Staffrider

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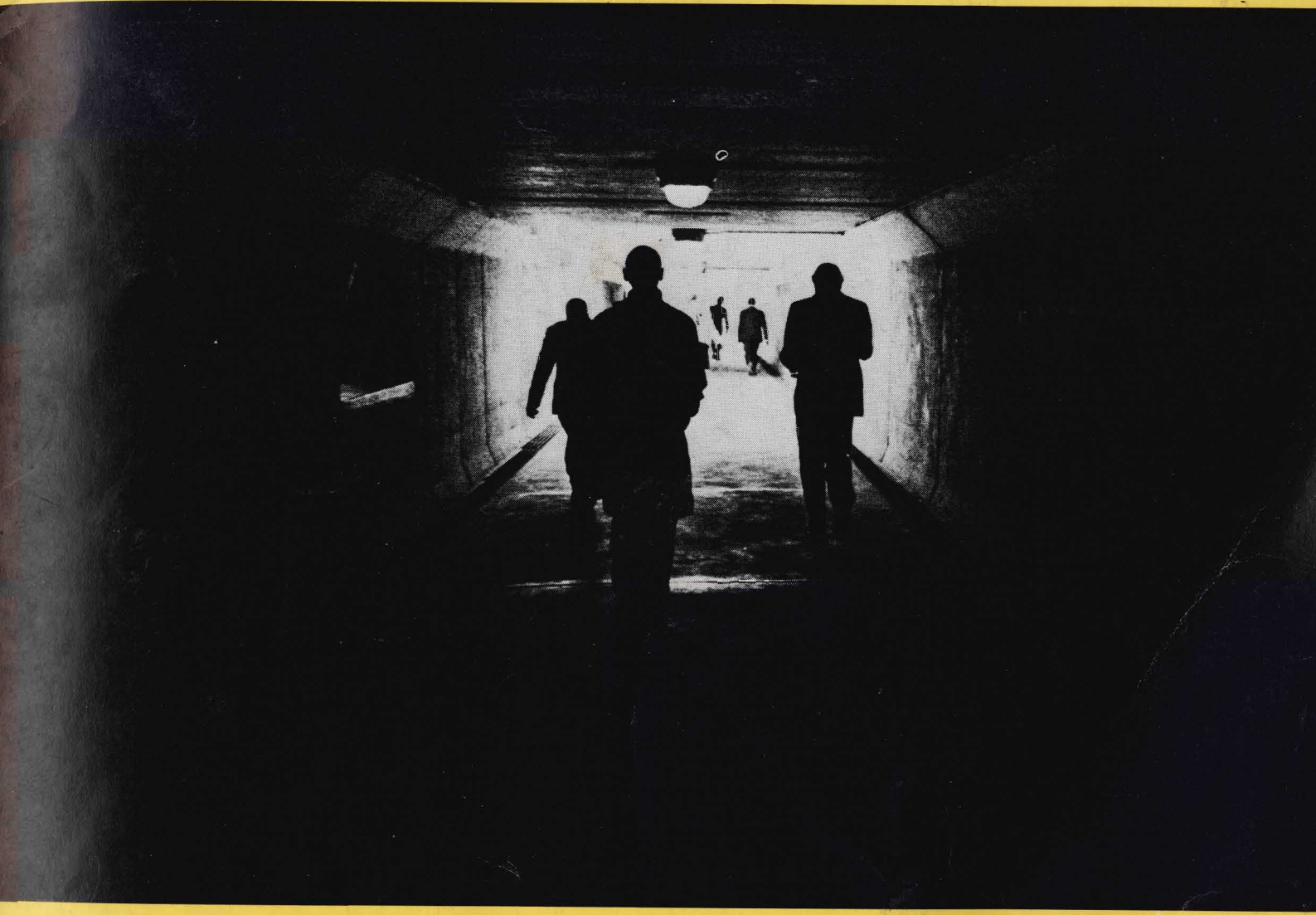

Story Special

Staffrider Exhibition

graphics · drawings · paintings & sculptures

CANCELLED

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Cover Photographs:

Front: Ralph Ndawo
Back: Paul Weinberg

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AFRIKA AT A PIECE
(On Heroes Day)

