

Umkhumulansika

The Destruction of the Pillars of the Home



Writings by

B. Mahlaba, N. Shinga, M. Goba, M. Njeje,
N. Mthethwa, D. Nombela

Ukhumulansika

*the destruction of the pillars
of the home*

writings by...

**Beauty Mahlaba, Menzi Goba, Marjorie Njeje, Nkosiyethu
Mthethwa, Dumisani Nombela, Ntombiyenkosi Shinga**

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Culture and Working Life Publications

Durban, December 1992.

ISBN 1-874897-61-1

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Design and Layout by Siven Maslamoney
Printed by Multicopy, UND.

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Editorial Note

UMKHUMULANSIKA - the destruction of the pillars of the homestead - could be a name given to this period of political war in Natal. Thousands of people have become homeless due to the ongoing violence; families have lost their pillars of support due to migrancy, apartheid laws and brutal death. This is Natal since 1985.

This collection of stories, poems and notes reflects the harsh reality of life under the conditions of an ongoing political war. The stories are an indictment of apartheid which continues to haunt particularly the women. They describe how African women suffer multiple oppression and hardships.

The first part consists of a diary kept by Beauty Mahlaba, a retrenched worker, over a week. Most of the course participants do not find time to write during their busy working lives. The notes printed here represent some of the ideas and thoughts which inform their writing.

The second part talks about the particular oppression of African women by other women, and by men.

The third part focuses on the violence experienced by the writers during their childhood.

The texts were written during a creative writing course. This course is part of a training programme in cultural production for workers, run by the Culture and Working Life Project. The sessions were facilitated by Zaida Harneker, Nise Malange and Astrid von Kotze, who also edited the stories and put this collection together.

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The linocuts were done by Nkosiyethu Mthethwa, Dumisani Nombela, Beauty Mahlaba, Ntombiyenkosi Shinga and Bernard Mchunu during Saturday art classes. S'fiso M'kame conducted these sessions. Arts and crafts are another part of the culture course. The artists had never before been given the chance to explore their creative talents.

Thanks are due to Thabisile Sibanyoni for assisting with translation during sessions. We are grateful to Siven Maslamoney for the layout of this book.

This is a third collection of stories, poems and reflections written by workers in Natal. The first two were "Where we come from" (1990) and "The man who could fly" (1991).

Chapter One



Living in times
of war



ISW

Beauty **Mahlaba**

Impilo Enzima

(A hard life)

SATURDAY

There has been a lot of violence again. I haven't been able to do my homework because things were very bad. Shacks were burning, people were dying.

I couldn't pay my accounts this week because of my dismissal from work. Final notice letters keep on coming to me daily, telling me to report to the stores within two days or else they would take legal action against me. I don't know how to respond to those notices because I didn't have a cent and it is difficult to go and face the people from the shop without money. My main problem is that I've been unemployed for seven months now. I decided to pray to God who knows everything. I didn't report to the stores.

When I came home from the culture course I visited my sister to tell her what happened to one of my friends, Jabu. In the train the robbers wanted to take her guitar and run away. Fortunately our neighbour's boy was there, and helped us. My sister said the Kwazulu Police had been chasing the boys with guns in the afternoon. She also told me that we had been informed about

the launching of the IFP branch in our community hall:
everybody was told to be there with a membership card as early
as 10:00 am in the morning. She said she would go to church. I
told her that I'd go to the burial society meeting at Wema.

I wrote a poem today.

Where I come from

I come from the African Canaan
the land of meat, milk and honey
where starvation, destruction
drought and misery are unknown.
Yes, I come from the land of plenty.

I come from the sheltered land,
the land between Ingele and Nzimankulu mountains
where destruction by the wind is unknown.
Yes, I come from the Canaan of Africa.

I come from the fertile valley
the land of different species of herbs and flowers
where diseases are not taken to the doctor
where patients are taken to diviners
where meat is obtained from the wild animals.
Everyone is a hunter there.
Yes, I come from the land
between Ibisi and Umbumbane river.

I come from the land of religion
where the ancestors are more respected than Jesus
where traditional ceremonies and ancestral rituals
are practised.

I come from the land where lobola is still paid.
Yes, I come from Xhosaland.

I come from Machunwini at Umzimkhulu
where the spoors of apartheid can still be traced
where racism, tribalism and sexism
and not democracy are practised.
Yes, I come from Transkei.

SUNDAY

This morning when I wanted to go to Wema there were no taxis from our shack area to the station. The road was full of unknown men wearing funny things made of wool but I couldn't tell what they were. Those things were not jerseys nor towels but I noticed that they had the IFP colours. The men had sticks and assegais, and some of them were whistling. I thought if I followed them they would kill me. So I decided to go to a house and ask for water. The owner of the house said "I think you don't want water; maybe you are scared of those people. Where do they come from? I have never seen them in this area."

Four men with "Shembe" badges came past and I thanked the owner of the house for the water and followed the Shembe people. I was scared to go near the station because there was a lot of whistling, so we had to walk a long distance to catch busses.

Outside the community hall we saw unknown people standing around. Not even one person of the area had come. I thought to myself: "they want to launch the branch with people from other areas, and not from that area." Everybody there was unknown. My neighbour later told me that the meeting took about twenty minutes and after that the men went to attack Uganda where they killed two innocent people. Uganda people were unaware of this attack, they only heard the noise of the guns and whistles. They ran away from their shacks but two of them died.

Last night I also heard the bang...bang... of a gun. I woke up and peeped through the window. I saw a bright light which made everything shine like sunshine, as if it was already in the morning. I heard a woman crying. I opened the window quietly and I saw a shack burning. I looked at my wall clock, it

was ten minutes past twelve. I went to look again and I saw a man running with a woman who was crying following him to the bush.

Four men were standing with guns watching that burning shack. I couldn't sleep. Something was jumping in my chest. In the morning police were taking the corpse from the bush to the mortuary.

MONDAY

I saw a man and his son coming from the supermarket. They were carrying 1kg mealie meal and a small packet of sugar. The man told me that the previous night they had gone to sleep with no sugar, and that they were now going to cook phuthu and eat it with mbhubhudlo. I gave them some potatoes and cabbage and I told them that they must not sleep with nothing to eat. They must tell me so that we can share whatever I have.

I visited my uncle. He and my aunt were digging holes and putting down poles, they were trying to build a house. They were digging the soil full of stones. I tried to help them but I had to leave early, because a stone hurt my leg. A lot of dust was coming up and my uncle was coughing terribly. My aunt was doing a double job using a pick and a spade, because my uncle was not feeling well.

TUESDAY

My sister-in-law told me about Bab'uShembe Inkosi yasekuphakameni at Matabelu near INhlangakazi. I asked one of the old ladies to go with me there because I didn't not know the way. But she said that she had to go and fetch her son's

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clothes from Folweni where the houses were burning. Her son was found at Mshiyeni Hospital. She gave me directions and I went by myself to see Bab'uShembe for the first time in my life. I asked many people about Inkolo of Inkosi yasekuphakameni. They told me many different stories. They were very kind to me.

