the scraggy animal skins, cowhide shields and all that stuff. All to be shown before visiting diplomats. A sorry spectacle of lost

Africa. Primitive. Amusing.'

'Aren't you going to the celebrations then?'

I shook my head. 'I'd rather travel to the United States and start reading for my Masters degree.'

Spinky's eyes flashed. Then she said: 'You'll come back still not knowing who you are. Your ancestors will be lost to you, lost, forever.'

It wasn't necessary that I went to America for further studies. I had obtained what I wanted in Nigeria — an arts degree in sociology. But I was still undecided where to go. I wanted to remain in Nigeria which had infatuated me. But I had another thought: of roaming the world and doing nothing. But Spinky had stood firm to the idea that I return home and start serving my people.

Once she had asked me to tell her about our Zambian customs and girls. As soon as she detected my reluctance, she became angry with me. 'You mean you don't have customs back home, or you have never had any girl friends there. I don't expect you to fall from the heavens like an angel.'

'Yes — I had a girl, once,' I told her. 'She was of my Ngoni tribe and a charming little damsel she was.'

Spinky, born in Asaba on the western banks of the Niger, just opposite Onitscha city, told me: 'You never seem to be proud of your country, of how your people live. At home, at my home, and even in Lagos, where I have a brother, we eat pounded yam with soup. Sometimes what we eat is gari and I like it.'

Dusky and fine-bodied, Spinky had high cheek bones which had two small dark circles on them. She had told me they were made when she was a baby. 'They burned my cheeks with juice of coshono-nut shell and I wish they had made more on my face. I simply adore the beauty spots.'

As we approached the city the pink round ball touched the horizon. The bus settled to a quiet, lulling drone. Far away, across the city's buildings, soft mists swirled up, making a fine contrast against the golden rays of the setting sun.

'Nephas, I've always wanted to ask you why you are so much in love with yourself,' Spinky had said.

'Funny of you asking me such silly things.'

'My worry is, I never want to think of myself as an Ibo only. I want to

think of myself as a Nigerian, as an African.'

'C'mon, now, let's talk about other things,' I protested.

The bus took a smooth curve. The excited chatter of passengers started. They talked about the splendour that was the city, how it soothed their nerves, how they would forget about the dull, boring life of the countryside.

'I'm a Ngoni and I love myself, that's all,' I said.

She laughed, a full-blooded, rolling and rippling laughter so prevalent in Africa.

'The Ngonis, ah yes, I did some study on them. That was when I was reading for my senior secondary school course. Ngoni did you say?'

'Yes,' I said.

'The past-proud race of Central Africa, originally from South Africa. But you are not like them . . .'

I cast an angry look at her.

She was amused. 'Is that not the truth, the truth about you? That's why you say you don't like the independence pageant. That is why you won't go home because you despise your own people, your culture.'

That night Spinky suddenly became mysterious. When we reached the bus-station in the city, she said she wanted to smell the city air after the long spell in the country. After cloaking our few belongings, we hailed a taxi into the city.

By nine o'clock we were seated on soft cushions, watching the thrilling Itsekiri traditional dancing presented by the Nigerian Arts Council.

Spinky looked at me, thrilled to the marrow. 'You like it?'

I shook my head vehemently.

'I love it. You'll see as it goes on. Sit and relax,' she said, holding my arm, and pushing her warm body towards me. She felt warm and soft. Later she

said, 'But you are so cold, what's the matter?'

I watched with unseeing eyes. Jungle beat, I thought. There was glittering gold and trinkets, blazing costumes, all making my mind jolt with disgust.

'Watch that action,' Spinky clung to me more. 'That's the wuruye, an invitation to drink. That burly woman over there is the star-drummer.'

After the performance we hailed a taxi, collected our belongings at the bus-station. Then Spinky was watching me with a puzzled smile. I looked back, not understanding what was going on.

'Yes, tell the taxi-man where we are going,' she said with a commanding voice.

'Spinky, didn't you say you had a brother in the city?'

'Yes, I said so. He's here. Somewhere in Lagos. But it's too late to go to his place. He may not be there anyway.'

'Yes, but . . .'

The taxi driver watched us with amused eyes as we hackled back and forth. After winking at me, he smiled.

'I'll take you to de first-class hotel, sah,' he said.

Spinky's eyes glinted. 'Yes, darling. Let's hop in.'

I got in, reluctantly.

'Well, darling, what's the matter?' Spinky had asked, when we reached the hotel. She pointed at the booking register.

In my confusion, she exchanged a few Ibo words with the reception clerk, who smiled back charmingly at her.

I pulled in a deep breath and said: 'What's the meaning of that?'

Spinky kept quiet until we got into the hotel room. Then she asked: 'What did you mean to do?'

According to my Ngoni tradition, no one room for a couple unless they are wed . . .'

'Trash,' she laughed. 'I thought you had lost all your roots. What a contradiction . . .'

She looked at me sarcastically, as if saying: 'I'll break that silly pride of yours.'

Her body was inviting. It would be a thrill to kiss her hard. But as for my Ngoni upbringing. I was feeling guilty already. Actually this was nothing more than silly pride and I could have swallowed it down. But then, the fear that things may not work well and that my ancestral spirits might curse me, grew sharp in my mind.

Now the sound of music stole into my mind and I jerked up from my thoughts. Well, that night, Spinky, angry with me, picked up her cases and screamed: 'I'm disgusted. I hate you. I don't want to see you again. Never again.'

The waiter brought me another glass of beer.

A highlife tune was growing fainter and the magic of the city was fizzling out of me. Now I knew all the magic, all the barbaric charm that had greeted every stranger to Lagos, belonged only to Spinky.

My heart had bled for her. I could not help it. She had crept into the secrecy of my heart. I could have followed her into the city and perhaps bridged our quarrel. Now it was late. Too late.

Now the call was there, drumming insistently in my mind, like a drum beat in the wild jungles of the dark continent. It penetrated right deep into my heart.

The night outside was warm. The moon that had been there the first night I arrived in Lagos was gone. At a street corner, I hailed a taxi.

'Yes, sah, where to, sah?' It was the man who had picked us up from the bus station on our arrival in Lagos. 'To where, sah?'

'Hotel — and then airport,' I said, pushing a crisp banknote into his hand.

'But sah, which flight sah?'

'Flight to Zambia, through Kinshasa. Stop asking questions. It's an overnight flight.' There was a thick lump sticking in my throat.

'But sah, where's madame, sah?'

'Don't know.'

'Sah, but woman is de woman. Foolish sometimes, bullying at times, sah, but soft and tender.'

Thirty minutes passed. We reached the airport. I had five minutes for formalities. Soon, the plane was off . . . Zambia, mother Zambia, I thought . . . And in the early morning, the morning of the new day, when Zambia's independence celebrations started, the plane banked down towards Lusaka airport.

The night was full of mystery.

The pageant was unfolding before our eyes. The Ngoni dancers were a sad reminder of the 'curbed ferocity' of the fearsome Zulus, having run away from the plundering warriors of the nineteenth century.

There was rejoicing as the Visekese, sang 'Mupoka chalo Kwabafendo,' a praise song for the President in having provided good and brilliant leadership which united the people of Zambia and also made possible independence.

Then there was Zambia's own folk-singer, belching out music that was full of falsettos and sent everyone bursting with raucous laughter as he sang about the defunct federation.

Then I thought I heard the accustomed laughter — the simple, rippling laughter of the pleasant Ibo. I made quick jumps to the VIP stand, just next

to where I had been seated. Guards tried to hold me back, but I managed to screech through to the place where Spinky sat among the Nigerian guests.

'What do you want here — I never knew you'd be here,' I said, feeling the sharp rays of the lights making me uneasy. Spinky was cool. She looked at me quietly and I was aware of the chilling look in her eyes. The change in her brought me a sense of shock. She was much more mature now, not the little sex-kitten I had thought she was a few weeks ago.

'You had better see me later,' she said. 'I'm busy at the moment.' There was a chilling finality in her voice.

I had a feeling as if the earth had rocked away from under my feet. Spinky looked aside and pretended I was not near her. I then decided to slouch back to where I had been seated, but this had been too much, so I later decided to get away from the independence stadium.

The tropical sky was starry, lifeless and my heart was bleeding. I wanted to sob, to weep for Spinky whom I felt I had lost, the wonder girl of my dreams.

There were moments when I walked down the Ridgeway Hotel's corridors where most of the VIPs were accommodated, creeping despair would seize me, but the nagging feeling remained — I wanted to speak to Spinky. Perhaps she would spare me a minute and allow me to thrash out my quarrel with her, I asked myself.

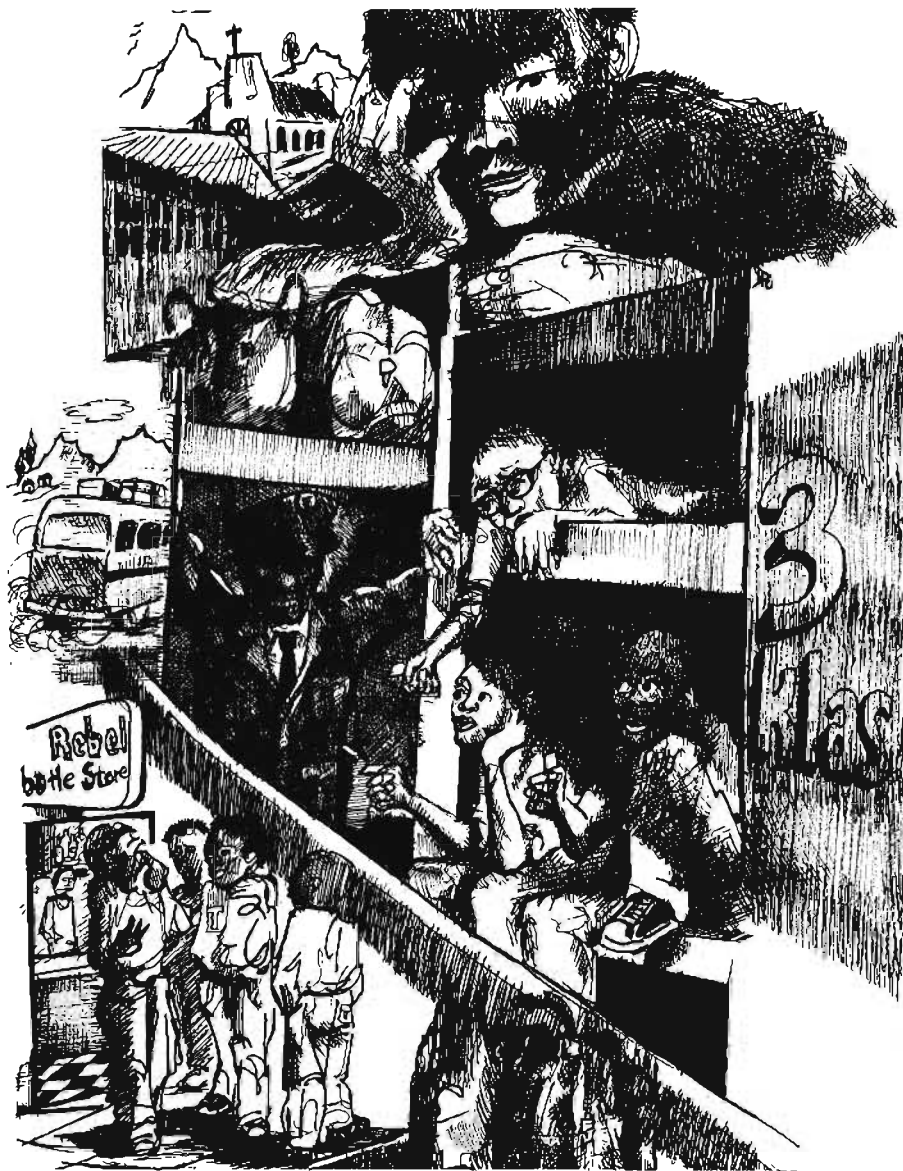
I wandered around the hotel's lobby, hoping that Spinky might stray out of her room. From one window, I heard a Highlife tune filtering out. Then I stood still, shuddering from head to foot and wishing fretfully that the record player would stop the melody. But the music continued.

Switching off my mind, I tried to erase all old memories of Ibadan University, where I first met Spinky. Yet, the tune remained, echoing in my ears, full of haunting sweetness. Even as I walked away, the song was still lingering about the posh and brilliantly-lit place.

The following day I tried frantically to get hold of Spinky. I tried to ring the hotel, but was always politely told: 'She's gone out with the VIPs to some function.'

In the evening of the third day since Zambia's independence, the plane which brought the Nigerian delegation left Lusaka Airport. And now the city remained moody, with skies above murky and hostile.

But well, today I'm married. I'm married to a quiet, dusky Zambian girl. Of course, she always reminds me of Spinky. She is deeply in love with our past too . . . ! ■



## HAVE YOU SEEN STICKS?

by Thamsanqa Illustrated by Gamakhulu Diniso

When I finally got the report informing me that I'd more than satisfactorily completed my end of year examinations, I did not exactly become mad with joy, not in public anyhow.

From the way I acted in the seclusion of my room, however, a Boswell and Wilkie scout would have signed me on immediately.

These results were important: they meant an escape from apron-string supervision and the shine-my-shoes, go-buy-me-a-beer type of commands. They meant, in two words, Boarding School.

Any child who willingly wants to go to college, has not yet had visions of military-type teachers bearing down on students, of doors slamming and keys turning at night time, of a perpetual shortage of food.

My own vision of college was extraordinarily naive at the time. In the privacy of my room, lying on my back with my hands behind my head and one foot crossed over the other, I'd kept see-

ing students (myself included) camping, stalking wild life, visiting historic sites, or being visited by eminent people who make history. One would have thought that college was some sort of safari. And visions of us in class? Never.

The first hint that my dream of a boarding school was way out was at Germiston, the station of departure.

Mthunzi and I — Mthunzi being my hometown boy — were standing side by side with our travelling bags placed between our legs. Immediately behind us was the bookings notification board on which we had checked our places on the train. We'd booked at the same time and had fortunately been paired together. The scene before us was like nothing I'd seen before. The din was incredible. Groups of boys were colliding with each other or with groups of girls moving up and down the platform. And all this seemed to be done on purpose. When this happened they would exchange colourful language. Then there

would be the odd person dressed in what is known as 'kitchen boy garb' — khakhi shorts and a shirt with red trimmings — who had an open bottle of some intoxicant from which he'd periodically take long convulsive gulps. And there was this gangling barefooted boy who continually stopped people to peer in their faces. He never found what he was looking for.