You can't think of a solution
Without your mind spelling revolution
Unless your mind is steamed with pollution
So much that you drop the notion

As our heroes die
As our heroes are born
Our history is being written
With the black moments given
Looking the storm in the eye
Our hope is not gone

Our blackman's history
is not written in classrooms
on wide smooth boards
Our history shall be written
at the factory gates
at the Unemployment offices
in the scorched queues of dying mouths

Our history shall be our joys
  our sorrows
  our moroseness
scrawled in dirty Third Class toilets
Our history will be graffitti
decorating our ghetto walls
where flowers find not peace enough to grow

Our history shall be written
on laps in the bush
Or whizz out of a smoking steel mouth

Our history is being written

Our history is being written
As the Bergies refuse to bend
  to white civilization
below Table Mountain

Our history is the freedom seed
being sown across the Karoos
With our Kaapenaar brothers
refusing to mix the milky way
But blocking blows
Right into 'die duiwel se skop'

Our present is the lavatory blues
we so love to sing
  in our matchbox houses

Our present is the Blue Light
flashing operations
high up at Groote Schuur
Our present is those heart operations
with guinea-pig donors from ghetto deaths
and from deaths called 'accidental'

Our present is naked ribbed stomachs
  and TB coughs
at Limehill, Dimbaza, Winterveldt
It is panga attacks and rape
at Tin Town, Malacca Road, Crossroads
It is ritual murder at Richmond Farm,
Rooigrond, Klipspruit

Our history glosses the rail tracks
at Effingham and Langlaagte
Our history is black women marching
on Pretoria Building
  lifting fists
shouting:
  'Amandla!'

Our history is being written
with indelible blood stains
with sweeping black souls
in the streets at John Vorster
  where Timol dived thru the window
  at Auden House
  where Mdluli made a somersault stunt
  at Sanlam Building
  where Biko knocked himself against walls
  at the Kei Road copshop
  where Mapetla thought hanging was fun
  at Caledon Square
  where the Imam Haroon slipped on a bar
  of soap

We sing our present
We sing the dark-lit rooms
where the 'Free Mandela' chant is mounting
truth
We sing the New Truth
The New Truth is!
Those 1976 bullets were not sacramental
bread meant
for the faithful . . .
We've heard the Bullet Refrain vibrating walls
at Silverton

On the sidewalks of Goch Street
We shall sit down and sing
We shall sing songs Tiro would have loved to
hear
Songs Ma Ngoyi would have sung
Songs Mthuli kaShezi would have composed
Songs
Songs that lead us on
And when it's Time To Rise
The Isle of Makana will be flooded
by the swelling tide of Kwancha

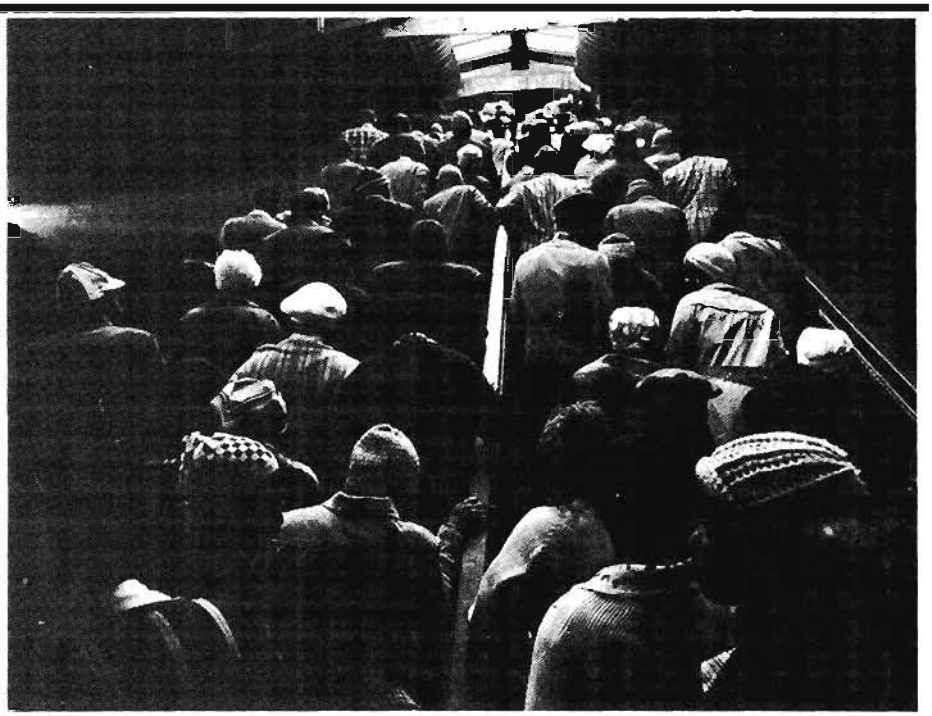
Batho ba Sechaba,
  hora e fitlhile!
The Hour has come!