This week's special news are about the goat, Dennis Sabelo who passed away in the Folweni violence. He is mourned by many people in the township because they were drinking beer with him in the shebeens and he was smoking Craven A Menthol. Many people wanted to attend his funeral on the twenty second of August in Seventeen grave yard.

Unfortunately the funeral didn't take place on that date, because the Umlazi authorities refused to give Mr Sabelo permission to bury his goat. They said that in all these years they have never had a story of a goat being buried in a people's graveyard.

WEDNESDAY

This morning I remembered how I went to visit my sister in law at Inkandla in January. It's a long way from Durban to KwaZulu. I saw lovely butterflies and wild animals and I hoped that I was really going to a peaceful place.

When I reached her home there was nobody there and I had to sit outside. When I heard her husband and his friends coming back, they were singing Zulu songs. They were carrying long sticks in their hands. My sister in law came from the other side with a bucket of water on her head. Her daughter was carrying fruit from the forest.

The next day I saw workers marching, demanding the right to join a union. The KwaZulu government did not allow them as

DOWN WITH THE ASAGAS
WE LOST OUR FAMILI
IES AND HOMES



farmworkers to be unionised. Suddenly vigilantes appeared. They shot and stabbed the workers with assegais. These vigilantes were always fighting with them and the workers were frightened because the vigilantes were helped by sangomas who gave them medicines so that none of them would die.

The following day I visited my sister in law's son who was in hospital. He showed me the bullets which had injured him when he was shot at while fast asleep at home on New year's day.

I saw that it is just as hard to live on the farm as it is in the township.

Today, I went to Isipingo by taxi. On my way I saw many people toyi-toying at Unit seventeen near the men's hostel. On the road a man was lying on a pool of blood with a knife in his head. He was just moving his feet slowly for the last time in his life. I think he had been killed by the hostel dwellers. When I come back home there was a letter for me from Libode. My mother-in-law was asking me to visit because she is missing me. She also said she is worried about me in this violence taking place in our area.

Last night I was fast asleep when I was woken up by the oohm...oohm... of the dogs. I listened and heard men shouting all at the same time. I realised that they were fighting. I walked slowly to the door and I opened it quietly and I saw them kicking down the door of another shack. People were crying inside and nobody bothered to help. I also couldn't help. I closed the door and sat on the chair. I was trembling with fright. I heard the sound of the gun and they ran away.

THURSDAY

This morning the people from that shack went away. Nobody knows where they have gone.

A woman with a baby on her back told me that selling Jik and Glycerine was the only way she and the baby could survive. The baby's father ran away from her when she was three months pregnant. She didn't know where he had gone. I asked my neighbours to buy from her and I also bought in order to help her get something to eat and feed the child. She took the money and went straight to the tuck shop to buy half a loaf of brown bread and 500g sugar. I saw her giving her baby a piece of bread on her back and she also swallowed something. She and the baby must have been very hungry because she didn't even wait to go home and have a proper lunch, she started eating on the road.

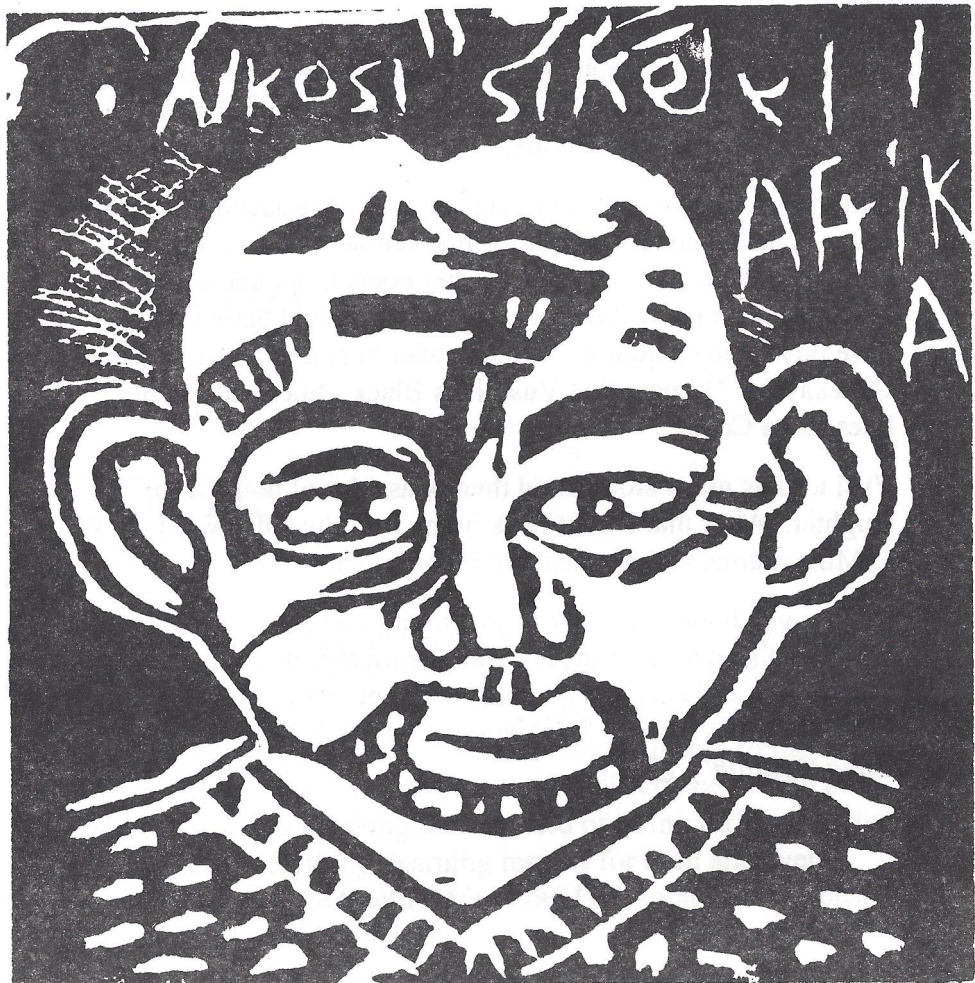
I went to town. At the corner of Victoria and Grey streets a boy touched my shoulder, I turned to see who it was, but I didn't know him. He said to me, "Yahamba yonk'imali yakho." (All your money has gone) I kept quiet because I had heard about this business before. I walked on and an old man came to ask what the boy had said to me but I just zipped my mouth and went to a jewellery shop. I told the shopkeeper that I was having a problem with people following me outside. He told me that I must check if my money was still in my purse or not, because these people have magic. I was worried about my money. I checked and there was nothing wrong. All the way home I kept on checking my purse but my money was still there. At home I had to check it several times again, but nothing had happened. I told my sister about those robbers. She said that she also heard about them and they are dangerous. They claim that your money has been turned into paper and they will help you to change it back, but they rob you.

FRIDAY

I took my blankets off the bed, jumped down - and then put them back again and slept some more. It was very cold outside. A lot of memories came back to me. I remembered ...