We stood at a respectable if disdainful distance from the scene, like an audience of extras at a shooting of an epic film; we were the freshers, going to college for the first time. We freshers stood by ourselves or with our relations. The old students were characterised by their perpetual motion; we were singled out by our immobility.

The freshers stood rooted, as if unable to believe their eyes. Whatever our conceptions of college had been, the scene that was being enacted was certainly not one of them. All around me I saw this stunned young man or that hand-wringing young woman, surrounded by a horde of earnest mums, uncles and grannies, all bent on offering profound advice. From the way the beleaguered boy or girl kept nodding in rapid succession, it was apparent that they weren't grasping a thing.

Not only the new students were overawed by the situation. One stooped elderly gentleman, a grandpa or a prematurely aged uncle, was so carried away that he completely forgot about the pipe he had firmly clamped in his mouth. This elderly gentleman had been patiently waiting for the mother, who kept saying, 'Do you hear me, son?' to this bespectacled boy who was bobbing his head frantically. When she finally stopped for breath, the gentleman, forgetting to remove the pipe from his mouth, broke in. By the time he straightened up into his stoop after picking up his pipe, the mother was again advising the boy. 'Makhosonke ...' was all the man had managed to say before the pipe clattered on the platform. The young man had nodded, as if acknowledging that his name was indeed Makhosonke, while pushing his slipping spectacles into place. No one in that group thought the scene amusing.

And then, of course, there were the groups that had either exhausted every avenue of talk, or had simply been rendered speechless by the sight.

I found myself hating the old students for their mindless behaviour and I hated the new students who'd let their parents accompany them, thus subjecting them to anxiety. I also hated the parents who'd imposed themselves on their children, no doubt needing to boast to their neighbours how they'd seen the promising offspring off at Germiston.

Our train slid in and everybody was galvanized into action, scrutinising coach numbers. Mthunzi and I found ours without hassle mainly because we weren't hampered by effusive relations.

We were scarcely settled, though, before we heard a voice saying, 'Come on, come on. I've found his place. Here is his name. Mr M Mdetshe. Those twits! You'd think those booking clerks would know what they are about. It should be Mdletshe. But it's his name alright. Makhosonke Mdletshe.' After this elucidation the elderly stooped gentleman appeared at our door and peered in. He seemed unhappy to find us inside but shifted over to let the bespectacled boy in. The latter threw us a feeble smile. He then busied himself, helped by a bespectacled older version of himself, with storing his possessions, which were considerable. Clearly, like a lot of us, Makhosonke had thought he was going on a picnic.

Mthunzi and I went out into the corridor. I looked at the slip of paper with our names on it. Just below our names, Mthunzi's and mine, was that of a certain J. Phalaza who'd not as yet shown up. This name was followed by that of our present companion.

'The lecture is in full swing again,' Mthunzi said, nudging me and indicating our compartment.

I craned my neck to the spy glass and saw the elderly gentleman seated, talking to Makhosonke while the rest of the clan milled about. His normal stoop could fool anyone who'd never seen him standing into thinking that he was hunched forward, making whatever he was saying appear all the more important, which doubtless it was.

'They are searing the living daylight's out of Four Eyes,' I said.

'If I were him, I'd tell them to shove off out of here,' Mthunzi said characteristically.

'At the moment I think it's Four Eyes, more than anybody else, who'd like to shove off out of here,' I said, thinking I'd do the same if given half the chance.

'Yes. I believe you're right.' Mthunzi sounded a shade less confident himself.

Makhosonke was saved by the bell; the warning system that informs people when a passenger train is about to pull out of a station. Or maybe again that bell sounded like a death toll to him — if he was anxious to cling for a few seconds more to the wordy bosom of his people. The last thing I saw as we stood waving to people on the platform, was an upraised hand gripping a pipe above the heads, caps and hats of other people.

I don't think that last gesture of the elderly, stooped gentleman did much to bolster Makhosonke's resolve. To me it

looked too much like the hand of a drowning man clutching at flotsam.

Our present position wasn't promising. We sat surrounded by various sounds of raucous singing and boisterous hilarity. For the three of us in the compartment it wasn't an occasion for joy. We could sense the sinister undertones, as perhaps animals do an impending slaughter. Our attempts at conversation degenerated to disjointed snatches of random thought. Our fourth companion, J. Phalaza, had not made an appearance and we hoped we'd pick him up at succeeding stations. We kept saying, 'Train slowing down. There are some lights ahead. Probably he'll climb in there,' but he never did. I'm sure we all knew he'd not be coming but that didn't stop us from using him as a screen against our fears, which became very tattered as time progressed.

Makhosonke was from Mamelodi, Pretoria, and he was going to Kwa-Dlangezwa, a recently opened College on the North Coast. From the little conversation we'd had, he'd sounded a bright young man, albeit reserved. But which friendless student on that journey wouldn't have been? And so, there were lengthy listening silences in our compartment. The longer we travelled the more the silences seemed to cock their ears for the slightest noise. They appeared to say, 'What was that? Could you please raise your voice?' Unwillingly we did just that and sounded obscenely loud. Then outside, far away in another coach, a lonely anguished scream would be wrenched by the whistling wind and thrown into the dark night. At this the three of us would look at each other then turn away quickly. After some time I needed to go to the WC.

When I came back and slid the door open, I could have sworn I'd come to the wrong compartment. What we'd learned so far, instinctively, was not to latch the door. Only freshers barricaded themselves in and old students had ways of unlocking such doors from the outside.

Another useful stance we'd adopted was to stare stonily and unconcernedly at whoever slid our door back. So far, because of our apparent unconcern and the unlocked door we'd managed to pass as an uncommonly inactive trio of old students. But this would not last of course. As yet we hadn't encountered any mavericks or hard nuts.

So, when I came back and slid the door open, I could've sworn I'd come to the wrong compartment. Mthunzi was unlike the Mthunzi I knew. There was an almost tangible animal ferocity about him. And Makhosonke, Christ, Makhosonke! I do believe that boy's appearance at that time went a long way in

saving our miserable hides.

We'd made him take off his spectacles, for obvious reasons, explaining with great care that personally we thought there was nothing the matter with people who wore them (Mthunzi even said wistfully he wished he could afford a pair!) but that there were occasions...

Now his myopic stare between which ran a regal nose, his longish neck with its prominent Adam's apple, and his overall scrubbed appearance made him look like a highly intellectual, very friendly psychopath.

I didn't tell them the images their appearances conjured up in my mind. I didn't have time to. No sooner had I shut the door and sat down than it was shoved aside to admit four very mean-looking boys.

Mthunzi distracted them, but briefly. They could sense the beast in him. But then they had bestial natures of their own. The one who arrested and held their undivided attention was Makhosonke. I still can't say with any conviction whether Makhosonke's bronchial action was regulated or purely instinctive. Every so often, after maybe a quarter minute, his Adam's apple would deliberately go down and deliberately come up again. He looked like someone who'd squeeze the life out of you while disapprovingly but politely telling you to stop wriggling.

The first boy to enter, the leader, had to clear his throat before he said, his voice still husky, 'Hey, you guys, have you seen Sticks?'

'Nope, not yet,' I said, casually assuming the role of speaker.

'Say, aren't you freshers? You look like freshers to me,' he said, looking at each of us in turn.

'Ha, ha, freshers be damned,' I said without humour, turning my head at the same time to look at Makhosonke as if to say, 'Did you hear that, Old Sport? Us freshers? Indeed!'

Makhosonke gave me a mirthless smile, right on cue. I was putting a cigarette in my mouth when the next question came.

'What about Starks? Haven't you seen Starks either?'

I lit and flipped the burnt matchstick in a graceful arc. I wan't sure this boy wasn't stringing me along, wasn't conning me. First it had been not an uncommon name in itself. But now Starks!

'Oh sure. Starks passed here several minutes ago. Only he didn't stay. He said he was looking for Bonzai,' I said, improvising. I'd heard the name Bonzai being bandied about at Germiston station. I held my breath for his reaction.

'Who was with Starks?' So apparently and blessedly this wasn't Bonzai. I mean anybody but a fresher would have

known who Bonzai was, such was his slightly-glimpsed popularity.

'The other guys he was with did not enter. They passed right on,' I said expelling smoke.

'What way did they go?'

'Up,' I said shortly.

With an oath these fellows flung out and slammed the door shut. It was as if, since they found no reason to molest us, they nevertheless wished to enclose us forever in our slippery, uneasy tranquillity.

Encouraged by the way we'd warded off this potential attack, we devised a plan, and, using information gained from previous encounters, we parried new ones. Only once did this plan come close to catastrophically shattering about us.

What we did was one of us would stand sentry at the door covering both ends of the corridor. When the guard saw would-be aggressors approaching, he'd call out to them, saying something like: 'Hi, chaps, has any of you seen Starks?' Invariably the answer would be another question: 'Starks of Mariannahill?' And the sentry would say: 'That very one.' To this the reply would be that they were also looking for him, or that Starks was somewhere ahead, or way behind. After such an exchange the group would pass on without so much as a glance inside.

We nearly landed in the thick of it when it was my turn again at the door. I remember something curious flashed past and to see it better I stepped out and lowered the corridor window and peered out. The next minute I heard this voice saying 'Move!' I hastily stepped back, saying automatically, 'Say, fellows, haven't you seen Bonzai?'

The two chaps did not reply but stood staring at me quizzically. I looked briefly at the short boy and then addressed the taller and heftier fellow. 'Haven't you seen Bonzai?' I asked again, with a niggling uneasiness at the back of my mind.

'What do you mean, haven't we seen Bonzai? Who do you suppose this is then?' the hefty chap said, indicating the short chap. I recall thinking, 'Now we are cooked.'

But in a flash Mthunzi was at the door. Pushing me none-too-gently aside, as I suppose an old student would have a fresher, he said confidently and unpatronisingly, 'Hello Bonzai,' to the short boy. 'I'd like to apologise for my cousin's impulsiveness. This is his first trip to college, you see. What happened was that Starks was here . . .'

'Starks of Mariannahill?' shot out the short chap.

'None other,' Mthunzi confirmed, leaning lazily against the panelling. 'We got talking and he mentioned he wanted

to see you something awful. What about he wouldn't say. My cousin was very taken up with what he heard us say about you. He's been trying to impress everybody that passes along ever since.'

'That's alright, as long as it's your cousin. By the way, who are you? I can't seem to place you.'

'I don't blame you,' said Mthunzi magnanimously. 'We only met briefly last year on the train going home. But mind, I already knew quite a lot about you by the time we met. I am Mthunzi of St Augustine's.' This was the name of the college Mthunzi and I were going to.

'Where was Starks headed when he left you?' he shouted across the length of the corridor.

'The same way you are going, down,' Mthunzi shouted back, waving towards them with his hand.

I'd said Starks was up and Mthunzi was saying he was down. And, together with whatever made-up momentous news Mthunzi had imparted in Bonzai's ear, it would be much healthier for us if all these old students did not get together and compare notes.

Soon after this remarkable display by Mthunzi, the noises on the train quietened, almost hushed, as if in anticipation of some magnificent event. This puzzled us greatly and, instead of relaxing the atmosphere in our compartment, it only served to tie us into a heightened state of tension. Occasionally what we would hear would be a surreptitious rustle or a hollow cough or a muffled thump reminiscent of stealth and caution in a thicket at twilight.

The corridor became deserted and the doors stayed shut. We abandoned the post at the door, not knowing what to expect. We became acutely aware of the sway of the coach, of the whoosh as it passed trees, the unvarying slap of wheels on rails, and the rumble as the train forded a river. The light was harsh on our glistening faces.

'What the dickens is now happening on this mad train?' Mthunzi said to nobody in particular.

'You mean what the dickens is now not happening on this mad train,' Makhosonke corrected. We smiled our tight smiles.

'We'll know soon enough what is or is not happening,' I said.

'Better sooner than later,' Mthunzi observed.

'It may be something not to our liking,' I said.

'Better than this inactivity.'

We lapsed into silence, staring at our swaying and smoking reflections on the impersonal pane. Then, outside, in the corridor, there was a sharp tattoo of metal on metal. Hard on the heels of this sound and overriding it was a booming voice which said, 'Tickets!

Everybody tickets!' Doors slid open and doors slid shut in a most businesslike and comforting manner. Previously, when doors had opened — prior to the inevitable whimper — there'd always been the cackling babble as of cavemen deciding the best way to divide the spoils.

In a flash we understood why mischief had gone to ground. The true masters of the houses on wheels were at hand. Unconscious of the act, our hands shot into pockets, rifled inside, came out and shot into other pockets again for the documents that made us temporary tenants of the room we were occupying. By the time our compartment door slid open we had our tickets in our hands.

A large, bewhiskered face appeared which first regarded us impersonally, then broke into a smile, creasing the black plateau into promontories and bushy valleys of a vast Africa. The large man pushed at the door some more to allow his bulk in. He stood just inside the door, staring at us silently, a smile playing fleetingly across his countenance.

'You are new students, aren't you?' he said at length.

'No,' we chorused, reacting to this question as we had to others seemingly ages ago.

He laughed outright, genuinely amused.

'Of course you're new students,' he said with a gleam in his eyes.

We remained silent.

'You know how I know?' he asked.

We said nothing.

'I'll tell you nevertheless,' he said, seating himself. 'I've been doing this job for seven years now. And in those seven years I've seen fresh-faced boys like yourselves, willing boys like yourselves, more woebegone and tear-stained than you are, who always have their tickets ready the minute a railway employee like myself presents himself. Every year it's the same. But what will happen next year? There'll still be open-faced, willing and obedient boys. But you won't be among them.'

We still said nothing.

'I don't know how you have managed to travel this far unmasked,' he continued, glancing from one to the other of us. 'Anyway, that's your secret. I must say, it's highly unusual. You know what or how you'll be next year? You don't? I'll tell you then. You, who today are models of modesty and docility, will either not pay your fares, or if you do, will not be so fast in producing your concession tickets; you'll be ill-treating next year's fresh-faced students, you'll generally be anything but what you are today,' he concluded rising.



'We won't change,' Mthunzi said.

'Oh you will,' said this brotherly man clipping our tickets. 'What amazes me is how you've stayed out of harm's way this long. Care to tell me?'

He was such a wonderful, fresh-faced, genial giant of a middle-aged man that we didn't mind telling him.

He whistled when we'd finished our tale. 'That's smart, really smart,' he said in admiration which swelled our hearts. 'It's the first time I've heard something like it. But you two,' he said indicating Mthunzi and me, 'will be getting off in about a half hour's time. That'll leave you alone, which might put you in a spot.' He looked at Makhosonke reflectively.