Mafika Gwala

UNB Residence (Austerville)
Heroes Day — 21 March 1980

ALEXANDRA SPEAKING

Mahlaba Eddie Nhlane of KHAULEZA talks to Mr Petros Xaba, a pensioner of Alexandra.



How fair is it for a man to give his blood, sweat and tears to uplift the face of a city and make it one of the most beautiful in the world? How fair is it for a man to build schools and churches only to be deprived of the right to education, and religion? How fair is it for a man to build skyscrapers and mansions for his master, and himself live in ghettoes? Worst of all, how fair is it for that very man to be told he belongs to a certain homeland and not to the place he has helped to build? That is the gratitude the black man in this country earns. Yet Johannesburg, as it stands today, tall, proud, with its neon lights flickering and reflecting its beauty, is the result of the blood, sweat and tears of our disability pensioners.

Forty-four-year-old Mr Petrus Xaba of Alexandra is one such victim. Born in Alexandra in 1936, he had difficulty in getting permission to stay in Alexandra. His parents had divorced, so his father was staying at Dikathole and his mother was still in Alex. Police started arresting people under Section 29 known as 'loaferskap' or 'Julle Bantoes'. He had to flee from Alexandra and went to Dikathole, where his father was, and obtained a reference book.

After two months, he came back to Alexandra and applied for a permit to live with his mother. This time the application was considered, as influx laws were not very strict then.

At the moment he is sharing a small room with his sister and brother-in-law who are said to belong to a certain homeland. They help with the rent and food. He cannot manage on the small pension he gets.

I found Mr Xaba sitting with about eight men and one woman around a pot of home-made beer, which his sister brews on his behalf. He was friendly and helpful. Without wasting time he led us into the house.

Mr Xaba, as far as I know, the age requirement for pensions, according to South African law, is 65 years. How come you got paid before you turned 65?

I was laid off work permanently by some doctors after suffering from some mental illness. I tried to get back to work after recovering but the disease recurs from time to time, so I was forced to stay permanently at home after working for about seven years. I still receive medical attention every Friday.

When first did that start?

Well, it first started in 1960 while I was working in Fordsburg. I lost concentration on whatever I was doing and was told that I did some funny things while I was with my white co-worker. He felt scared that maybe one day I would pounce on him and do harm, especially as we were always fighting over my doing a lot of hard work and getting very little while he relaxed and earned a lot.

You were getting a raw deal from your employers?

Oh yes, I was. In fact, I did not blame the people at the top, only him. He was the one who never worked much but always expected more for the little he did. And I still remember very well that in early February 1960, we had a quarrel in an Indian shop along Market Street. I looked at him and just thought to myself: 'This one can't even scare a dead rat so why me?' But, most unfortunately, the Indian owners stood by him. I was, in any case, afraid to beat up this stubborn young White boy as I knew I would be arrested there and then.

When did you receive your first pension payment?

My son, they mess us around, these officials. My first application was tendered late in 1963. For ten years I had to go up and down. I gave up and said, 'Oh well, to hell with it.' That was in 1965 after running up and down for two years. In 1969, when I heard rumours that blacks had taken over our pension offices, I thought everything would run smoothly. But to my surprise, the situation seemed worse.