- the violence of Ekuthuleni on the second of February this year. The township of Umlazi had smoke and there was the sound of crying people and guns all over Umlazi;
- the day when the warlords came from house to house, with assegaais, looking for my sister;
- when we tried to escape from the violence and went to the rural areas;
- the funeral of Uganda;
- my cousin's wedding where my uncle was killed by his brother-in-law with an assagaai;
- the chimora violence when I saw a young man dead inside the toilet;
- when I passed my exams and my mother had to kill a fowl for me;
- the Zulu police shooting into the train on Workers' Day. Othelweni were standing on the platform with traditional weapons.

After I had woken up, made my bed, cleaned my shack and put some water on the stove somebody knocked on the door. I opened the door and laughed when I saw Vusi, a dismissed worker from Dayanand Gardens Home. He came to see me as we hadn't met for a long time after we had been dismissed. I made breakfast for both of us. While we were still eating my friend Lucia who had been dismissed with us knocked and came



inside. She also laughed and shook Vusi's hand. I made a cup of tea for her. She asked Vusi to come to her house before he left for his home, Mthwalume.

After breakfast we went to Lucia's house. She asked Vusi if she could make something to eat for him but he was no longer hungry. Then she took keys from her pocket, opened a drawer and took out a purse. She took out ten rands and gave it to a little boy to buy a quarter of black label beer and a litre of Coca Cola saying: "I know that Vusi likes Black Label and Beauty likes Coca Cola."

Vusi told us many stories and there was a lot of noise from laughter. After that I went back home and Vusi also went back to Mthwalume, and promised to visit us again.

On my way home I saw six boys singing and dancing. I came nearer to listen to their music, and I heard that it was a church song because I heard the words I've learnt from the Bible. Their song was saying, "*Mshimane abulaya Goliath*" ("A boy killed Goliath"). □

Notes from a Diary

Menzi Goba

Sports

I have never really had an interest in sports but after I watched what was happening in Barcelona my attitude changed completely. I saw people from different countries, in their united spirit, doing their best to bring their countries to the top. I thought if South Africa can bury all their differences of the past and work towards uplifting the standard of living for everybody, deracialising everything, learning respect for each and every human being, maybe South Africa could be counted as the best country in the world of sports.

Many talented people were left behind on the Barcelona trip because of a lack of facilities in their communities, long working hours and no efficient transport to take people back home in time. We need schools with more sports facilities, factories with different sport activities and the support of employers. □

Dumisani Nombela

Caught in the Violence

People in the township are very worried about the violence. The police and army are always present but they fail to stop the violence. Township people say that the hostel people who are mainly Inkatha supporters are responsible. The army and police are taking sides; they are only protecting Inkatha.

Most caught in the violence are the youth. They are fighting very hard to defend their communities. Because of the violence a large number of people have become thugs. Moments of peace when beer is being shared in the shebeens are precious. Everyone can drink, whether they are working or unemployed.

It has become clear to most young people and adults that this violence can never end unless this apartheid government is removed from power, together with its puppets, the homeland leaders who cannot say boo to a goose. □

Marjorie Njeje

Causes of Violence

I think there are two kinds of violence: the active violence and the quiet violence. Quiet violence is when someone is not partaking physically in violent acts. For example, when Jan van Riebeeck was bartering cattle from the Xhosas they were too clever to notice the unfairness of the deal. So they went back and repossessed the cattle. I regard fighting as active violence.

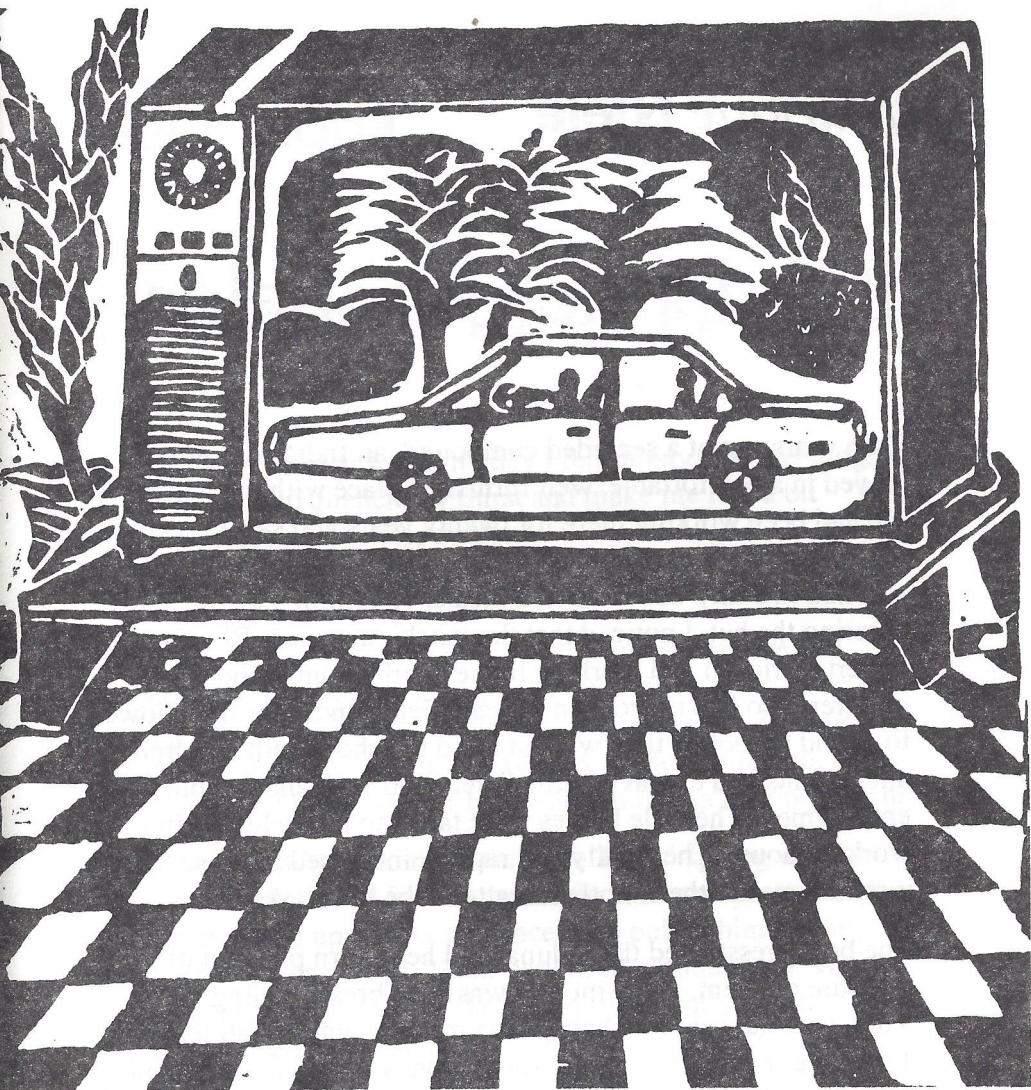
The main ingredients of violence are people selling one another, lying, poverty and joblessness. No matter how hard we pray, peace won't come unless we are totally involved, physically and emotionally. □

Menzi Goba

Images

I saw a man who had been knocked down dead by a combi and was wrapped in plastic and no one could recognise who he was;

I saw another man who was shot down by unknown people for working while others were on strike. □



Marjorie Njeje

Life in the Canefields

Two years ago at a secluded compound, an Indian employer stayed in a comfortable, well furnished place with two children. He had been working there for twenty years and saw himself as the owner of the canefields. A nearby hut was filled with smoke and had two tiny windows as a means of ventilation. On entering the hut, I noticed that the inhabitants were Blacks, poverty stricken and working in the nearby compound. The children also had to work in the canefields and were not allowed to attend school. If they wanted to go to school both children and parents had to leave immediately and seek another place of employment. The little babies were taken to the fields during working hours. The family had rapidly increased because there was no time for their mother to attend the health services.