'Tell you what I'll do, though I don't usually concern myself with the students I meet on this train. But I love ingenuity. I have a boy myself, much younger than you are, who's as enterprising as hell. At Glencoe, where these two get off, I'll come and take you to a place of relative safety.' He then saluted, the small boy getting out of him, and left. When we looked at each other, really appraising one another for the first time in many hours, our eyes were brimming.

At Glencoe, that wonderful man, who never introduced himself to us, nor we to him for fear of affirming an unwarranted familiarity, came for Makhosonke. We shook hands hurriedly and feelingly with Makhosonke before getting off the train.

'See you next year when you've changed,' the genial man said looking down at us.

'We won't change,' we said with gusto, looking up at them.

'You will,' he said confidently, moving ahead of Makhosonke in the passage-way.

We honestly felt we wouldn't, if only for his sake.

The time was 12.30 am.

We stood where we were until the train pulled out. Which was a mistake. Two ripe tomatoes landed smack on our foreheads. Clearing the sticky juice from our eyes we saw the short chap, Bonzai, together with some fellows, among whom were those we'd earlier encountered, leaning out of the windows laughing themselves sick. We picked up our bags and went towards the waiting room but at the last minute thought better of it. Through the window we could see that it was already packed to capacity and by the looks of it, there were a lot of unsavoury things going on in there. We found ourselves a nook and, like rabbits in a burrow, settled down for what remained of the night. At about 2 am the Durban to Johannesburg train crawled in and what should already have been enough noise for that

medium-sized junction station, increased many fold. Students tumbled out of this train in all manner of attitudes; backwards, forwards, empty-handed, laden, fully-clothed, half-naked, wide-awake, half-asleep. Mthunzi and I kept a healthy distance and well away in the shadows, watching. It was Germiston, all over again.

And the inevitably lost-looking freshers, minus the parents.

Rather than look at human hilarity, most of which was induced by human suffering, we withdrew back to our nook and awaited further developments.

The sun came up over the rim of the gabled town houses and hesitated, seemingly surprised to see so many people about. But then, reminding itself that it was the re-opening of schools, it rose up smiling.

Soon afterwards we got onto yet another train bound for Mahlabathini or some such place, which would disgorge us along its route. First to alight would be the students to St Augustine's and the graphic art school at Rorke's Drift. This part of the journey proved a surprisingly short hop from Glencoe. Hardly were we on the train than we had to get off again, at Dundee. Those that went past with the train after Dundee were headed for Inkamane and one or two lesser known institutions on that route. At Dundee the matter of safety took on a different and worse turn. Where we had previously been able to shelter in the anonymity of numbers and various colleges, that ruse fell away at Dundee. The small group of artistic chaps who were headed for Rorke's Drift, because of their creative temperament, perhaps, never went in for the ill-treatment lark. They immediately accepted new art students into their fold. That then left us, old and new students bound for St Augustine's, to claw each other naked. Dodging was simply out of the question. If you were a new student, that was that. You simply stuck out like a sore thumb.

Mthunzi and I looked at each other quickly then turned away. We were again standing, twelve hours later, with bags between our legs. We kept shifting from one foot to the other as if in response to the wishes of an unseen sergeant who kept commanding us to be at ease, first on the one foot, then on the other.

A number of boys went past, hand in hand with their girls, and favoured us with a mean look, an eloquent measure of things to come.

'You know, Mazi,' Mthunzi began, 'I wish I'd stuck to our high school back home. I don't like what we've let ourselves into here.'

'Sure, I know how you feel. If only we could switch the watch back.'

'That's just it, we can't. This spirit of adventure doesn't look so good anymore. I'd sure give my right arm to see old Banana right now,' my friend said, wistfully looking towards the north west.

Banana was the nick-name of one of our ex-teachers who'd not only been boring but also crude to the extreme. He was part of the reason we were here, but things being what they were, the image of Banana remarkably transformed itself. What we'd thought of as crass remarks now assumed an honest, down-to-earth appearance. His irritating cackling laughter was — why, unique!

'So far we've been extremely lucky, thanks to you,' I said.

'No, no, it's thanks to you and you only. You set the pattern and we only followed. How did you know to play it like you did when those guys came to our compartment?' Mthunzi asked.

'Oh, it came by itself, mostly. The main thing was not to let those bullies realise we were freshers,' I said.

'Dead correct there,' Mthunzi acquiesced.

'And I was partly helped by the trip to the loo. You remember it was immediately after I'd come back that those chaps barged in?'

'Sure, I remember.'

'Well, when I got to the loo the same fellows were going the way I'd come. There was somebody in the lavatory so I had to stand and wait. While standing there I heard these people trying to open the first compartment door but it was locked. Just then the lavatory door opened and a girl came out. Well, I gave her the once over, you know how it is.' I was warming up to my story.

'Sure, sure,' Mthunzi said, actually pricking up his ears.

'So this girl comes out and I stepped forward, meaning to go in. You can imagine my surprise when out of the same lavatory comes a boy — with a king-sized grin and, giving me a wink, he went past.'

'J-e-e-z,' said Mthunzi, an awed note in his voice.

'When I came out the guys who had been banging on the first compartment door had it open by then. They streamed in and roughed up the occupants something awful, as old Pixley would have said,' I continued, reflecting on how the people we'd formerly regarded as obnoxious were increasingly occupying positions of grandeur. 'I stood at the door and watched but when one of these chaps glanced at me I decided to move on. By the time they came to us I'd a plan ready for them.'

'It was a good time to go to the loo. Thanks to your sensitive bladder.'

'Think nothing of it,' I said expansively. ■

# The Babalaz People

BY MATSIX

Miriam Zenzi Makeba said it, introducing one of her songs to us: 'People all over the world have many things in common. One of which is drinking. Some know how to take it, and then again there are those who don't know how to take it. Our next song deals with the second group. They often enjoy complaining about what we in Southern Africa call: ibabalaz.'

South Africa will soon be the only shebeen of its kind in Africa. There are shebeens galore in Africa but they are different from the one down here. Most of them are at least operating in an atmosphere of self-rule, where there is the promise, at least, of justice and freedom for all people. And babalaz has seen its day. Zimbabwe is one of the countries which is still fresh from the swamp, with the smell of the South African Breweries still clinging to it, stinking of nothing but apartheid and its alcoholic culture. Zimbabwe, still suffering from colonial hangover, has entered another phase of the fight for freedom. First it was a forced landing, a political takeover after military pressure. Now it is an economic struggle. The last will be the social struggle, the reconstruction of her history and cultural values which were nearly buried in the era that was ended by a rocket-propelled grenade. These phases are interdependent: they cannot be separated, but priorities will be observed.

Today, in Azania, we are fighting under the influence of various forms of drunkenness. Some of us are fighting for personal exposure, in our scramble for fame and heroism. Aspiring to build mansions, castles and pyramids in the backyards of the ghetto. We are worried about a trip overseas and a spectacular picture on the front page of the *Star*. Bosuphasta boiphile matla. What about our newly-found dream, SABC TV2 and TV3? Separate underdevelopment. What a bladdy culture. A culture whereby we talk of the dispossessor and the dispossessed, the oppressor and the oppressed, the drinker and the drunkard. It's a shebeen culture — where the rule for the babalaz people is: to avoid babalaz, you have to stay drunk.

Fortunately Marcus Garvey's redemption talk lives on through people like Bob Marley, who in his lifetime sang sacraments of liberation: 'Emancipate yourselves from mental slavery/None but ourselves can free our minds' — lest we become diwengu tsa struggle — lifetime slaves. We need to be conscious of who we are . . . And we need to know the causes and effects of babalaz.

When we take a close look at our unclear past, we are able to see how our people fell victim to babalaz. And why today some of them enjoy complaining about babalaz. Queen Victoria was one of the first shebeen queens to invade Africa. In our state of drunkenness, shebeen queens started



Trevor in 'Mama Dragon'

pic: courtesy BTC

fighting amongst themselves: the law of greed knows no colour. Their thirst for the sweetness of our people's sweat and the richness of our people's land, made them hate each other. Slave trade was introduced and Ahoy was the word when our people were sailed out of Africa.

In Babylon, people such as Marcus Garvey began the freedom blues. Garvey's redemption talks were like a sunny day over there, splashing the African people with rays of hope — an African dream, a return to the native land, a journey back to the roots. Thus today in the performing arts we have Black Theatre Co-operative in London, which exists to give opportunities and experience to black actors, directors, writers, designers, technicians and other workers in the theatre. They aim at staging popular theatre, which will be of interest to and attract, as an audience, the black communities of Great Britain. For them, being in Babylon is not being submissive to slavery, but setting another course for freedom — a continuation of Garvey's redemption talks, but adapted to a new reality.

Shope and Trevor appeared in the group's production, 'Mama Dragon' a play by Farouk Dhondy. It was performed at Fools 2, an International Theatre Festival in Denmark, Copenhagen. We spoke about black theatre in London and

## 'It is not for blacks to sound apologetic in their defence of Black Theatre.'

they identified certain problems which are related to ours down here. The problems are not the same as ours — but perhaps for that very reason, they throw light on ours.

*As black actors living in London, how would you define black theatre?*

TREVOR: At the moment, black theatre in Britain is in its early stages. It is difficult to define. I would say black theatre should be positive; say positive things about black people. Though there is a mixed feeling on what is positive and what is not positive. Because some people will keep on saying this is not positive, that is not positive, this is positive and so on. Some say there shouldn't be theatre at all. They say black people should be in the streets fighting. You know what I mean . . .

*What about the question of white involvement in black theatre?*

TREVOR: Well, if you take black theatre to its ultimate and, I mean its grass-roots base, where we have an all-black community, then there shouldn't be any whites in it. So with our theatre here, because we live in London and we as a minority found white people here, we feel it is important to show how it is to live in a white society, being black.

SHOPE: That is what we take into consideration: because those of us who were born and went to school in London, we went to mixed schools. Like we blacks being a minority, we went to white schools. A lot of us grew up with white people. And that is how the theatre is — I mean, our theatre company has a white director. But now there is a play going on which is written, directed and acted with only blacks in it. Is it not true, Trevor?

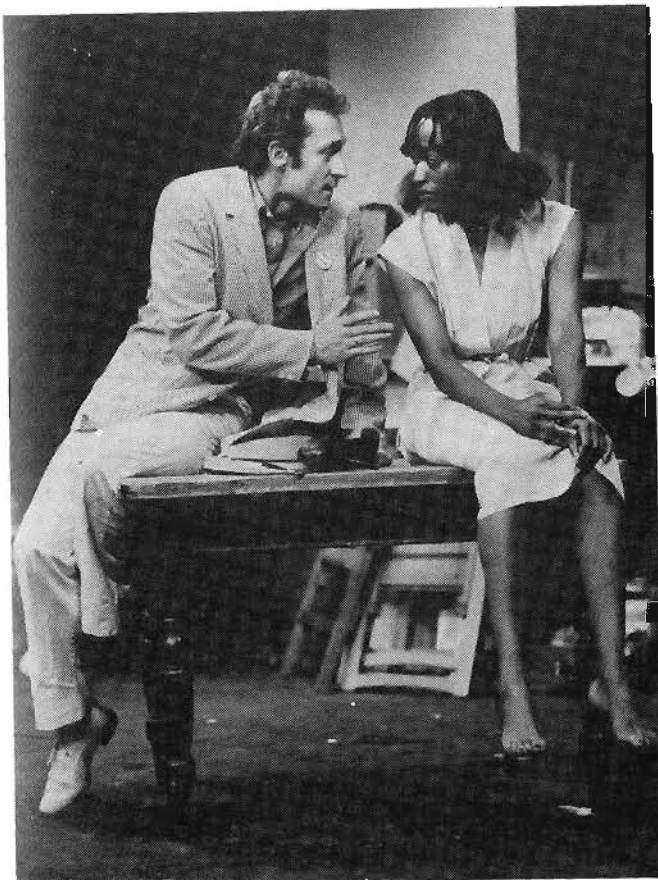
TREVOR: That's true. But you see, that play is about black people relating to *each other*, entitled 'One Rule' by

Mustapha Matura. Obviously the pressure of the white world makes us do what we do, you know, the pressure of being black in a white society is what the play is all about. The thing is, you probably know better, because South Africa is the country that knows it all. I mean you come from *there*, where it is happening beyond reality. The motivation that makes you write, act and makes you do what you do wouldn't be the same if those white people were not doing what they are doing to you. In England, in a white thing, where they have blacks acting in it, they make you act the way they see black people. *Stereotype* sort of thing.

SHOPE: Stupid . . .

TREVOR: When they see black people, they say so long we black people can sing and dance, this and that, or smile a lot, something like that, that is what they are looking for . . . In England the difference is that black people get a chance to show their depth. You know what I mean, to show that they are human, that they have got feelings like anybody else. And of course the tensions that make up a character, that makes an interesting piece of theatre, are found where black people live. In this time black people are almost *lucky* — in that the tensions they have got to draw on are enormous! The pressures, the confusions, all those frustrations, pains and everything, those are lovely tensions to draw on, to make a play to show how other human beings like us are living.

SHOPE: And also, that we are aware of these tensions and we want to deal with them. Whereas before, maybe, our parents felt as hard-pressed and confused as we feel, but were ashamed to deal with all that confusion. And then they had to bury it and forget about it. I agree with what Trevor says because I think what black theatre has to deal with, and has to create, are people. All different kinds of people, right. Not just, I don't know, noble savages or pretty people, you know. Pretty people who look good in a sack or something. We got to have people that we see on the stage and say Yeah or No to, right — and we feel part of it, you know. That's what I think black theatre should do. Recreate people.'



Shope (right) in the play 'Mama Dragon'

The recreation of people and the showing of a people's depth should be the task of all theatre. Black or white, African or English, theatre should reconstruct a people's history and cultural values. The task of reconstruction will be determined by the extent of destruction. Hence the reconstruction struggle at home and in Babylon is not the same.

In Azania it goes without saying that cultural resistance is not born in a vacuum. Domination took place and the Kyalami race took its pace. Culture was like a clutch pedal. And because the black people's foot was not on the clutch pedal, they did not know how to change the gears. They lost the race and the white man's culture took the lead. The destruction of mankind in these parts took its course and history became a matter of convenience. Both black and white lived in a distorted reality. Dancing to the rhythms of South African music by the famous Apartheid Musical Band. What a musical group, with a sense of racial disharmony. They have the most unique chords, with race as their keynote.

Now, today, we are all engaged in the struggle for freedom, and the idea that race does not determine our roles in such a class struggle is . . . just an idea. Black people are fighting from a rootless base, while white people are fighting from inside a dominant culture. How do we *combine* our revolutionary efforts without being confused by this cultural marakalas? It's a big question . . .