By then I was desperate to get money as I could not stand the thought of being a burden on my family. I learnt to be patient. I took all their instructions and eventually in 1972 they told me to wait for a letter.

At that time I had difficulty in walking as I had pain in both my legs. I waited for two years and in 1974 I got a letter informing me to report to the Commissioner's office.

In July of the same year I received my first pension.

How much were you paid?

R28,00, bi-monthly.

At the moment, how much do you receive?

R45,50, bi-monthly.

Does this cover your expenses for two months?

Hayi Bo! Mntwana wam', don't play with me. Being a pensioner doesn't mean I get things cheap. I pay the same amount that you pay.

So how do you push on?

(He smiled shyly and looked at me like a kid who was caught doing wrong.)

My sister here, (pointing at her) brews umqombothi for us to sell as she too is unemployed. These people outside are our daily customers. We make very little out of it but at least we go to bed having had something. My brother-in-law does help a lot, especially with rent. He does piece jobs. They (my sister and brother-in-law) cannot register in Johannesburg as they do not qualify.

Now lately I was arrested for selling liquor and, fortunately, I managed to

pay the fine (R20,00) as it was only two days after I got paid. I didn't care as that was not going to stop me from selling. I understand their laws, but I always tell myself that unjust laws are there to be opposed.

(We passed on to general topics. We spoke about the sixties and forties. Way back Dark City.

He smiled rather shyly and took his zoll of B.B. that was lying on the table and lit it. He pulled one good puff and concentrated on the smoke escaping his mouth, still wearing a slight smile.)

I was very young, you are right, but I still recall some scenes from those days.

We lived as one society, but even though we understood one another so well, there were problems.

I remember the war between the Zulus, Xhosas and Marussia. It was so dangerous that we were not even sent to the shops after 6 p.m. as you would be molested by either of those groups.

Police were summoned by some concerned residents to calm this devilish warfare that made people feel unsafe. But those were family affairs and they were solved quickly. What worries me now is the lack of unity.

In the 1940s people were so united that you could not even try to separate them. For example, in 1945 we suffered from housing shortages. But as our people were a unified society, they eased the problem without even consulting the authorities. One morning, when we woke up, we found that people had not slept but were busy building houses with 90 lb. mealie-meal sacks. That was the era known later as 'Emasakeni'. They built them to safeguard the few household belongings they had. Police tried to demolish those sack-houses but they were met by a strong protest from the whole society. The government was forced to give alternative accommodation to those people. That was when people were sent to Moroka. But on coming to Moroka, they found that there were no houses and they built their 'Amasaka' again, until they were allocated proper accommodation. That demonstrates that a united nation will eventually achieve its goal. But things have now changed.

You say that unity has died with the times. What, according to your own views, brought this about?

Three factors: education (at school and at home); lack of proper leadership; and selfishness.

To start with education at home — I often find it hard to understand when a parent says, 'Umntwanam' uya ngihlula. There is nothing I can do to stop him from his bad deeds.' Perhaps this is because people are disunited. In the early days a parent was right to beat a child

who did an act of malice to society. If we wanted to fight, we would go far away where no one could see us, as we knew that if we were caught we were in for the high jump. But today parents defend their kids by denying that their children have done such a thing. The child eventually takes it as a lesson and ends up in big trouble.

As for education at school, I view it very differently from that of home education. Today's education is creating class, not knowledge. The Boers have taken advantage of our educated people. Our educated feel that the customs and ways of civilisation are superior to those that were not certificated to a certain level. For instance, when the blacks took over the jobs that were done by Boers, as happened at the pensioners' office, we thought things would be easy. Instead, they proved to be tools of more oppression. They felt they were more important than we were and we had to listen to the sophisticated. They called us, and still do, uncivilised, mannerless old men and women. That is where these Boers got us. They felt it wise to teach us their way of living and we danced to their tune. Now, when we do things the African way, our sophisticated, educated people mock us and say these are other times. Well, we, the olds, have decided to accept it as a way of life.

Lack of proper leadership: When we were still young, most of our leaders did the job voluntarily rather than expecting payment or recognition. I know it might hurt many but the truth of it is that today's leaders, cultural or political, do it for their own good. They think of their stomachs before anything else and eventually let the people down. Who of our present leaders comes from a poor family or rather is poor himself? Such people are not even cared for, if they do exist. That is very bad, mfana'm'. They are not leaders but misleaders.