The boss pressurised the induna, and he in turn put a lot of pressure on them. If the mother was seen breastfeeding her baby, he would shout: "hayi, wena makoti, yini loskati lovile?" Thereafter he made sure that some money would be deducted from her salary .□

Skopolo Men's Hostel

At the end of this hardworking day I felt thirsty and was longing for something to quench my thirst and make me feel a bit warmer in this cold winter season.

I decided to go to the beerhall inside the Skopolo men's hostel.

The hall was full of people, filled with cigarette smoke and empty bottles on top of tables, and on the floor. Everybody was talking and it seemed that nobody was listening to anybody. Some men staggered on their way back to the compound, and others crawled because their legs would no longer support them.

The music from the jukebox was loud. Thami sprang up and went to Shlephu: "My friend, the music that is playing sounds very nice. Stand up and let us dance". He pulled him by the hand. Shlephu answered: "I am very tired, Sququ my boss has been slave-driving me." But he got up, reluctantly, not to disappoint his friend. Thami encouraged him, mockingly: "You will soon get used to this thing, my friend. Here in the hostel this is how things happen."

Even I got moved by the music. I stood up and danced, but not with another man. In the end I watched the other pairs, for they were performing well. They were kicking and screaming, and lifting each other and doing all sorts of tricks.

Suddenly Shlephu objected: "No, man, I think I must go back to the bundus and herd my father's cattle rather than live this kind of life." But Thami said: "How can you do that? Did you not get the message that Madclo the induna of amabutho is coming here this weekend to prepare us for attacking those township dogs?"

And then I heard Shlephu say: "That my friend I cannot do. How can I attack my brothers who are oppressed like me, even if they support the ANC and PAC. I am leaving for home tomorrow." Even I myself cannot wait for that attack on innocent and oppressed people like me. I think that the best choice would be to leave. □

Menzi Goba

Streetscene

Busy street, traffic jam. Pavements blocked by hawkers. Pedestrians trying to find their way through pick-pocketing and bag-snatching. An old woman dressed in a torn pinafore, barefoot, looking tired and hungry and trying to sell muti. She comes from a rural area where there is a scarcity of customers and where there are no industries, no schools; where only people owning cattle and a plot of land can survive.

Traditional music from a group dressed in sangoma style. Hooters from different motorists trying to clear their way. A voice shouting for help after having been pickpocketed. The intercom from the nearby railway station, directing passengers to their respective platforms to board their trains. A lonely voice from a mosque.

The woman who sells muti has developed a cunning way of making a living. She sends her children to gather information from passers-by and then advises them about a good sangoma here in town. □

Marjorie **Njeje**

I wish

I wish the whole world could change from violence to peace. This would give the youth a chance to go back to school, and so they could have a brighter future, and we would have leaders for a new South Africa. I would help to build a healthy new country in which education, peace, love and sharing were the priorities.

I wish brothers would respect one another and that we would all have dignity, irrespective of race, colour, creed and standard of education.

How I wish for the goneby days where the rich man was judged by the number of livestock. Ploughing and cultivation of fertile soil would result in bags and bags of corn, amabele and healthy looking pumpkins.

If only everyone could be back in the rural areas enjoying our customary feasts and cultures, where worshipping the ancestors would bring us good luck. I wish for young women wearing beads and traditional attires, blowing their mouth organs and playing the sitolotolo. □

Chapter Two



Women caught in
the web of
violence

Beauty **Mahlaba**

Women



Women have many different difficulties.

Some of them are exploited by their husbands. They are beaten for nothing because they have no strength to fight. At home they have no right to talk. They must sit down and listen to their husbands. They must agree even if their husbands are telling them wrong things because they paid lobola for them and bought them clothes. They have no right to own anything in the house. Cattle and goats and even the land must be written under the name of the man. Even the children belong to their fathers. There are no equal rights for men and women.

There is no law protecting women.

When women work many men demand the full salary and use it on other women in hotels while the owner of that money has nothing to eat in the house. Some women are divorced without knowing it. Some are widows even though their husbands have not died. They leave them with many children and disappear. Many women are being exploited by their employers. They do not earn enough money because they are women. Some women want to buy houses but it is hard if their husbands are not working. There are not enough political and other structures for women. That is why they are always left behind. There is no woman leading any organisation and there is no woman president or vice-president in our political organisation but women are the majority in our country. The unions seldom employ women as organisers and even the union structures have few women in leadership positions.

Women must fight for equal rights.

Discrimination

It was in the early seventy's when I went looking for a job in a white woman's house at Umzimkulu in Transkei. I left my matchbox hut at about 3.00am. My children were still sleeping and there was no breakfast for them because their father was dismissed from the goldmines. I walked because I didn't have any busfare to travel from Machunu village to the town of Umzimkulu. It took two and a half hours to reach the town. I walked from road to road and knocked from house to house looking for a job. The white women only looked at my swollen, paining feet and said: "There is no job for you", and banged their doors. I can't forget the last house I went to. There was a small, short white dog. When I knocked at the door, the dog came around the corner. It didn't bark but bit my ankle. I screamed: "Oh, please help me, the dog is biting me" The white woman came out of the house. "Hahahaha" she laughed, "Puppy is very good in watching the house". She then went back into the house.

I thought that if my skin was white she would have helped me and saved me from that dog. The puppy did not let go of my ankle. I walked through the gate with it biting me. It only left me once I was through the gate. I was bleeding. A domestic worker saw me sitting on the roadside. She asked: "What happened? Were you involved in a car accident?" I told her



what had happened to me. She gave me some tablets, a bandage, two slices of bread and busfare. I then went back home.

My mother in law told me to wash the wound with peach leaves so that it would not get bigger. There was no money for me to go to the doctor.

Since that day I have not wanted to look for a job in a white woman's house. □

Ntombiyenkosi **Shinga**

African women are most exploited

One day I was walking through an indian township. I was looking for a job in Chatsworth as a domestic worker so that I would get money to buy a bag of mealie meal. I saw a pregnant woman coming from the market accompanied by an indian woman. She was carrying a baby on her back and holding another one by the hand. She also balanced a big load of groceries on her head. The indian woman only had a small handbag. We came past a garden where I saw an african man. It was difficult for him to help the pregnant woman as he was working.

As they were walking they talked and I heard the pregnant woman calling the indian woman 'Mrs'. I became very angry and kept on thinking about the incident in which a black woman called an indian woman 'Mrs'. What are we going to do if the conditions are like this in our South Africa?