One thing for sure — black people should not allow the



*Black Theatre Co-operative in London*

back-to-the-roots blues to escape their minds. It is said that a nation without its past is like a tree without its roots. Therefore, the fruitfulness of our national struggle will depend on our historical past. To be engaged in a class struggle does not mean being oblivious of the fact that our revolutionary efforts link up with our traditional past. We should bear in mind that the liberation struggle in Azania does not start with us today. Thus the historical development of resistance in Azania is the theme to reckon with. Our theatre, as the historical embodiment of our cultural past, should become a threshold towards a new society in this country. Our African identity should therefore take the lead in singing such liberation blues.

For Black Theatre Co-operative and the others in Babylon, it is an African dream. A search for the roots, far from the tree. A spiritual journey across the waves. A struggle to know the link-up and preserve the umbilical chord. It is said that they can be taken out of Africa but Africa cannot be taken out of them. Now they, as a *minority* with an African origin, have to adapt to a white *majority* culture. Without imposing their African culture, they may influence English theatre. But as expatriates, they have much to learn from English theatre. For those reasons, they can work with a white man in the theatre. For us down here, it is another story . . .

Our African dream is different. When those in Babylon are dreaming of Africa across the waves, we are dreaming of Africa's milk right in her bosom. Searching for the roots where the tree stands. Ours is a struggle to unveil the curtain and divulge the truth about the hard-

ships of existence in a race-obsessed society. It is a struggle to recreate a distorted reality. Once, the white man made our people believe that a tree can stand firm without its roots. That talking about our African-ness is being racist and anti-class struggle. And yet our understanding of the South African society is that the class struggle is embodied in the race issue. Here, race determines class. A white worker differs in many ways from a black worker. Therefore, in such a class struggle our theatre cannot be colour-blind.

A good artist or dramatist is the one who is not anti-man but anti-evil. His or her theatre should demistify, recreate people and make love to humanity. Unveil all evils and let those who resist against the truth perish in the furnace. To do that we have to know evil where we find it, as we experience it. As dramatists writing for the stage, we should master our art in relation to our African cultural values and our ghetto lives. Situate our spirit of resistance within the context of our historical past. Avoid being either American, European or English. Be African and let the world bear witness to our African-ness. Some people may say this is just a dream, a 'black talk' which is becoming phobic.

Peter Tosh sings: 'As long as you are a black man you are an African.' This should not mean that as Africans we should bury our pride in our blackness, without the practical manifestation of our African cultural values. We could be black, but unAfrican. Our African-ness will be born in the daily practice of our African cultural values. Some white people who are not reluctant to respond to African cultural values, are more African than some black people who are

wielding empty black power slogans. But most unfortunately, the majority of white people see nothing wrong in European or English culture dominating African culture inside Africa.

In any case, what kind of shit do we expect from a person who eats dry pap and bread all the time — tough shit. And walls fall apart when this shit is released. Because of the bitterness of our experience our theatre will always be seen as a negation of the western notion of theatre.

And at this stage, black theatre should be created with and for black people by black people. It is a sort of theatre which should not be imported from town, but must be produced and found where black people live. The squatters, slums and ghettos should be its stage. Mampara bricks, corrugated zinc, the mud and stench in the streets should be its costume. Seqamtho, 'tsotsitaal', sepantsola not schippie should be its language. Black theatre should create its mode of expression. Feed the hungry masses with the teachings of a revolution. Prepare the blues people for the practical manifestation of their aspiration. And prepare them for the days when white supremacy shall have seen its day.

Above all, black theatre should reflect the present in relation to the past and project a vision for the future. This vision will prevent black theatre from simply reacting to white supremacy and oppression — reflecting the plight of a black man without projecting a spirit of resistance coming out of our cultural past.

This vision, later on, will prevent us from falling victims to black dictatorship under the shield of black consciousness or majority rule. We need freedom, not a change of shebeen queens. Black theatre should be consciously critical of bo-black baas and bo-black missus. Be critical of the shebeen queen who started by dividing us into blacks and whites, and is now dividing us into those who drink Whisky; Lion Lager and Bantu Beer. That is apartheid culture on the march.

Our journey to a free Azania should not be deterred by this race issue. Being class-conscious does not mean that we should be colourblind at this stage. We should be critical of the white man whose norm of existence is the exploitation of a black man. Some people may take this as yet another black talk, though they are conscious of the historical truth that all those who had fought against racism were mistaken for being racists. In the struggle against racism, there is no way one can fight without being seen as racist. It is not for blacks to sound apologetic in their defence of black theatre. ■

## A LETTER TO CHANTAL

Thank you for the invitation  
 but to attend would only reopen the wound  
 and reveal my weaknesses.  
 Chantal, of the honeyed thighs  
 which I had stormed so often in the past  
 and whose wet and warm welcomes linger,  
 I salute you.  
 wish I had some chaser to go with the brandy  
 relax, I am not drowning my sorrows  
 I merely dig getting pissed,  
 I told you our lives are not our own  
 We owe our dues  
 I hope you sleep easy  
 remember the parts you made me play?  
 some of the roles I actually enjoyed  
 foregoing my principles to partake  
 of the pleasures of the carefree tycoons.  
 when alone, visions of you  
 which only my eyes have seen  
 would drive me behind locked doors  
 seeking release in the manipulations of hands  
 hands which you know so well  
 but then turned furiously on me.  
 the day you made your farewell speech  
 I cried because of what the laws  
 had twisted you into,  
 when you said goodbye to freedom  
 we had to part  
 you had said goodbye to me.

Keith Adams

## We all gather

we all gather  
 by the graveside

we all gather  
 forces of conflict subdued

the lull  
 in the tenor of turmoil

we all gather  
 the camouflaged  
 in low profile

the thronged masses  
 oozing the elegaic tones  
 of protestation

we all gather  
 affirmed and revived

we all gather ALL  
 in bereavement.

P.K. Chipeya

## AT THE COUNTRY CLUB

In the foyer a sugar baron's rifles rust,  
 they've not been pulled through in years.  
 In the bar, bottle tops shower the wooden slats  
 which save the floor, hiding sloped beers  
 and totwash sluiced away. Two cricket bats  
 in the umbrella stand unpeel the smell of linseed.  
 In the lavatory someone is hawking phlegm.  
 A planter declares the Zulu a broken nation.  
 Rumour has it there are some so rich  
 they allow the air-conditioning to breathe for them  
 and employ servants merely for observation.  
 Cane is cropped and squeezed twice a year  
 and the clubhouse finds itself in new, naked country  
 under the millstack smoking burnt sugar.  
 Then tours go out to the site of the severed finger  
 and the places where the mamba were.  
 This week's tennis prize is a personalised Luger.  
 On the court, young men sweat through a needle match.  
 The umpire licks or counts his fingers and shares  
 their mounting love with wives who do not watch.  
 Water sprinklers circle with utter confidence.  
 In the laundry the steam iron hisses like a train  
 across the chairman's aubergine safari suit.  
 Beneath the trees which hide the security fence  
 nannies doze among children who pick at their  
 soft black undersides as if they were fallen fruit.

Christopher Hope

## SACRIFICE . . .

(a love song for my sons)

The drums are speaking again  
 And I can see warriors  
 Fleeing across the ancestral plain  
 To the mountains and valleys  
 Where ancient rivers stir  
 A love song in my bones:  
 O precious earth  
 O sacred soil  
 Black as my soul is black  
 Trodden beauty  
 Trodden pride,  
 Dust of the dust . . .

Speak to me of Sacrifice  
 Speak of the unrepentant beast  
 That must be silenced  
 With the ritual blade of defiance.

O Azania  
 Blood of my blood,  
 Take my pleasure  
 Take my pain  
 As I pluck the Black Plume of Freedom  
 For my sons . . .

Monnapule Lebakeng

# W Lone Black Woman

A Story by Morongwanyana

Illustrated by Goodman Mabote



Ma Chauke arrived home at six o'clock in the evening. Her children were surprised. She never came back home on a Wednesday — her day off was on Thursday like all other domestic servants.

'Meisie, don't stand there as if you've seen a ghost. Relieve me of these parcels.' Meisie took the parcels from her mother and put them on the kitchen table. Ma Chauke walked through to the dining room. She pulled a chair and sat. The room was semi-dark; the children had not yet lit the candles.

'Make me a cup of tea,' she said to no one in particular.

'Mama ke eng?' Meisie and Thabo asked in unison. They had followed her to the dining room.

'Why, can't I ask for a cup of tea?'

'Why have you come home on a Wednesday, what has happened?' they asked urgently.

'Oh, I felt like sleeping in my house tonight. Can't I?' Their eager faces amused her.

'Mama ke eng?' Meisie asked, shaking her mother's arm. Tshepo and Tshidiso had by now joined Thabo and Meisie in the dining room.

'Where's my cup of tea?' Ma Chauke asked, ignoring the children's question.

'Tell us first. Why are you here?' Meisie insisted.

'All right. My employer's first son has been called up for military service. There'll be a send-off party for him and the other boys on Sunday, so I have a day off and not a half-day off tomorrow. Well, is my cup of tea coming?' she asked, looking Meisie straight in the eyes.

'Ja,' Meisie answered promptly. 'Thabo go and make Ma a cup of tea,' she said, pushing him towards the kitchen.

'Ha! You make it.' He held onto the table for support. 'Mama, akere boys don't make tea.'

'I don't care who makes it. All I want is a good cup of tea. Where's Val?' Her

eldest child was not in the house.

'O ile mithining ya power,' Tshidiso answered, clambering onto her mother's lap.

Ma Chauke always wondered how her three-year-old managed to keep up with the students' political activities. Tshepo who was five was also in the know, but like his seniors he never let anything slip from his mouth. Meisie and Thabo were her ten-year-old twins. They were in standard three. Their progress at school was very promising, but Ma Chauke was anxious. All that talk about killing whites, destroying government property, destruction and damnation, was definitely not good for them. Even if something had to be done it was not right to bring children up on so much hatred. The frustrating part of it was that there was nothing she could do to remedy the situation. She was a stranger to her children in these matters.

'Mama, here's your tea,' Meisie said, bringing her mother out of her reverie.

'If this is how you serve your tea you'll never last two hours in a job. Your saucer's half-filled with spilled tea.'

Meisie walked back to the kitchen before her mother had finished talking. Ma Chauke heard her tell her siblings, 'She thinks I'll work in the kitchens like her.'

'Zola's sister says if she worked in kitchens she'd poison her employer's food.'

Ma Chauke was shocked to hear her Tshepo say this. Her little five-year-old Tshepo!

'That's what they want,' Thabo added.

'Will someone light the candles,' Ma Chauke shouted in an attempt to shake herself out of her gloom. She went to the kitchen. 'What's for supper?' she asked the empty cold stove.

'Bread and tea,' Thabo answered. 'That's all we ever eat in this house. These girls won't cook.'

'Want hulle's bloody oulik,' Ma

Chauke thought. She sighed as her lack of authority over her children was again brought home to her. Why couldn't she feel free to day they waste time at those silly Power meetings. What's so special about this Power?

'Hey you,' she said, pulling Thabo by the sleeve, to stop him from chasing Meisie round the table, 'take two rand from my bag. Buy one rand mince meat, a packet of onions and a packet of tomatoes. Is there enough bread?'

'Half loaf!' Meisie shouted.

'You might as well bring a loaf of bread. No don't buy bread. I'll cook pap.'

After Thabo had left, Ma Chauke asked Meisie when her aunt came back from work.

'Eight o'clock,' Meisie answered.

That was one other thing which was very wrong, this sleeping-in. She had been trying for some time now to find a sleep-out job. The money was not right. She barely managed with what she earned — anything less than her present salary would be grossly inadequate. Her sister was very good with the children, but she worked shifts. Some weeks she came back very late like today, and other weeks she worked at night. Those weeks when she came back early and could spend the evenings and the nights with the children, Ma Chauke slept easy. However, for the foreseeable future nothing else could be arranged.

Ma Chauke half filled a pot with water and put it on the primus stove which Meisie had lit.

'When do you do your homework, Meisie?' she asked.

'I've no homework,' Meisie answered defiantly.

'When do you read your school books?' Ma Chauke could feel her daughter's agitation. It took her much effort to check the storm brewing within her. 'Fetch your books now,' she said sternly.

Meisie dragged herself to the bedroom. She came back with the books

and threw them on the table.

'Here they are,' she said.

'Read them,' Ma Chauke said, turning to face her daughter. She grabbed the books from her daughter and gave them close scrutiny. 'Are these books schoolbooks? These dirty, tattered loose sheets of paper? You should see master John's books. They're something to be proud of, and he's two years your junior. You are a disgrace.' She then went to pour mealie meal into the pot of boiling water.

Meisie shuffled her 'books', not knowing whether she was still expected to read them.

Thabo came in carrying the things he had gone to buy. He exchanged meaningful glances with Meisie. He put the parcels on the table and went to the bedroom to fetch his books. On his return he went to sit behind the stove. He propped a book on his knees.

Val came in then. She was surprised to see her mother.

'Hau, mama ke eng?' she asked as she kicked her shoes off her feet.

'Why?' Ma Chauke asked without affection.

Val exchanged glances with Meisie. 'It's not usual for you to be here on a Wednesday,' she retorted.

Val walked to the bedroom barefooted. Meisie and Thabo surreptitiously followed her. Ma Chauke heard her ask her siblings: 'Why is she so sour?'

'She says master John's books can put us to shame.'

'Of course they'll put us to shame,' Val raised her voice. 'He has a maid to fuss over him while we are without a mother to care for us.'

Sometimes Ma Chauke wondered if her children meant her to hear their insults. She went on cooking supper. She couldn't ask Val where she came from, nor scold her for coming back so late, seven forty-five. She no longer felt at ease with her first daughter; they had been apart too long. Besides, there was this abominable thing called Power. The student leaders had eroded the authority of parents. Question any of your children's activities relating to politics, and they called the disciplinary committee to deal with you. That's what they called it, a disciplinary committee — a bunch of presumptuous youths who poked their snouts under your eyes and impudently asked, 'Mme ubada hush-wa?'

There was a knock at the door. Before Ma Chauke could answer, her sister came in.

'What time did you arrive?' her sister asked.

'I've already cooked supper,' Ma Chauke answered.

'Oh yes, I really looked forward to coming home tonight. It's nice to know



someone is concerned about you. Where's the gang?'

'In their bedroom. I've been waiting for you, I'd like to change into something loose.'

The two sisters went to the other bedroom. Ma Chauke's sister unlocked it and they entered. After changing Ma Chauke went back to the kitchen to dish out.

As usual supper was not a formal occasion. Ma Chauke and her sister sat at table in the kitchen. Thabo sat behind the stove while Val and Meisie ate in the dining room. Meisie was under the table. The adults went to their bedroom after supper, while the children remained in the kitchen to wash up.