Now recently, I protested against going to 'City Deep' (a hostel complex near George Gogh) and complained to our leaders, but they did not even give me an answer. Fortunately, the hostel was full and that is how I escaped it. How could I have managed the higher rent when I am having problems with the present rent here? Well, that is a part of life that I've learnt to accept now. But, truly speaking, 'Asinabo abameli'. They only want to be recognised at the expense of other peop' . 'Kungalo' according to me.

And thirdly, selfishness. I cann t understand how some people can ow y large houses while others do not hav s even a place 'to hide their heads'. Th s action drives the homeless to distru t and have a negative attitude towards th fortunate ones. In the process no o wants to help each other and enmit crops up. I have seen a family of abou twelve sharing one room. The father an the mother on the bed, kids lying on th ground so that there was no place t put a foot down.

The kids blame their parents, becaus they do not know and cannot unde stand. Eventually, they lose respect fo their parents and accuse them of makin life hell for them. Parents, on the othe hand, try hard to please their kids bu how can they? Not when they ar underpaid. Eventually frustration lead a father and/or mother into drinkin and they start using vulgar language i front of the kids. They learn the langu age and spread it through outside. Ther the whole family is corrupt.

Those are frustrations that some o my friends could not overcome Mntwanam', life is really frustrating. wish you good luck, not to be a victim in the future.

'Yes, I know baba,' I said. 'Tell me, what is the situation at the pension office?'

Oh, you mean when we are getting paid? Hell, I feel pity for the old ladies that cannot even walk. It seems to be exaggeration but it is not.

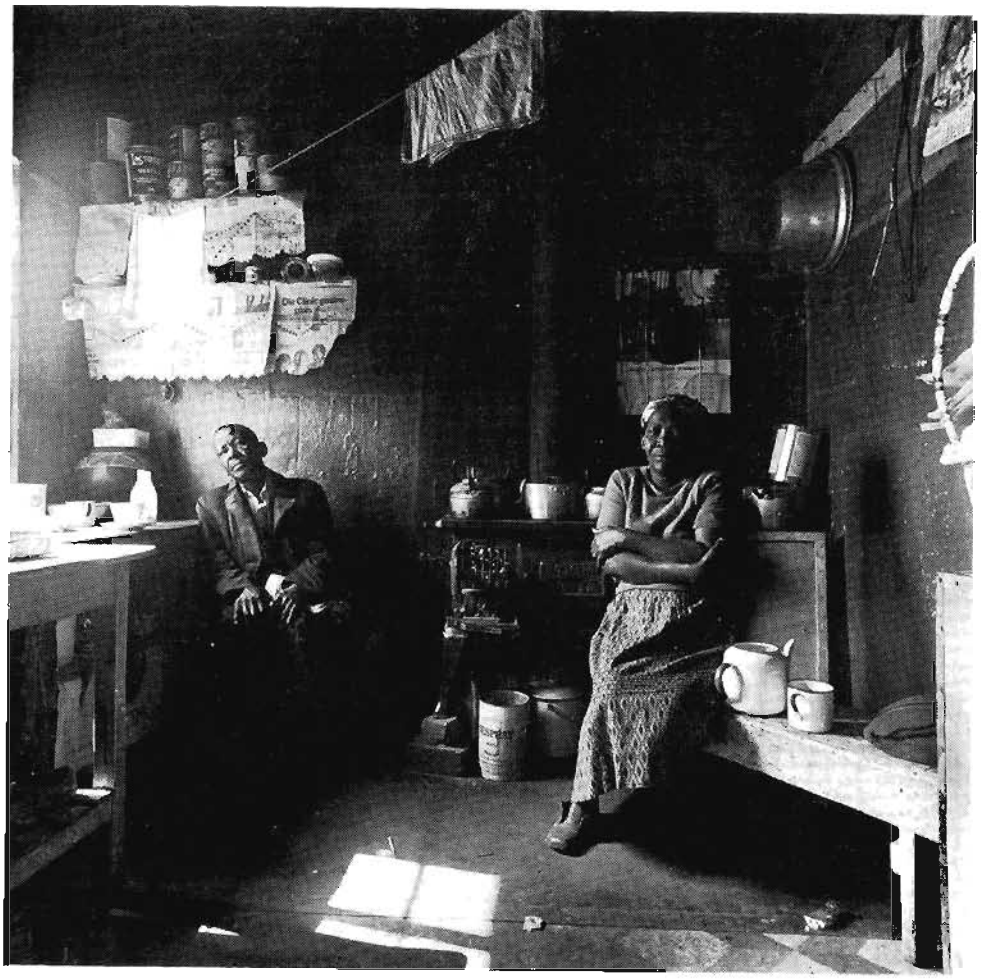
You know, mntwanam', some old ladies are pushed to the office in wheelbarrows as no one is allowed to take anyone else's pay on his or her behalf. You can cry if you are not man enough to see how these old ladies and some old gentlemen are treated by their own children for that matter. That is a school of vulgarism. Those boys do not have respect, really. We wait for our money outside in the sun and it takes them a little under an hour to serve two pensioners. You know, there are a few who spend the night there to be first on pay-day. That is to show how desperate they are to get that money. Who knows, they might have spent some days without a meal.