The other racial groups are living a good kind of life because they have everything they need for their daily lives, while we Blacks are living a very difficult kind of life and are deprived of many things. We are very poor. Our houses are not in good condition and when it rains they fall down because they are built of mud. We do not have cars, we have to rely on buses and trains to commute to and from work. □

*Beauty Mahlaba, Menzi Goba
and Marjorie Njeje*

Two women coming from the market

One early morning I was shopping at the market in Warwick Avenue. Some people were going into the market while others were leaving it, rushing to work. I saw a pregnant black woman with a big basket on her head. A nine month old baby was fastened to her back with a loose bath towel. She was holding two small girls by one hand, while the other hand was holding the basket on her head. A white woman was following her with a small bag in her hand, and an umbrella because it was raining. I heard the white woman saying; "Betty, be careful, don't drop that basket. You have to walk fast so that you can cook for my friends that I invited to a party this afternoon. The worker pulled a face and said: "Uyangihlanyela lomfazi akapheki yena kodwa uzongicintsha loku kudla kwakhe".

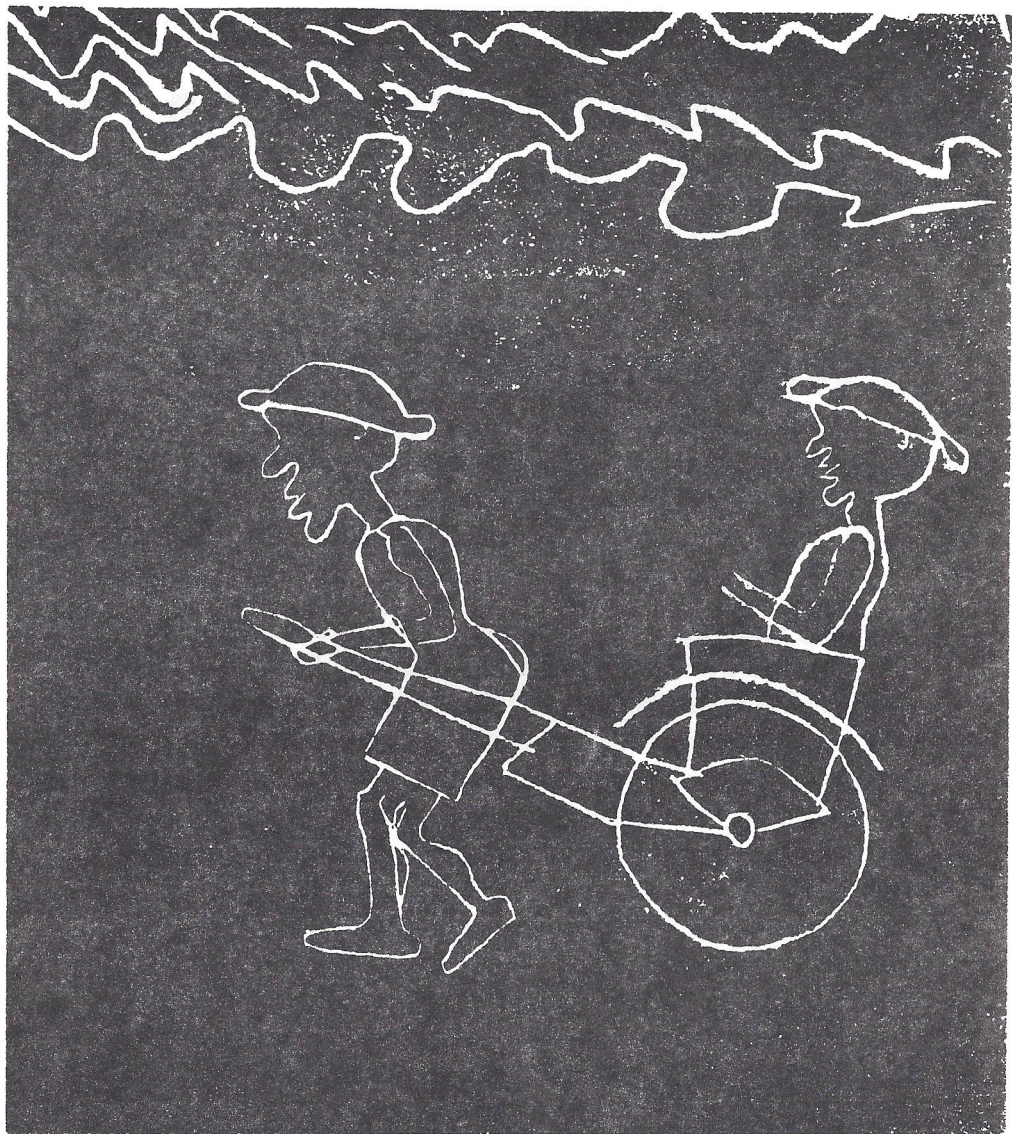
"What did you say Betty?" Betty turned around to answer her employer and said: " No. Mrs" She held the baby because the towel was loose. At that moment the basket fell. Juicy tomatoes, oranges and first grade bananas all cracked on the road. Green cabbages and lettuce were kicked by people.

*Beauty Mahlaba, Menzi Goba
and Marjorie Njeje*

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Potatoes were rolling like balls. The white woman shouted: "Stupid!Rubbish, go home and take your clothes. Your job is finished and your salary is here on the floor. You dropped my basket!" Betty was crying and saying, "Oh Lord, where can I get food for my children? What about this one in my stomach?"

I asked Betty if I could help her but she didn't answer. The white woman just left her there.

Afterwards I went to see my mother at her workplace in a white woman's house. When I arrived at the house, there was a terrible noise. The employer was shouting about a broken cup, and calling my mother a "stupid".

One day I was sitting at the busstop waiting for a bus home. Two women walked towards me. I couldn't believe my eyes. The black woman was overloaded with a big basket full of fruit and vegetables. The white woman was walking freely while the black one was staggering under the heavy load. Suddenly she stumbled and the basket fell, scattering everything in it. The white woman slapped her and shouted at her abusively. My bus arrived and I boarded it.

I looked through the window and saw that the white woman was behaving like a mad person. The black woman was trying to collect the groceries but some of the things were smashed in such a way that they were useless. The black woman looked scared and confused. She was trying to apologise but the white woman was hearing dust.

White infuriated lady: For crying out loud. I'm not myself at all!

Friend: Why not?

She: That senseless old kaffir girl, Betty!

Friend: How dare you allow yourself to be at her mercy.

She: She decided to make a complete standardised meal for the vehicles and people's feet on that road.

Friend: I don't get you.

She: I mean she dropped everything. My juicy tomatoes, peaches and grapes. She will refund it with her wages. That will teach her to be careful next time.

Friend: Oh no! Did she do it purposely?

She: I'm not interested in that. Next time she will be very careful. Remember, once bitten, twice shy.

Beauty **Mahlaba**

A worried woman

One day my sister's daughter Thobile and I went to fetch some wood in a huge forest. It was a very cold winter's day. I was suffering from a headache and feeling very cold and hungry.