Ma Chauke woke up at nine o'clock. The occasions when she could indulge herself like her madam were few and very far between. However her indulgence ended as soon as her feet touched the floor. She quickly made her bed up and went to the children's bedroom to collect their dirty clothes. While the clothes soaked she washed and made herself a cup of tea.

Cleaning her house was an encumbrance. She preferred her madam's house. The large, carpeted, well-aired rooms were a pleasure to work in.

'Koo,' someone shouted, startling her.

'Come in,' she answered.

A door-to-door furniture salesman came in. 'Good morning mother,' he said shoving a catalogue into Ma Chauke's hand.

'I don't want anything.'

'Our terms are the best in town, we don't repossess, we . . .'

'Honestly, I don't need anything.' Ma Chauke spoke with calculated politeness.

'How can you say that?' The salesman was strutting up and down the kitchen. 'Look at your stove, it's old-fashioned and broken. You can no longer find parts for these stoves. Buy a new one.'

'Young man,' Ma Chauke said, 'out.' She caught hold of the salesman's left shoulder and turned him to face the door. The salesman left. Silly brute, Ma Chauke thought. He'd be shown his place in no time in the suburbs.

She went on with the cleaning. She then washed the children's clothes. Just after she had hung them a wind storm broke. She was annoyed. The tiniest whiff of wind and you had a dust storm. Damn Soweto. As she was going to take the clothes off the line the storm abated. However, the clothes had to come down. She rinsed them and hung them up again.

While she darted in and out of the house, bending here and poking there, chuckling one moment and cursing the next, the time flew by. In what seemed to her a very short while, the children had come back from school, and she had done all her housework. She was ready to go back 'home'. She promised to come back the following Thursday as she left.

'Tell your master Andrew to train well in the army. We are waiting for him,' Val shouted after her as she boarded the bus.

They had been very busy that morning preparing for the party. Ma Chauke was very tired when she went to her room at mid-day. She wished all of madam's parties could be like this one — preparation and cleaning up only, no hectic activity behind the scenes during the party.

The madam had said the guests would leave at five, but Ma Chauke wouldn't be needed until five thirty. Ma Chauke thought if she started cleaning at five she would finish sooner than she would if she started at five thirty. She would start with the things already in the kitchen, then she wouldn't disturb anything.

The wine glass slipped from her soaped hands. Fortunately she was able to cup her hands and catch it. Ma Chauke couldn't believe it. She had actually overheard her madam tell her husband, 'Phil dear, will you please see to it that Ma Chauke is here at five thirty? I still distrust my capacity to deal with blacks. There was a moment during the ceremony when I knew I'd have lynched any black who'd entered the room even if it had been Ma Chauke.'

That night sleep eluded Ma Chauke. She had always prided herself on working for an English-speaking family, a family belonging to the Progressive Party and moving exclusively in Progressive Party circles. When Val rambled on about her revolution nonsense, she told her, 'Nna makgowa aka a buella batho.' These people were supposed to be on the black man's side. They always told them, 'Your children were lured into the wilderness by the irresponsible Mandelas and the sensation-seeking Sobukwes. We will win them back with love.' ■

# A Gift for Rajendra

A story by Jayapraga Reddy

Illustration by Jacqui Nolte

When he reached the top of the hill, he paused, breathing heavily. With each day the climb seemed to grow steeper. He leant on his walking stick and remembered sadly how once he used to roam the countryside with an effortless ease. Then he had been young. But as his gaze wandered over the sun-drenched countryside, he mourned more than the passing of his youth.

He remembered a time when people cared for each other, when he was welcome in every home in the district, whether his services as a home barber were needed or not. Now the countryside was dotted with houses filled with strangers who did little to hide their scorn for his out-dated services. He realised that his was a dying trade, and would end with him after being passed down through the generations. His heart was heavy as he thought of these things, but change was something to which he had resigned himself long ago.

The mist lifted from the hills like a gossamer curtain. At the foot of the hill he could see his little tin shanty huddled like a shame-faced refugee. He thought of his wife waiting there, worn out and ailing but bearing his hardships patiently, and his heart lifted a little. He tucked the brown paper parcel of instruments more firmly under his arm and resumed his walk.

Outside the gate of the first cottage he paused. He could hear voices raised in anger. Ah, it was the old woman again, he thought knowingly as he went up the path. The old woman heard the tap, tap of his cane and thrust her head around the open doorway.

'Ah, Barber!' she said, delighted to have an audience.

She waddled onto the verandah. The chair creaked ominously as she lowered her ponderous weight into it. He sank thankfully into the other chair. She champed busily on the wad of betel leaves and eyed him speculatively for a moment. To the barber she seemed like some smooth, self-satisfied prize sow.

'Ah, you are lucky you don't have daughters-in-law living with you! The whole day long they lie around like pampered queens afraid to dirty their hands! Half the morning gone already and nothing done around the house! Agh!'

Her plump hands quivered in an expression of disgust. He chuckled good-humouredly.

'Ah, but it is good to take it easy. It is so hot,' he said.

'Hot! Hot!' she echoed incredulously. 'At their age I could do twice the amount of work in half the time, heat or no heat!'

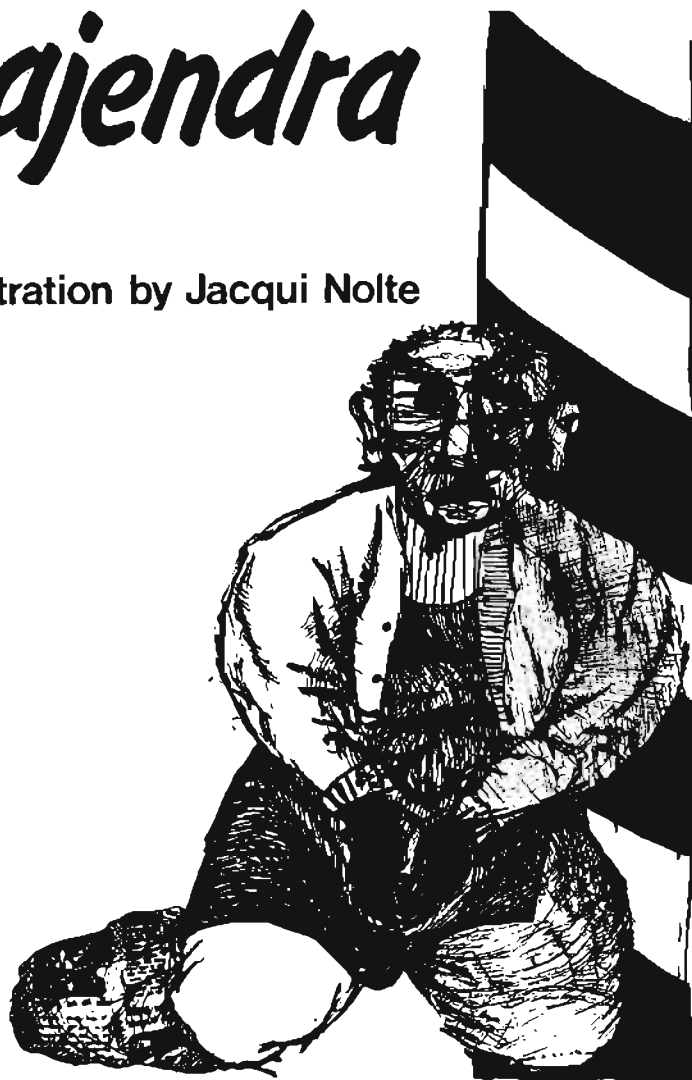
She paused to adjust the sari over her head which had slipped in her agitation. Two little boys peeped around the corner of the house.

'Lalitha! Lalitha!' the old woman called.

Lalitha appeared almost at once. She was the youngest daughter-in-law and as lovely as an Indian madonna, all serene and sylph-like.

'Bring the boys. They must have their hair cut,' the old woman ordered.

The boys fled squealing in protest. But Lalitha was after them running as lightly as a deer, her sari billowing around her. The barber picked up the younger child and placed him



on his knee.

'Now why all the fuss? If you promise to stop crying, I'll let you play with the clipper,' he said coaxingly.

He stopped crying at once. The barber beamed at him with avuncular benevolence. The child smiled tremulously. The barber rose and placed the child on the chair. He unwrapped his instruments. The paper was so old that the lines of its folds were permanently scored in. Lalitha eyed the instruments doubtfully. They were so old that some of the bushes had hardly any bristles. She would have to start taking the boys to the new barber shop which had been recently opened in the district. This was all so primitive.

The barber's scissors snipped busily as he chatted on amicably. With the white sheet tucked around him, the child sat stiff with rebellion. When it was over, he was allowed his promised reward.

His next call brought him to one of the best homes in the district. It was the home of a wealthy businessman. For years he and his sons had been some of the barber's best customers. But recently there had been a change.

Mr Singh himself answered the door. He was a middle-aged man, small and dapper.

'Ah, come in, Barber!' said Mr Singh cordially.

The barber noticed that his hair had been recently cut. He doffed his hat politely.

'I don't think I'll come in, Mr Singh. I must try and make as many calls as possible this morning.'

He tried to sound brisk and businesslike but failed when his face betrayed his weariness.

Mr Singh cleared his throat uneasily.

'Ah yes, of course. But it is so hot now. Why not come in for a while and have something to drink?'

They went into the sitting-room which was cool and restful. How well he knew this room, and indeed every member of the family! But now it seemed his services were no longer



required.

Mr Singh drummed on the arm of his chair. His wife entered with a tray on which were glasses of cool drinks and a platter of samoosas.

'Have you met the new barber?' asked Mr Singh casually.

'No, but I've passed his shop,' the barber said quietly.

'I've been to his shop. It's really worth it. The service is very good. You are given a shampoo and shave. Everything is clean and spotless. He uses disposable towels and everything is new and modern.'

New and modern. Yes, disposable towels were certainly new and modern, the barber thought sadly.

'And he cleans his instruments after every customer,' Mr Singh added meaningfully.

The barber bit into a meat-filled triangle of pastry.

'Such services must be very expensive,' he pointed out.

'Ah yes,' said Mr Singh blandly.

'I wonder if everyone in the district can afford it.'

'Well, whether they can or not, I don't know. But I do know his shop is always full,' said Mr Singh.

The barber knew what this implied; Mr Singh and his sons were no longer his customers. Mr Singh's enthusiastic approval of the new barber was an open rejection of his services. But it was not the loss of custom which cut him to the quick. It was something which went much deeper, which to him was a sort of betrayal, for he had believed in them. He knew now that he had been wrong. And he acknowledged within himself that he was too old, too tired to compete with a younger man who could offer the public a better service.

He heaved himself to his feet. He was tired and it was not yet midday. And outside the world was so intense with the summer and heat.

'Thank you very much for the refreshment. Now I must be on my way. I must make as many calls as possible today,' he said courteously.

His next few calls were fruitless. The children were away on holiday or the boys were not in the mood. Some had already had their hair cut by the new barber. Their evasiveness, their eagerness to shut the door and their failure to invite him in for a chat, did not escape his notice. Their vague and apologetic manner irked him. Did they take him for a fool?

He turned away and decided to make one last call for the day. Even if there was no business for him, he knew he was always welcome at Mrs Khan's.

Mrs Khan herself answered his knock. Her soft eyes lit up with a smile and then darkened with concern.



'Why Barber! You look so tired! Come in and rest for a while. You shouldn't go around in this murderous heat!' she exclaimed.

'It is kind of you. But I think it is cooler under the trees,' he observed.

'Ah that is so. A good idea,' she said briskly.

They strolled towards the bench under the trees. The peace and stillness of the garden touched them like the very presence of God. And as the peace of it touched him, he felt his cares slipping from him.

'If you have come for my sons then your call has been in vain, for they are all growing their hair,' she said lightly.

'Ha, who isn't these days?' he replied, sauthing.

She was a perceptive woman and she probed beneath the surface of the words. Her eyes kindled with sympathy.

'Is business that bad, Barber?' she asked softly.

'Business? It is no business, just a struggle,' he said heavily.

'I think it is so unfair. The new barber sits in one place and gets all the business and yet you go to their very doors!' she exclaimed indignantly.

He could smile now. Her sympathy and concern comforted him.

'Ah, but that is life. People are fickle and always ready for anything new and exciting. If they prefer the new barber, then I must accept that,' he said philosophically.

'Yes, what else can you do?' she agreed, sighing.

She decided to channel the conversation in a new direction.

'Have you been to the new house at the corner?' she asked.

'New house? Have they moved in yet?' he asked.

She nodded. From where they sat they could see the house clearly. It was large and tastefully designed. It looked very expensive. It was certainly not the

type of house that looked as if it was inhabited by people who would welcome his services, he thought sadly.

'I haven't met them yet. But I know that she's a widow and has just one son,' she said.

Just one son. But there was no point in offering him his services.

But when he passed the house on his way home later that afternoon, he hesitated outside the gate. Should he call just out of curiosity? He wondered what they were like. He tried to convince himself that there was no harm in calling but failed. And as he turned away, someone called to him. She had been in the garden all the time and watched him. She came slowly towards the gate. She was tall and slim and too young to be a widow. There was a quietness about her which told him that this was not a happy woman.

'Are you selling something?' she asked quietly.

'No, I'm not,' he answered.

Her glance fell enquiringly upon the parcel under his arm.

'Then what is that you always carry? I've watched you walk this way many times,' she said.

'Oh, this. Soon I'll have to put it away for good,' he said laughing. 'You see, I'm a home barber.'

To his surprise, her eyes lit up with interest.

'Oh! You must come in! Perhaps you can help me!' she exclaimed.

Without waiting for his answer, she turned and led the way in. He followed, puzzled.

Inside, everything looked and felt expensive. His feet sank into the most luxurious carpet. There seemed to be a houseful of servants.

She sat in a chair near the window with the folds of her sari falling softly around her. She looked at him thoughtfully.

'I suppose you know I have just my son,' she began.

'Yes, so I heard,' he said.

'What else have you heard, about my son?' she asked quietly.

'Oh nothing in particular. Nothing,' he answered, surprised.

She rose gracefully.

'I think you should meet him. Then you'll understand.'

She led him to a room, all cool and pleasant with tall, wide windows. He was sitting in a wheelchair, reading. He was young, probably in his early twenties. He was very much like his mother. But the eyes that he turned upon the barber were sombre and painlined. His hair was long and almost reached his shoulders.

'This is my son, Rajendra,' she said.

'Why have you brought him here?' the boy asked irritably.

## TO MY DAUGHTER ON HER 16TH BIRTHDAY

You are the song . . .