On our way to the forest, she asked me: "Why are you looking so tired?" "Because I am not feeling well" I said. "Have you taken any tablets?" she asked. "I haven't had any tablets or food and I'm feeling cold but I don't have a jersey." "Why not?" she asked. I told her about my life. "I got married four years ago but my husband left two months later. I was pregnant and he went to Johannesburg. He never wrote to me or sent money and he never returned home. I had a baby boy. My neighbours gave me old napkins. There was no food in my house. If someone gave me mealie meal and sugar I ate phutu and drank sugar water. My son grew up.

I live by selling wood to my neighbours. I can't plant mealies because the cattle and goats eat it since I don't have a wire fence." She asked: "Is the father of your child still alive?" I said: "People always see him in Soweto. They say that not even in his sleep he dreams about home. He has a beautiful girlfriend Ma Mohlakoane." At that moment I fell down: Bhuunu! because I was so hungry and weak. Thobile tried to pull me up. She scooped cold water with her hands and gave it to me to

drink. She fetched unknown fruits and gave them to me to eat so that I would have the strength to collect wood."How much are you selling a bundle of wood for?" she asked."Two shillings", I said.

We went back home and she gave me clothes and food to eat. She told her mother to buy wood from me at five shillings a bundle. Most of our neighbours heard about this and felt shame. They told each other to buy my wood and sometimes they gave me things to cook.

I started to live like other women. There were groceries in my hut and I could cook food for my children. I had clothes for them like every housewife.

My baby boy grew up without knowing his father.

Chapter Three



Growing up

Ntombiyenkosi Shinga

Ngisemncane

Ngisemncane nganginesikhathi esiyisinqumo kubaba engabe ngiya ngaso komalume emaSomini. Lapho phela kwakusekhaya bomama u-MamSomi. Leso kwakuyisikhathi sika Nhlanguvana, uJune phela.

Ekufikeni kwami komalume ngangazi kahle ukuthi ngizokhelela ukhulu amanzi okugeza kanye nawokuphuza itiye. Amanzi ngangiyiye ngiwakhe emfuleni omkhulukazi uMgaqazi.

Ngangivuka ekuseni ngibabele kuwo lomfula lapho ngangifike ngiwacwenge kahle amanzi bese ngikhetha lawo ahlanzekile ngiwafake embizeni. Ekubuyeni kwami ngangiyiye ngibase umlilo ngibeke amanzi ukuze ngenze itiye, ngithelele ukhulu amanzi okugeza. Lokho kwakumjabulisa kakhulu ukhulu kangangokuthi wayeze angethembise ngisho ukungixoxela izinganekwane ukuthola umuntu omsizayo. Ngesikhathi egeza wayengicela ukuba ngimuchophe izinyawo.

Ngaphambi kokuba aqale ukuxoxa izinganekwane wayeye akhiphe idoshana elabe lihlala isinefu sakhe asishutheke emakhaleni. Emva kwalokho aqale-ke angixoxele izinganekwane. Enye yezinganekwane yayithi "Kwabe kukhona umuzi, kulowo muzi kwabe kukhona amantombazane amahle amathathu. Lomuzi wawakhiwe bude buduze nehlathi elibizwa ngokuthi iMpunga. Kwakunezinto eziningi

ezazizenzeka kulelohlathi. Ubaba walamantombazane, uSilwane Ngubane wayevamise ukuthi njalo ntambama ahambe aye kulo lelihlathi. UMaZondi, unkosikazi kaSilwane waye thwala indishi egcwele ukudla alandele emva komyeni wakhe banikele ehlathini.

Amagama amantombazane kwabe kungo Bazondani, Batheni kanye noThandekile owabe engumagcino. UThandekile wayemuhle ebadlula bonke odadewabo. Wayenemilenze emihle sengathi epholishekile. Bonke abantu besilisa babethatheka ngalentokazi kaNgubane. UThemba Mletshe, wayeshela enye yamadodakazi uBatheni, owayesehlele ukuba amnike ucu. Waze watshela umama wakhe ngaloluthando aluzwayo ngentombi yakwaNgubane, waze washo nokuthi ufisa ukuyilobola. Umama kaThemba, uMazwezwe watshela uThemba ukuthi akakhohlwe yilento ayicabangayo mayelana noBatheni ngoba ubaba wakhe ungumthakathi owaziwayo endaweni, washo nokuthi uma engase akuzwe konke lokho angaba senkingeni enkulu. Ubaba kaBatheni kuthiwa wabe enezilwane ayezifihla ehlathini.

UThemba wacela umama wakhe ukuba amdlulisele umbiko wokuthi ufuna ukushada indodakazi kaNgubane. Umama kaThemba wakhuluma noyise ngalendaba. Ubaba kaThemba waphendula ngokuthi, haw! umfana usebonile ukuthi sesikhulile, sesidinga umuntu ozosibheka. Umuntu ozosikhelela amanzi asithezele izinkuni. Wabe esebiza uThemba wathi kuye akahambe aye kumfana kaMzizi ukuze ayomokhela umlilo kaNgubane. Wafika umfana kaMzizi uMdletshe wabe esemcela ukuthi ayomkhongela kwaNgubane, wazisho zonke izinkomo ayezofika azishiye lapha kwaNgubane, izinkomo zelobolo.

Ngelanga elilandelayo indodana kaMzizi yavuka entathakusa, yathatha izinduku zayo nejazi layo yanikela khona kaNgubane. Wezwakala emememza esangweni, 'sikhulekil' ekhaya nina

bakwaNgubane sizicela isihlobo esihle thina bakwaMdletshe. Siphethe izinkomo eziyishumi nanye zoboya'. Wazisho zonke ngemibala yazo nangeminyaka yazo. Bakhokha lonke ilobola ngokushesha okukhulu ngoba babejahe umakoti abe sekhaya ngokushesha.

Emva kwelobolo, usuku olukhulu lwamenyezelwa. Ungubane wacela amadoda amane ukuba amphelezele bayobona izinkomo zelobolo. Ngalolosuku kwahlatshwa izinkomo ezimbili kanye nembuzi ukwamukela umakoti ekhaya. UThembi wafika ephuma ekhaya washada nendodakazi kaNgubane.

UBatheni wayegqoke izingubo zomdabu. Ngosuku lomshado umakoti wasina elekelelwa umamazala wakhe uMaZwezwe owayejabule ngenhliziyo yakhe yonke. kwahlatshwa enye imbuzi yokungenisa umakothi ekhishini. Ngosuku olulandelayo uBatheni kwadingeka ukuthi asale nomyeni wakhe uThemba. Bahlala isikhashana uThemba kwadingeka ukuthi aphindele eGoli. UBatheni wahlala yedwa ecabanga odadewabo angeke esababona ngokuthanda kwakhe.

UThemba wapakisha izimpahla zakhe waphikelela eGoli. Unkosikazi wakhe wamsiza ngomphako. Wakhala zoma esecabanga ukuthi uzolala yedwa endlini, into angayejwayele.

Izinsuku zaqhubeka, uThemba akazange abhale nencwadi yokusho ukuthi uzovakashela ekhaya. UBatheni wabona ngaye nje esetheleka ebusika enyangeni kaJuni. UBatheni wayenenganyana yakhe ayeyinikwe ubaba wakhe, kwakungenye yezingane ezazihlala ehlathini iMpunga. Igama layo kwabe kunguGubeshe. UThemba wangena endlini yakhe ngesikhathi uBatheni eqeda kumbathisa ingane yakhe. Wayetshale uGubeshe ukuthi lengubo ayembathisa yona kwabe kuyingubo yomkhwenyane.

Kwezwakala ngaye uGubeshe esecula "Ngithe qhusha ngengubo yomkhwenya wethu". U-Themba wabuza umakoti wakhe ukuthi yini eculayo, waphendula wathi akazi. UThemba waphuma wayobiza abazali ukuba bazomlalelisa, nebala uGubeshe waphinda ingoma yakhe "Ngithe qhusha ngengubo yomkhwenyana wethu" UThemba wabuza futhi ukuthi ngabe kwabe kungubani lowo oculayo ngoba ibona kuphela ababelapho endlini. UBatheni waze walikhuluma iqiniso lokuthi, leyo kwabe kuyingane abe eyinikwe ubaba wakhe ukuba azixoxele naye uma enesizungu. Wabe esecela uThemba ukuthi amxolele.

UThemba watshela abazali bakhe ukuthi akasamdingi ubatheni, ngenxa kaGubeshe washo nokuthi akakaze asibone isilwane esikhulumayo. Waphatheka kabi ngezinkomo zikayise aziphonsa emfuleni. Waphela kanjalo-ke umshado ka Batheni. Cosi, cosi yaphela. Kwakuthi iphela inganekwane kube kade silele, sovuka ngakusasa sibuzana ukuthi iphele kanjani. Ugogo wayesineke sokusitshela isiphetho njalo uma simbuza.

Engakubona ngelusel'emhlangeni...

Kwathi ngalunye usuku ngathanda ukuya kulusela ngakomunye wemihlanga eyayisenkangala. Kwaqengele enhla nezigodi zakaMvuyane lapho khona kunamathaf'amahl'emhlangeni. Kuohona umthala nekhwami, kundiza nezikhova. Kwakukhona nesiziba sokubhukuda esasibizwa ngokuthi ise-Makhala. Kulendawo kwakukhona izikhova nalezinyoni ekuthiwa zidliwa yizalukazi, uFukwe.

UMambengwane wayekhonze ukujikijela izikhova. Langa limbe sajikijela sajikijela sabona kuqhamuka omunye umame ngasenhla kwethu. Lomama wayephethe isikela ukusho ukuthi uzosika la emhlangeni. Wayehamba ethele igazi phansi ebona sengathi sizomhlupha. Wathi uma eseseduze samemezana

saphuma emhlangeni nezagweba zethu esasizikha kumthi okuthiwa uMfekane. Wathi uma eseduze kwethu, samingelela, wedlula wangena phakathi emhlangeni. Umama lo wayezivumela ingoma yakhe kancane, evungama singayizwa kahle ukuthi ithini. Umama lo wayengayena owangakithi kuba igama leli ewayelicula sasingalazi. Sahlala salalela sesiyekile nokujikijela manje, sesidlala eminye imidlalwana esasingayiqondile.

Sahlala lapho kwaza kwavuka izinkomo zikade zilele ngenhla kwesiziba. Abanye bashaya izinkomo zabo bagoduka bangishiya ngedwa nezakithi izinkomo. Umama yena loko eqhubekile ukusika ikhwani. □

Taking the chicken to the doctor

It was a sunny day when we were playing at my uncle's house. Nosinto, Nomvuyo and I were playing dolls, and also had to watch Dumeleni the baby. Nomvuyo said to Nosintu: "Will you please play the doctor in this game, because our babies are sick?" and Nosintu said: "Yes, but where is the surgery?" Nomvuyo suggested: "under the plumtree".

There was a red hen with twelve chickens. I said I would not take a doll to the doctor but what about a chicken? They agreed: "That's a good idea! No dolls, only chickens must be our babies now". I took a hankie and a pin and put it like a napkin on my baby chicken. I took the chicken on my back and fastened it with Dumeleni's napkin. I went to see the doctor.

Nosintu the doctor had put water and washing powder into a tin and gone under the plumtree with a syringe in her hand. In the surgery there was a big cardboard box with a stone inside. The stone was called bed, and the doctor was sitting in the box.

Nobody was allowed to speak Zulu because there was no nurse to translate. The doctor herself was saying "bra...bra...bra". That

was English and we also replied "bra...bra...bra" to tell her that our babies were sick.

The doctor put soapy water into the syringe and told me to take my baby's nappy off. I did so. My baby cried "tshiyo...tshiyo..tshiyo". The hen was busy chasing us and the doctor threw stones to make it go away. Nomvuyo also took her baby's nappy off. The doctor held my baby's leg and put the syringe between the legs in the bum.

We laughed till tears were falling from our eyes.

"Tshiyo..tshiyo...tshiyo" cried the baby and vomitted soapy water. I put it on my back again and sang a nice song for it: "Lala, baby, I'll buy sweets for you".

After a few minutes my baby was quiet and I put it on a stone to sleep. I went back to the hen and took another baby. Nomvuyo did the same as me. We gave the doctor all twelve chicks. When the doctor had finished examining all the babies we put them all on our backs so that they could sleep comfortably. I had six, and Nomvuyo also had six on her back.

Dumeleni was locked inside the house where she was crying because she was hungry. But nobody cared for her.

"What is happening here? Who is beating my baby? Where are those naughty girls?" a voice called out. It was Nomvuyo's mother. "Let us try and escape, it's a giant!" shouted Nosintu. I tried to make my voice louder and said; "Who are you? I'll chop you with my axe. I am the owner of this house, do you hear?" Nomvuyo's mother replied: "Come here, owner of the house!"

We were so happy, coming to show her our babies. I said, Malumekazi, look, I am a mother of six", and Nosintu said "I am the doctor of all." Malumekazi was angry because we were ignoring Dumeleni's crying and telling her stories. Then she



took the napkin off Nomvuyo's back and said: "What is this?"
All the chicks were dead.

Nomvuyo's mother was even more angry now and threatened to kill us. Nosintu and I quickly ran away. On the way home I took the napkin off my back and all the chicks were dead. I covered them with a napkin and left them behind.

At home, my mother and sister and Nosinto's two sisters were there. I went in with my finger in my mouth. "Why are you so early today?" they asked us. "Because Ma-mal-malum-mekazi wants to beat u-us" stuttered Nosintu. Her sister said: "oh oh, there is something wrong. They did something naughty at uncle's house."

At that moment Nomvuyo's mother arrived. Nosintu and I jumped up and ran, but our sisters chased and caught us and they pushed us back to the house where aunty was telling my mother about the doctor and the chicken game. My mother didn't ask if it was true or not - she beat both of us. "We babo we we" we cried and ran outside. There we met Nomvuyo, also crying.