You are the song of close smiles  
that unearthed sensual urges  
in our youthful deeps  
leading to your being born

You are the song  
of wide dreams  
steeped in innocent childhood eyes  
as summer rains poured out the winter chills

You are the song  
of tenuous touch  
of minstrel quivers  
of jade on black  
Getting blacks on track

You are the song  
of cool shades under the fig tree  
Reminding me my brother Vusizwe didn't die  
catching funerals of statured men

You are the song  
of stolen anger over a tennis ball  
in the streets of boyhood days' Grangetown

You are the song  
of petal freshness  
as raindrops crawled  
down the window-pane  
on Redcliffe's autumn days

You are the song  
of sad funeral processions  
as we learned before Age Ten  
of  
    six feet graves  
    pure rituals  
    isolated cremations

You are the song  
of crumpled rolls of tears  
The day Mandela was given life sentence  
for standing up to be a true blackman

You are the song  
of prehensile nods from ghetto kids  
playing hopscotch in dirty streets  
& boat races in flooded drains

You are the song  
of adventurous grins  
as we sloped carts down Candella Road  
Sometimes ending up  
in bamboo groves  
and rattan cane hedges

You are the song  
of baptized doubt  
spread on textbook pages  
telling the history of Time

You are the song  
of puzzled stares in Srd. VI  
as we tried to make ABC  
of the Old Testament  
and the Queen of Sheba

You are the song  
of gandaganda stories  
told while burning tyres  
peeling succulent 3/10 sugar cane  
as Hassan told African tales  
from Zanzibari's on the Bluff  
on some cold winter evenings

You are the song  
of black sculpture & paintings  
not created to fill greedy pockets  
at commercial art galleries

You are the song  
perpetuated by African Savannah  
Brought home to Luanda, Maputo  
Rested and embraced in Rufaro

You are the song  
I sing on rare South African Moments  
Reminding me Azania is not lost  
The Isle of Makana shall be brought

You are the song  
in my Problems Department  
Where querying laughs  
& flippant curses pass the day  
To retain my sanities.

You are the song . . .

## Continued from page 39

'He is a barber, Rajendra,' she explained, smiling.

The boy looked at him coolly. Then he turned back to his book and showed no further interest in them.

When they went back to the living-room, she apologised for his rudeness.

'Actually he is not really a rude person. But since the accident he has changed so much. It has taken him a year to recover from it, and to get used

to the idea that he will never walk again. But I tell him he is still lucky, his father died in the crash,' she said quietly.

He listened and was moved to compassion.

'You must have noticed his long hair,' she continued. 'He refuses to go out to crowded places and he won't go to the barber shops. And I don't know the barber in this district well enough to ask him to come to the house.'

He nodded understandingly. And he knew too that at last he had found someone who really needed his services. It was the kind of service he would gladly provide. He rose and gathered up his parcel.

'But there is no problem, I will come. I'll come whenever he needs me,' he promised.

She smiled and inclined her head gracefully. ■

# Black Writers in South Africa

To avoid scratching the ground backwards like chickens we decided to focus on the on-going struggle for cultural identity: what were we like before, what are we like right now and what do we deserve to be. Writers in Azania are in a position to make us understand ourselves better. Is it worthwhile to write?

At Khotso House, Johannesburg, after a steering committee meeting of the African Writers' Association, Miriam Tlali, Sipho Sepamla and Mthobi Mutloatse grouped together to answer questions on their experience in the previous decade of black literature. We hope other writers will join the panel in future issues of *Staffrider*.

Jaki Seroke

SIPHO: I have a very strange history in the sphere of writing. Although I lived through the period of the Sixties I really wasn't part of the writing scene. I knew about *Classic* for instance. I knew about the writings of the Mphahleles, the Motjuwadis, Casey Motsisi and the others. But like I say, it was from a distance. I was too much involved with firstly the academic world of teaching. For me, at that time, your Wordsworth and Shakespeare were the things that I was involved in. And later on when I worked at the Union Artists I got involved in play-writing. There was *King Kong*. There was *Sponono*. These were the things that had central influence in the black literary world. There was also of course Gibson Kente. These were the things I was involved in. Much later, I think as a result of working at the Union Artists, I became involved with writing itself, taking an interest in the writings of Can Themba and others.

It is true that one was not hit by the writings of local people at that time because the 60s are noted for the demise of writing locally; the government having introduced the Publications Act, as you may remember, in 1963. This wiped out the works of many local writers. Whoever was interested in local writing found that there was a vacuum. We found ourselves working through this vacuum and we had to look outside South Africa. Our point of departure was a very difficult one.

It was towards the end of the Sixties that suddenly the liberals, in particular, took an interest in Oswald Mtshali's writings, leading to the appearance early in the Seventies of his *Sounds of a Cowhide Drum*, followed later by Serote's *Yakhal'inkomo*. That opened possibilities that were remote in the Sixties. The white publisher was becoming interested in works by black writers. It was not until Wally and Oswald were published that we realised this possibility. I don't remember any work being published during the Sixties.

JAKI: What happened to the efforts of Nat Nakasa, who published *Classic* magazine? After he took an exit permit it appears that the liberals took hold of the reins of black writing. Is it the vacuum of the Sixties that brought this situation about? Oswald Mtshali's book, for instance, had a suburban orientation.

MOTHOBHI: It just happened to have found a ready market, the liberals. It was an unfortunate way to have emerged. He was almost put on a pedestal — then there was no follow-up. (*Fireflames* by Oswald Mtshali was published and banned in 1980). There was the obvious reaction. The difference that also arose between him and Mongane Serote was one of those unfortunate things. Some of the academics made a big story out of that.

There was this big gap between the days of Nat Nakasa and those of Oswald Mtshali. I would say the departure of

*Classic* was also caused by different editors. It was the *Classic* of Nat Nakasa. When he left the image was not the same.

SIPHO: Nat left in about '64 or '65. Barney Simon took it over but the very fact that he was white and *Classic* had been started by a black man meant that there would be a difference in tone, for instance.

I think we must not forget that it was inevitable that Mtshali would be picked up by the liberals. Unfortunately black people had not yet found it necessary to spend time on literature. Literature was still a thing for the academics. The public did not buy books so it meant black writing would be propped up by white people. It was discouraging. You depend on your homeground people to thrive. This continues to be a problem, to start with, for black writers.

JAKI: In the early Seventies black poets withdrew from a poetry reading at Wits University. You were invited to read too, bra Sipho. What was the stand taken?

SIPHO: Oh yes, there was a programme called 'Black Thoughts'. I must be quite honest, that took me by surprise. I live in Benoni and I had not been involved in the discussions that might have taken place behind the scenes. Don Mattera was not yet banned then, and he and I tried to persuade the young chaps to read their works, but they just walked away. They felt strongly against whites being there. This whole thing was unfortunate in that here we were in a white institution all the way from the townships. Whom did we expect to be in the audience other than a mixed group? That's why I thought it was unfortunate for them to walk out at that stage when it was quite clear all along that there would be white faces. In any case there's never been a programme like that one organised by Wits University since then.

MOTHOBHI: Another aspect that we should mention is the black press. The black press of that period did not promote black literature. For instance they could have taken up *Classic* and asked questions, or sort of generated some readership interest. It just happened that *Classic* was read by serious-minded people; most of them white. One aspect that is disturbing is that even up to today the black press seems not to have found its cultural base. It is still mostly conceived on the western concept of viewing our life.

SIPHO: I think you are right to say that the so-called black press hasn't committed itself to the advancement of creative writing by blacks in this country. They come onto the scene, it seems, by accident. When, for instance, a book has been brought out.

MOTHOBHI: They should not only concern themselves with *our* works, there is also the whole black diaspora. People would like to know what is happening in, say, Swaziland. Perhaps the press is condoning the implication that we are



**'I'd like to present my stories with the black audience in mind and I have never really intended to write for a white audience. I don't think it's important at this point. I don't think I could have taken to writing if it was not my desire to take part in the process of change in this country.'**

part of Europe, not of Africa. This can be corrected through the media, so that at least the local people can wake up. It is not healthy when we see a political happening here in isolation from the rest of Africa, just a South African thing. That's not true.

JAKI: MOTHOBHI, what you are saying could be misconstrued. Most of the early black writers started in journalism before turning to creative writing. We'll create a problem if we are going to draw a line between the journalists and creative writers.

MOTHOBHI: In fact all of our pioneers had some stint in journalism. But today it seems the trend is reversed. I don't know whether it's a misunderstanding, or what. We seem not to be together in the whole thing. The journalists are one side and the creative writers the other side. The press seems not interested in what our literature is all about. People do not understand the road we are taking. They look at literature in isolation rather than as part of the whole political picture. No-one acknowledges the fact that creative writing has made greater strides than black journalism over the last ten years.

Most of the press is so sweeping in its criticism of the new wave of black writing. They say it is too obviously political; it cannot offer anything else. We see the new writing as part of what is happening. It is a type of writing

that is perfectly suited to the times. We need a writing that records exactly the situation we live in, and any type of writing which ignores the urgency of political events will be irrelevant.

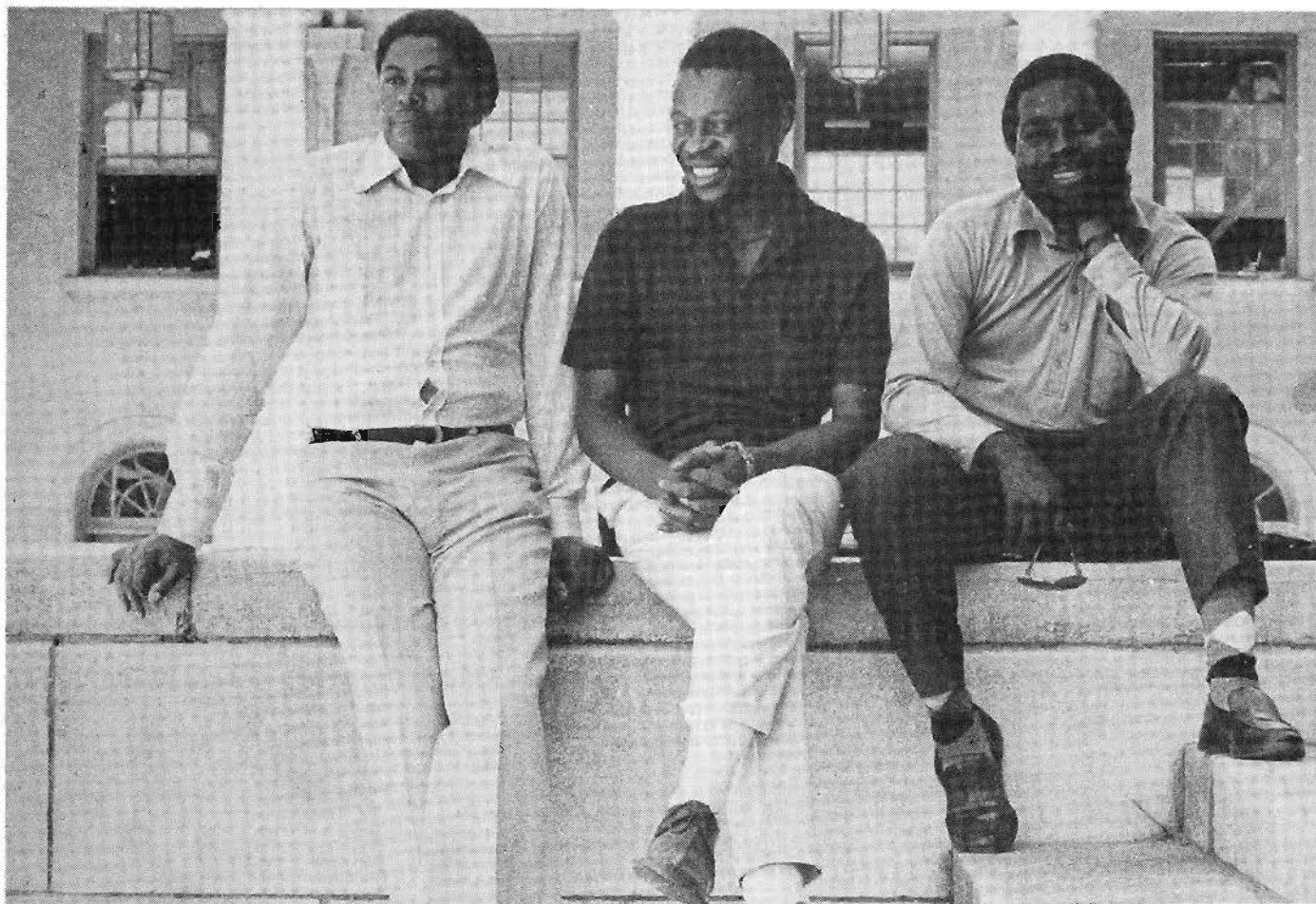
JAKI: We are tackling a crucial question when we talk about critics. An argument has been advanced that because of the scarcity of qualified people, blacks who are well versed in the theory of literature, the standard of black criticism does not rise. Inevitably the role of midwife is played by people with foreign concepts.

MIRIAM: This is very interesting. These so-called critics labour under a misconception in that they say that in order to write you have to be a literary scholar. I don't believe in that sort of thing. It reminds me of people who accuse us of being, just as you say, too political. To speak about the matters just as they are instead of building them into the emotions of the reader. As if it's just reporting. I know. I have been accused of that. What I believe in is that we can never be writers unless we reflect the true position of what is taking place and try to carry the reader along with us.

A critic once said black South African writers write as though Dostoyevsky and Kafka had never lived. But these are Russian writers, Czechoslovakian writers, you see.

Also, the novel has changed. It is not what it used to be. We no longer want to copy Dostoyevsky and them. I think these arguments are silly. I don't agree with that at all. Why should we adhere to these self-professed critics of literature? Why are we tied up by the role the critics assign to us? It is the reader who must judge, not those masters of literature.

Writing is an art like all the other forms and it should not be pipelined or squeezed in a watertight channel. A student of literature, who is also an aspiring writer, should learn from books as much as possible. But in exercising his creative vision he should be free to acquire his knowledge, not only to imitate, but to innovate, to divert or dissent from accepted traditions. His way should be open to unknown spheres



*Sipho Sepamla, Mongane W Serote, and Oswald Mtshali in the seventies.*

‘People do not understand the road we are taking. They look at literature in isolation rather than as part of the whole political picture. No-one acknowledges the fact that creative writing has made greater strides over the last ten years.’



and set the pace of advancement. That is what I believe creativity is. We must continue to explore and never forget our main task of being engaged in a psychological battle for the minds of the people.