My sister Nosihle collected all the dead chicken: "We must dig a hole and put all the chicken inside", she suggested. We asked our sisters to help us and they agreed. Nozibele said: "I would like to be e reverent when we bury them."

We dug a hole and put the chicken inside. The reverend said: "all mothers must put napkins around their shoulders and cry now because I 'm doing the last prayer for their children." "Hhi..hhi..hhi", we did as we were told. The reverend prayed and the sisters sang.

That evening my mother said we were not supposed to get supper because we had been naughty. Then I thought we were being punished because our mothers hate us. □

Ntombiyenkosi Shinga

Ekwaluseni

Kwake kwasehlela okukhulu endaweni yangakithi.
Kwasweleka abafana bokwelusa kangangokuba sakhishwa ezikoleni selusa izinkomo. Mamo! imikhutshana yokwelusa kithina yasenza saze sakhohlwa nokuthi singamantobazane.

Umdlala ukuthi sasingontanga imvamisa yethu, kwabe kunguMangalo, uSidudla kanye nami uNtombiyenkosi. Thina sasihlala nganeno komfula wezinkabi. Ababili babehlala ngaphesheya komfula ngaseziNdovwini, kwabe kunguDungizwe, uMtombile noJeje bobathathu babebancane kunathi.

Okungabafanyana kwakuthi uma kuqhamuka ngakwezinye izinkalo sikushaye sikukhombise ngoba phela thina sobathathu nganeno komfula sasesibadala singagolozelwa mfana nje sesifunde nokushaya induku kulabafana esasibafica kulesisikhashana esincane siqalile ukwalusa. Isibhakela sona saphuma naso ezikoleni esasifunda kuzo kwakukhala ububhaklabhakla uma sesisishaya.

Into yokuqala esasiyenza uma sifika emadlweni, ukuthi sidedele izinkomo ukuba zidle emva kwalokho siziphuzise amanzi siziqhube ukuba ziyolala. Emva kwalokho sikhumule izingubo siyobhukuda emfuleni. Uma sesenele ukubhukuda, yilowo nalowo ubonakala ethatha ezakhe izinduku. Naku phela

sesizoqala ukushayana sifundisana indlela esizoshaya ngayo abafana abasisukelayo noma uma siyise izinkomo ediphini lapho kuhlangukhona iningi labafana bokwelusa kushaywana kuthukwana ngenhlamba yobugwala.

Mina-ke ngaze ngagcina sengisele ngedwa lapha ekwaluseni sengifundisa abafana abafikayo kanye nabafana babafowethu ukwelusa kanye nokuthi induku ishaywa kanjani.

Ngangibafundisa kanje, ngangithatha amahlamvu esidende ngithi akushaywane ngawo uma selihluthukile ngililahle ngibanike amanye. Kuye ngibanike izinswazi bathintithane ngazo kanti phela ngilola impi yami ngibuye ngifake noMpi kayiboni noNtangayibomvwana ngenza amakhubalo bese kuyiwa koshaywana laphaya ngale kwentaba egamaloyi kwakuthiwa iNkonkoni kwazise phela ukuthi ngase ngiyinqwele. Yimina engangibatshela ukuthi benze njani uma beshaya induku.

Noma kuphi lapho kuhlangukhona imina engabe ngiyiphaka impi ezinkunzini zakwethu. Impela ngaze ngagcina ngizilibeke ukuthi ngiyintombazane. Inkunzi yakithi kwabe kunguSukumani elilunda

likhulu isho ngezinduku zayo ezivumayo, izinduku phela izimpondo enkunzini yenkomo ngangithi uma ngizikhetha ngikhetha yena uSukumani, uZesheli uKhethimizi noVelpense ngiziyise phakathi emasimini asekhaya. Ngangifika ngizibeke lapho zizitike ngokudla.

Uma sengizilanda ngokushona kwelanga ngangizibiza ngamagama azo ngishaye ikhwela ngiye ngizivalele. □

Marjorie Njeje

Memories

I remember when I was in CapeTown and the violence around fighting against the colour bar started. The train coaches had signs saying 'Europeans only - blankes alleenlik'. I remember people pushing in and out and Blacks seating themselves in the 'Whites only' coaches. For that they got hidings from the railway policemen.

I remember telling my mother of the fright that I had and she did not believe my story. As I could not answer her I went back to the station. Then my mother saw the incident reported in the Cape Argus. I remember that after she was satisfied that I had not been lying she allowed me not to go to school, as I was using a train from Woodstock to Athlone. Those days I was not clear about all that was happening - the damaging of the train.

I remember thinking that the Whites had all the good, and the Blacks could only have some of the good if they were fortunate enough. I thought that the angels were the ones with long straight hair, and evil a black ugly somebody with sharp thorns and a tail.

I day-dreamed that one day I would build a big house for my mother, furnish it, buy myself a luxurious car and drive her around. I thought that I would become one of the important people who would be of great help to other people. □

Menzi **Goba**

Memories

I remember when my girlfriend came to tell me that she was pregnant and I was just about to write my final examination.

I remember playing truant from school and going fishing. A man came with a knife and chased after us. We left our fishing rods behind and couldn't report the matter at home.

I remember when my stepfather caught me when I was supposed to be at school - and he pretended he didn't see me.

Profiles of the authors

Beauty **Mahlaba**

Beauty Mahlaba is a thirty-nine year old unemployed mother of two sons who are both in std. 9. She was born at Umzimkhulu in Transkei. She now lives in Umlazi in a squatter area known as Ekuthuleni - the place of violence. A former active member of National Education Health Allied Workers Union (Nehawu), she is now a member of the Southern Natal Unemployed Workers Union.

Nkosiyethu **Mthethwa**

Nkosiyethu Mthethwa is a thirty year old father of three children. He lives in the rural area of Kwamathethwa in Empangeni . He works as a welder at the Alusaf factory in Richards Bay and is a member of the National Union of Metal- workers of South Africa. He enjoys drawing and art work.

Menzi **Goba**

Menzi Goba is a metal worker who lives with his family in Dassenhoek. He is a member of NUMSA.

Marjorie **Njeje**

Marjorie Njeje was born in Matatiele - a place nicknamed as "a place where Jesus was nearly born." She works as a community nurse in the South Coast area. She says: "thanks to my mother who opened my eyes educationally, now I am able to write stories through her sweat as a domestic-worker."

Ntombiyenkosi **Shinga**

Ntombiyenkosi Shinga was born in Umbumbulu. She is a single parent who lives in Umlazi with her five children. Her house is near the Hubhushe river.

Dumisani **Nombela**

Dumisani Nombela lives in Umlazi and works as an office-worker in the Kwazulu government offices. He is a member of Nehawu and likes drawing and art-work.



Umkhumulansika - *the destruction of the pillars of the home*: this could be a name given to the ongoing period of political violence in Natal. These stories reflect the harsh reality of homelessness and death in times of war. They also describe how particularly African women suffer multiple oppression and hardships.

This is a third collection of stories and poems written by workers during the creative writing course which was part of a two-year training programme in cultural organisation and production, offered by the *Culture and Working Life Project*.