The System. It took years for the System to create the conditions that influence the minds of the people. It will take time too for the writer to reverse these conditions. Not only for those who write, but taking the people along with us. If we write for ourselves that won't help. We shouldn't be trapped like the 1950s generation of writers who had their books read by a few at the top of the masses.

*(If there was a gap in the fifties between the writers and the masses, there's also a gap now between the writers of the present and the experience of the past. The panel members had a lot to say on this theme of continuity.)*

MOTHOBI: We can recapture the past with some of the people who lived through those days.

SIPHO: Whatever critics say they must take cognisance of the historical perspective that is governing the present day writer. It is important to be aware that the present day writer comes almost from nowhere. Your Dostoyevsky, your Kafka are people we are not exposed to. And again it should be borne in mind that writing relates to tradition. You just don't write from nowhere. If you do, you got to set your own standards and that's not easy. This is why we have problems today because we have been forced to set our own standards. We are, at the same time, not saying we are not going to look at the things that went on before us. On the whole, whether we like it or not, we've got to find our own ground. We grow, we grapple.

MOTHOBI: We would like to determine our future concerning what is happening here. Not what America or others are saying about our books. It's a new language that we are creating.

SIPHO: It should be borne in mind that there is an audience for us. But it is also our task to challenge that audience to read. You cannot make people read if you do not relate to their world. We are creating an audience for ourselves. Those who come after us will look at other qualities of writing which we've ignored.

MIRIAM: It is said that *Amandla* is not a novel but a statement. I wonder what a novel is. In my writings I never try to copy somebody or adopt principles set down by scholars. I have read quite a lot of literature. I have always remarked that I'd like to present my stories with the black audience in mind and I have never really intended to write for a white audience. I don't think it's important at this point. I don't think I could have taken to writing if it was not my desire to take part in the process of change in this country.

MOTHOBI: Concerning black writers here, the Ugandan writer Peter Nazareth has said, 'It is fashionable to criticise South African writing because it is too obsessed with apartheid. But in South Africa the source of the faults that make the social system unjust is the all pervasive force of apartheid.' Here is an outsider who understands the situation here.

Writers in outside countries are reviewed by other writers. Alex Haley's *Roots* was reviewed by James Baldwin. That's a compliment! We should make a stipulation: we would like to

be reviewed by our peers!

SIPHO: Ja, you know, I must say we are full of self-hate as black people in this country. Instead of encouraging a person who is making an attempt we try to destroy this person. What we hope to gain mystifies me. There is nothing that a so-called critic will gain by destroying this book. Instead he will prevent the black people from making any progress. It is from his beginnings — humble as they are, poor as they are — that a lot can come out. It is really disturbing and very unfortunate that some of these critics are BC adherents. It appears they have not understood the meaning of black consciousness. We have to go to the people, like Miriam says. It is the man in the street — how he understands BC — that I feel we must listen to, rather than people who'll come with the jargon that they've picked up from American magazines to tell us what BC is all about. Whereas in their daily lives they don't know what it means.

MOTHOBI: We are not working in a vacuum. We have the people to respond to.

JAKI: 'Mama', regarding the position of a black woman who has to look after the household, run errands and several other things, how do you suppose time could be allocated for creativity in that situation?

MIRIAM: Ja, well. I just had to reconcile myself to the conditions already made. To do everything: be a mother, a wife and all else together. I had to do these things. I felt I couldn't write until I had done these, you see. I must say, it is quite a task to write. In the first place you have to be fortunate enough to have education which can enable you to express yourself. Think of a girl who was born round about 1957 who is confronted with Bantu Education as soon as she is a grown person. This makes it impossible for her to perceive and express herself. Some of them have the feeling but lack the ability to do so. I must say I was fortunate to have been born at a time when most of these restrictive measures imposed by Bantu Education did not yet exist. We had 'native education' then.

I have tried to bring young women writers together. I offered my house as a meeting place. You find that they have all the willingness to try and write but they are not able to do it because of these impediments.

MOTHOBI: 'Mama', it is not insurmountable. It needs dedication. Those who have shown willingness should be encouraged to improve.

MIRIAM: Ja, but you've got to read in order to write, Mothobi. The women are subjected to tedious tasks, confined to the kitchen. You've got to outgrow that. I had to outgrow the tendency to clean, clean, clean all the time. These meagre tasks — men are not exposed to them. Even your way of thinking as a black woman is confined. As soon as you wake up, you think of the broom. A man only thinks of getting up and going to see his friend or perhaps even reading. I had to break from such traditions and even educate my husband.

MOTHOBI: Ja, the black man has to realise that he is not the greater partner. He has to acknowledge the talent that is coming out from the other partner. The kitchen syndrome is not the sole domain of the woman. Nature doesn't always work it out so that the brains are always among men in the family. Some of the inhibitions the potential black woman writer has are man-made, literally.

MIRIAM: I am fortunate. My husband has this about him. He will read a book. If it is very interesting, he'll pass it on to me. We will also talk about it.

There are men, for instance, who have stopped me from delivering *Staffrider Series* books to their wives. They say they don't want their wives to be reading books. 'Why should my wife read books?' Honestly, this is true. Many women steal moments to read. ■

## Kippie's Memories

Second half, came Ella Fitzgerald and her group and the same thing happened. Ella was gone! With Herb Ellis (on guitar) and the other guys – one white and two negroes. I can't remember their names.

After the show, I got an autograph from Ella.

And from there, the doctor said to me, 'No, Kippie, I think you're still not awright. You'll have to stay another two weeks in the hospital.' After the two weeks, I was discharged, having been given treatment – like electric shock – three times. That thing can make you stupid.

It makes you to become forgetful. Even now, I'm like that – forgetful. I have this tendency of forgetting things – I can hold a pen and forget where I have put it.

But the doctor said it would do me good. He told me that if one nerve in my brain snapped, I had had it and would eventually become insane, if I kept on thinking too much about music. He said electric shock treatment was the best for me.

Afterwards, I went to this place – I forget it, man . . . Newport Hotel . . . there I met Jonas Gwangwa and the other cast members of King Kong. By the way, the doctor had told me not to booze, but all the same I drank though the doctor had said, 'If you drink, you'll die.'

### BACK HOME

Those who returned to South Africa with me were Mackay Davashe and Abigail Kubheka, while several others remained in London.

I had to come back home because I could no longer stomach it in London. Oh well, a week after my arrival, I went to Dorkay House where Mr Ian Bernhardt began to run musical shows for some of us there – including the late pianist, Gideon Nxumalo. We played at City Hall, Selbourne Hall and some nightclubs here and there. Gideon was just too fantastic! I mean, as a musician. I would say, he was a born musician, though he was much more into classic music, ya. But he was a master – he could read and write music well. He could handle that instrument of his!

Oh yah, I remember so clearly now moments in what I believe was the best small band in the country – Jazz Epistles, featuring Dollar Brand on piano, Hugh Masekela on trumpet, Jonas Gwangwa on trombone, and Makhaya Ntshoko on drums, and me on alto saxophone.

I now recall 'Scullery Department', which I composed and recorded on our first album, Jazz Epistles Volume One.

We were playing at a certain nightclub in Johannesburg. During a musical break, we were taken to the kitchen to have our meal. Yah, we sat down in that kitchen, eating.

Then I said, 'By right, you know Dollar, this is all nonsense – this idea of us being taken into the kitchen when there's a break.'

I further said to the guys: 'Are we kitchen "boys". Aren't we here to entertain the people? Aren't we the "thing" here?'

Dollar replied in a soft and skollie-like voice: 'Ja, man, jy praat die waarheid ou pellie.'

There and then I started to think of a song . . . to remember the kitchen incident by, but I didn't think in terms of the word scullery. It was suggested by Dollar.

He said, 'Ja, ou pellie, ons kom nou en dan by die kombuis . . . the scullery department.'



Kippie Moeketsi

photo, Mabu Nkadimeng

And that's how that song was born, because I said to the guys. 'Yes, I should write a song called "Scullery Department"!'

After discussing this, we immediately called the son of the owner of the nightclub into the kitchen and told him:

'Look here pellie, it is not good this thing of you bringing us into the kitchen for our meal.

'You'd better see that we get our own table right there among the customers. We're also important in this whole affair, you know?'

'In fact, we ARE the thing here! And do you know, if it were not for us, we're telling you you'd have no business.'

'But you know chaps, my licence,' he replied.

We answered back: 'Your licence? Why don't they stop us playing in front of whites?'

After that, he went away – and set a table for us right among the customers!

The Jazz Epistles was the best band I ever played in, here in South Africa.

# The Stories of Mtutuzeli Matshoba

A Critique by Mike Vaughan

In this article Mike Vaughan examines the stories in *Call Me Not A Man* and finds certain common concerns in them.



Matshoba's stories were first published in *Staffrider*. Some of them were then collected into a single volume, *Call Me Not A Man*, published in the cheapish, soft-cover format of the *Staffrider Series*, in 1979. This volume has subsequently been banned (for distribution, though not for possession) in South Africa. African literature is regarded by the agents of cultural control as being a potentially volatile and dangerous cultural area. The stance and subject-matter of Matshoba's stories are certainly much closer to immediate questions of social practice, in the modern urban-industrial context.

I shall begin with a brief summary of Matshoba's subject-matter. The first story in the volume, *My Friend, the Out-cast*, concerns a family who are thrown out of their rented home in Mzimhlophe (a township of Soweto) for alleged non-payment of rent. This, however, is a fabrication used by officials of WRAB (West Rand Administration Board) in order to find accommodation for those who are prepared to pay a bribe. When the petty-bourgeois individual who got the family's home in this way turns up, and finds the people outside the house with their belongings (a scene he'd never visualised) — he refuses to take the house.

The title story, *Call Me Not a Man*, concerns the role of African police reservists in the townships. They use their authority as minor agents of state repression to extract what is essentially a *personal fine* from workers homebound with their weekend pay-packets (for alleged non-possession of passes, etc.). The title derives from the humiliation of having to look on while these things happen: of having no means of effective self-assertion.

*A Glimpse of Slavery* is about farm labour. Protagonist-Matshoba is sentenced to a prison term for squaring up against a white individual at his place of employment. Such short term prisoners can be sent out to remote farms to work off their sentence. The story describes conditions on such a farm.

*A Son of the First Generation* concerns a young man whose lover and bride-to-be gives birth to a . . . *coloured* child! The story goes into the circumstances of this liaison, and ends with an open statement of African solidarity with 'coloureds'.

*A Pilgrimage to the Isle of Makana* describes a journey across South Africa, from Mzimhlophe to Robben Island, on the part of protagonist-Matshoba, in order to visit a close relation in prison there as a political offender. The story focuses upon the place Robben Island has in African consciousness.

*Three Days in the Land of a Dying Illusion* describes another journey, this time to the Transkei, by train and by bus — just to see what the 'homelands' really add up to. Protagonist-Matshoba visits some petty-bourgeois acquaintances in the capital, Umtata, whose style of life turns out to be vapid and parasitic. His real interest is only aroused when he is in the company of the migrant workers, moving be-

tween the mines and the homelands in an endless, compelled cycle.

The final story, *Behind the Veil of Complacency*, focuses upon the lyricism of a relationship between two young lovers, rudely shattered when the young man is accused of stealing an orange by a white shopkeeper.

### CAN THE WRITER BECOME THE STORYTELLER? A CRITIQUE OF MATSHOBA'S STORIES

The theme reflected in the title of this section derives from an essay by Walter Benjamin. There is a contradiction between producing for a *public*, and assuming a relation of participatory immediacy with a *community* (that is, adopting the role of the storyteller). However, Benjamin's theme of the opposition in social role between the *novelist* and the *storyteller* is highly suggestive about the literary project in which Matshoba is engaged.

To begin with, I shall concentrate upon the most striking features of Matshoba's break with the aesthetics of liberalism, in his concern to produce a fiction closely in touch with popular experience.

In the first place, the short story form is worth commenting on. Of course, in comparison with the novel, it is brief, pithy, immediate: it requires a relatively small space of privacy. Matshoba uses the form to convey the pressured, disrupted space of intersubjective life. At the same time, he develops the theme of the *traveller*, which both maintains the momentum of pressurised, impelled subjectivity (stories are overheard on crowded commuter trains), and evokes the motif of reflection upon experience, of disengagement from the immediate (looking out of a window upon the world in which one is usually immersed).

Secondly, the whole liberal preoccupation with the individual interiority, and hence with subtle and elaborate characterisation, is dispensed with. Characterisation establishes individual specificity and separateness, a function which is not relevant to Matshoba's project. Rather than character, Matshoba concentrates upon *situation*. Each story has an *exemplary* quality: it treats the situation that is its subject-matter as a model situation, from which a lesson can be derived.

The illusion-creating fictional narrative is shallow, and not allowed to develop the semblance of autonomy. It is constantly punctuated by a non-fictional narrative voice, a voice of social and historical analysis, of practical advice, of counsel. Matshoba adopts the narrative role of the friend, the sharer of experience. In formal terms, the space between fiction and actuality is abbreviated.

The theme of *counsel* is prominent in the stories. The prominence of this theme is related to Matshoba's concern with the exemplary or model-like character of the story situ-

ation. A situation is exemplary when it reflects an aspect of common experience: counsel derives from interchange based on mutuality of experience.

*Roughly, here is the story of my friend. Mind you, I was not there when it all started to happen, but I can imagine what took place; what with such things being part of life for us darkies. We read about them in the papers, we hear about them every other day, we come across the people who bring them about, who cause our friends pain and sorrow, many times in our lives. But when you read about it or hear about it, it is never as real as when it happens to someone who is close to you.*

The stories, then, are a medium of counsel about some of the exemplary situations of township life. The theme of counsel includes the characterisation of the counsel-giving friend. The role of the friend is both necessary and impossible:

*I saw it on their faces the moment my friend and his aged mother stepped out of the ball. I did not ask them anything because I wanted to save them the agony of going over the details of their disastrous meeting with the superintendent. I wished that I had not been there to share those first moments of their tragedy because it was now my responsibility to console them and I did not know what to say. I was dumbfounded and so were they. It was hard for all of us to accept that they were now homeless. We said very few words all the way from Pbefeni to Mzimblope, and Vusi's mother moaned from time to time. I hated to think that I was going to be there when they were removing their belongings from the house, actively assisting them to carry out the heartless bidding of the superintendent.*

The counsel-giving friend takes on a specific phenomenal form in several of the stories: the form of the traveller. Indeed, Matshoba gives the whole motif of travel a central place in his fiction. The journey is an inescapable moment in the life of the African workforce, since it marks the enforced separation between the ghetto-like place of recuperation from labour, the ethnically-defined township, and the site of labour itself. Matshoba interweaves with this compulsory character of the journey, its character as a context for storytelling and counsel:

*'What is it sonny?'*  
*'A baby,' answered the one wearing a grey straw hat with a black band, and a tweed jacket with narrow lapels which was a size too big for him. He replied as from an empty and dejected soul.*  
*'Hey, ndoda. What's wrong with you? Girl or boy?'*  
*'Boy.'*  
*The train staggered, heaved and swayed with its human load, and the hold-on straps hanging over our heads slipped in our grips as the weight of the passengers leaned heavily on us.*  
*You might have thought that our destination was Pandemonium, capital of Blazes, and that we were fast nearing it. The way we were sweating! Streams of sweat trickled down the side of my ribs and cascaded over my brow. Maybe it was the heat which vaporised the cheerfulness out of the young man's soul.*

If we consider the significance of this collection of stories, taken as a whole rather than separately, we can see that Matshoba has given model-like prominence to a range of situations. The stories move between town and country, metropolis and homeland, romantic love and political repression. Matshoba is using his stories to evoke the sense of a map of experience. Once again, the image of the traveller is significant here, for the traveller moves between the scattered

points of the map of experience: he/she is a co-ordinator, a principle of relationship and unity. The traveller, looking out upon the passing landscape and its diverse monuments to the history of the land, also serves the function of representing the (repressed) dimension of history (political consciousness). In short, Matshoba moves from the compulsory moment of travel, to its moment as an image of exploratory, co-ordinating consciousness, of critical and reflective estrangement from the impelled immediacy of local experience. Travel is, in its way, a motif of redemption.

Looking at a map enables one to understand the relation between particular features and the whole landscape. Map-making is important for orienting one's place in the broad movements of popular experience. The traveller is implicitly a map-maker:

*Soweto sprawled to the horizons like a reposing giant. I could not help feeling something like awe, a clutch at the heart of my being. With due respect, the train decelerated to a crawl as it left New Canada station behind and crossed Noordgesig towards Mlamlankunzi station, below Orlando Stadium.*

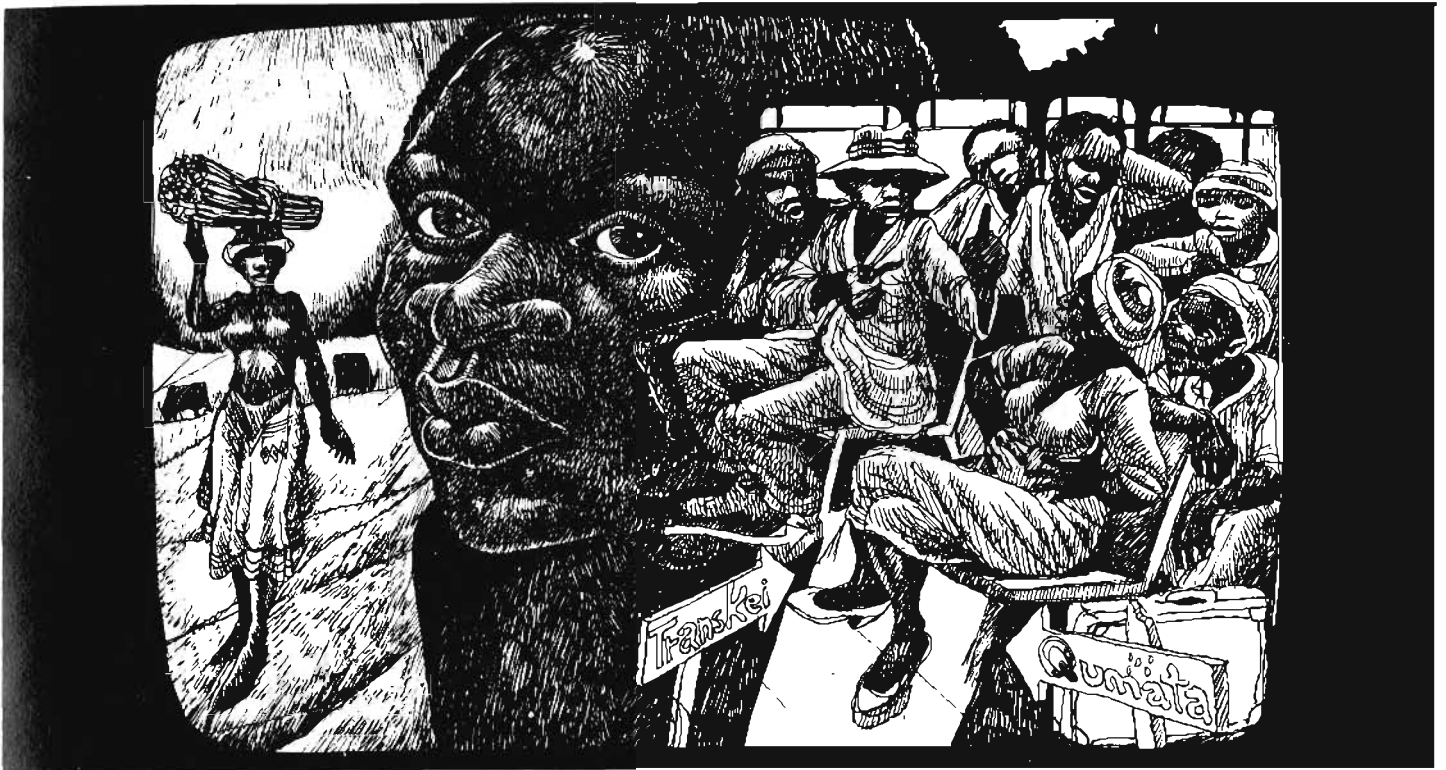
*'There, near that high building which is Mzimblope station, is where I stay. This is Phomolong, beyond is Killarney. Further up is the hostel — the one that engaged in the faction of Seventy Six. The horizon is Meadowlands. The school with the green roof to the right of that ridge, is Orlando West High where the first bullet of Seventy Six snuffed out thirteen-year-old Hector Peterson's life.' I pointed it out to my companion, thinking that perhaps one day when Bantu Education and all the blackman's other ogres have been defeated I shall suggest that the school be named after Hector Peterson, for reasons well understood. My friend looked attentively at the living map I pointed at . . .*

Undertaking a journey is, then, for these reasons a vital motif in Matshoba's stories. The journey does not have to be a literal one: it can be an attitude of mind. In the story *A Glimpse of Slavery*, protagonist-Matshoba decides even to treat his enforced sojourn on a brutal prison labour farm as just such a journey. That is to say, he adopts an attitude whereby the enforced situation is treated as the occasion of an exemplary lesson in broad African experience: the lesson supplied by the conditions of rural labour.

Another motif that arises from Matshoba's concern in his stories to give expression to the popular, communal dimension of experience, rather than the individual dimension, is that of *conversation*. Conversation occupies an important place in the stories, and this place is obviously closely bound up with the themes of friendship and counsel. It also relates to map-making. Protagonist-Matshoba listens to a long conversation on his bus journey into the Transkei. This conversation takes place between returning migrant workers, with an intervention by a young woman which in itself carries an exemplary value. Indeed, the immediate subject of this conversation is sexual relations and roles. The men argue over suspicion and resentment of women, and their bondage to domestic relationships. In this way the men give immediate expression to the contradictions of their predicament as migrant workers: separated from their wives and families during the periods of contractual labour, evolving short term relationships with other women in reaction to this separation. The men have a sense that they do not really control these intimate issues of their lives. The nature of women becomes a target for the relief of frustration and humiliation. The conversation, however, incorporates experiences and perspectives that are divergent, contradictory: it is thus also a medium of counsel, of critical interchange at a spontaneous level.

So far I've tried to identify those motifs in Matshoba's





fiction which reveal his concern to give expression to popular experience in his stories. Now I want to consider some of the features of these stories that seem to me to reflect limitations in Matshoba's development of this concern.

First, a broad question. How does Matshoba represent the nature and source of the exploited/oppressed condition of the vast mass of the African people? The nature of this representation is of fundamental importance, because on it depends the type of strategies that are developed in resistance to exploitation and oppression. On it depends the type of *popular consciousness* that Matshoba is concerned to develop.

This brings us back to the issue of the relative roles of race and class in the South African social formation. The question of the way exploitation and oppression in South Africa is interpreted comes down to the question whether primary stress is placed upon the role of economic factors (capitalism, class relations) or upon racial factors (white domination of blacks).

In Matshoba's stories, we find both types of explanation. Black consciousness provides a pervasive cultural assertion in these stories. At the same time, in specific contexts an economic explanation is put forward for the basic structure of social relations, an explanation that stresses control of the means of production, separation of labour from the means of production, manipulation of the labour market to ensure a continuous excess of supply over demand, and so on. In some stories, the two types of explanation, racial and social, are placed side by side in apparently open contradiction. In *A Glimpse of Slavery*, there is a characteristic conversation between the convict workers, in which the role of the African petty-bourgeoisie is criticised. In this same story, however, in other places, social contradictions are presented as having an essentially racial dynamic. This type of explanation seems to depend ultimately upon a *human nature* problematic: racial prejudice is an expression of distorted human nature:

*I saw that we would never arrive anywhere trying to pinpoint or diagnose the disease that was eating away part of our mottled human society, placed by fate in a most beautiful country to learn to appreciate it in amity, but failing to do so, to the utter dismay of the rest of humanity. 'It's just no use trying to find out these things. But at least let me give my opinion too. I think it's pride, an insane pride that makes*

*them refuse to accept in the face of humanity that they are wrong. On the other hand it's cowardice, a fear of accepting failure and losing face. But then think of how great the man would be who would stand up and declare that they were indeed wrong.'*

We are a long way, here, from the question of control over the means of production! If we were to interject this speech of protagonist-Matshoba with the question: 'Wrong about what?' – the answer would come back: 'About racial prejudice, racially discriminative laws'. A critique based on race implies a resolution of the critique in the abolition of all racial legislation. Such an abolition has tremendous implications for the sphere of politics in South Africa (the balance of class forces), but does not tackle the more fundamental economic problems of the African working masses. (A critique based on racial identity rather than social identity, while it evidently has some broad positive significance for a people suffering from general oppression, has a more conclusively satisfactory character for the petty-bourgeoisie than for the proletariat.)

Of course, in his stories Matshoba is concerned with the *lived quality* of experience. The two types of explanation for exploitation and oppression offered in these stories may combine to form a contradictory dimension of this lived quality. However, there is an absence in Matshoba's presentation of this lived quality. None of the social resources rooted in the environment of urban industrial production are given real space in this presentation. The working conditions of the urban working class, and the strategies of resistance evolved in the context of these working conditions, are largely neglected. There is no emphasis upon the positive potentiality of specifically working class consciousness, or working class forms of solidarity.

In a sense, this absence is bound up with the very prominence of the role of the friend, the giver of counsel. This theme presents community solidarity in a personalised form, and in a form which is relatively abstracted from class roles in the world of production. Emphasis upon the personalised relation of the counsel-giving friend seems to go with a representation of popular consciousness as politically passive and fragmented. The active role of consciousness is only possible in a personalised mode: the friend, the traveller. Is Matshoba in this way giving expression to his own petty-bourgeois activity vis-à-vis working class passivity? ■



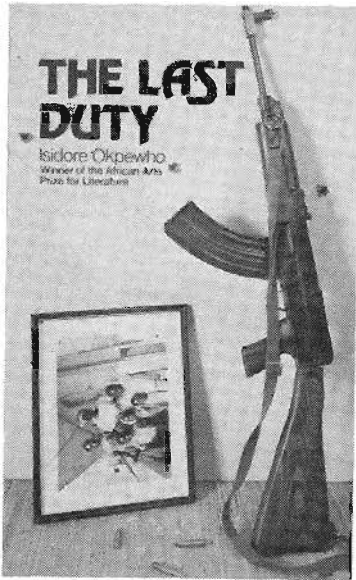
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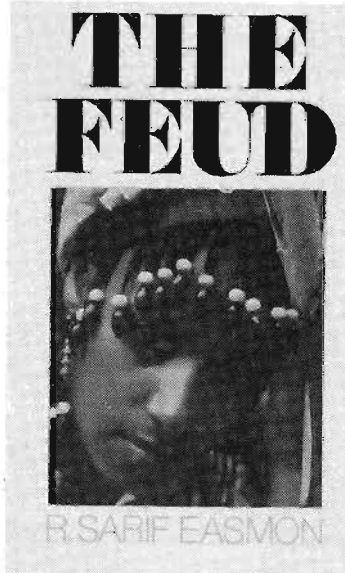


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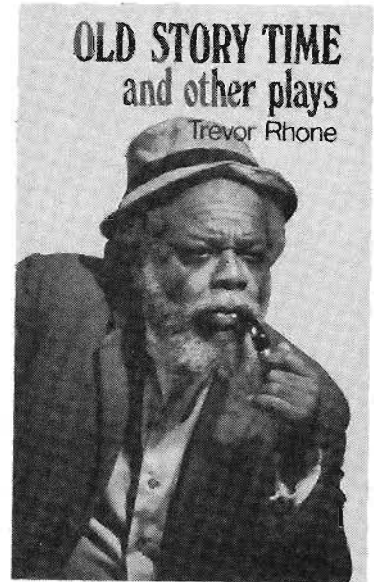


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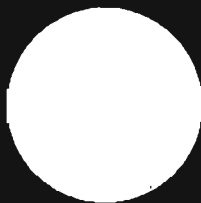
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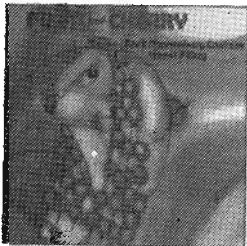


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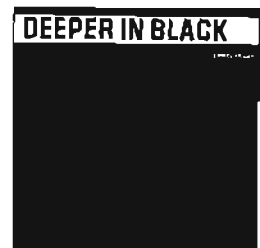
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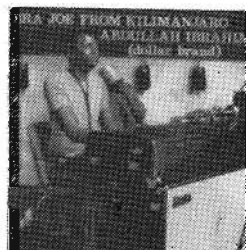
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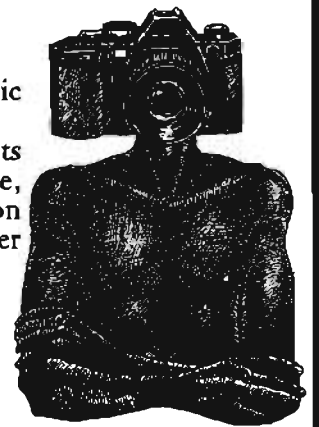
The editor welcomes poem contributions for incorporation in future issues of *New Coin Poetry* and contributors are invited to send them to the Director of the I.S.E.A., P. O. Box 94, Grahamstown, 6140 at any time for re-transmission to him.

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