At times I don't feel like going there and to keep on selling Umqombothi. But it is illegal and might lead to my arrest again, so I go there. You understand each other. Maybe if you could speak with them, they will understand, my son.

'Oh, definitely, we will try and speak to them,' I commented passively, wishing I had the power to keep this promise and stop the scandal at the pension offices.■

Ralph Ndawo

Makana and Ntsiki, Rockville, Soweto

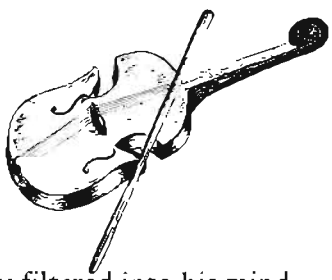


In a Kitchen, Killarney, Orlando West, Soweto

The Music of the Violin

A SHORT STORY BY NJABULO NDEBELE

illustrated by Mpikayipheli Figlan



Vukani was doing homework in his bedroom when voices in the living room slowly filtered into his mind. He lifted his head to look up, as if to focus his ears. No. He could not recognise the voices. Now and again the hum of conversation was punctuated with laughter. Then he grew apprehensive, the continuing conversation suddenly filling him with dread. He tried to concentrate on his work: 'Answer the following questions: How did the coming of the whites lead to the establishment of prosperity and peace among the various Bantu tribes? . . . ' But the peace had gone from his mind. The questions had become a meaningless task. Instinctively, he turned round to look at his music stand at the foot of his bed. Yesterday he had practised some Mozart. Then he saw the violin leaning against the wall next to the stand. Would they come to interrupt him? He felt certain they would. He stood up, thinking of a way of escape.

There was another peal of laughter from the living room, and Vukani wondered again who the visitors were. As he opened the door slowly, he was met by another thunderous roar. Escape would be impossible. He had to go through the living room and would certainly be called by his mother to be introduced to the visitors, and then the usual agony would follow. A delicate clink of cups and saucers told Vukani that the visitors had been served with tea. Another roar. His father and the male visitor were laughing. He knew now that the visitors were a man and a woman, but he did not recognise their voices. Growing curious, he opened the door by another inch or so, and saw the woman visitor, who sat close to where the passage to the bedrooms began. Vukani's mother, still in her white nursing uniform, sat close to the woman visitor in another heavily cushioned chair. They were separated by a coffee table.

'I couldn't make it at all to the meeting last Saturday,' said Vukani's mother.

'Which meeting?' asked the woman.

The men laughed again.

'Don't you laugh so loudly,' Vukani's mother shouted.

'You see,' Vukani's father was saying, 'I had caught the fellow by surprise, the way I like to catch them.'

'That's the only way to ensure that the work gets done,' said the other man.

'Indeed,' agreed Vukani's Father.

'So?' asked the other man.

'So I said: "Show me the students' garden plots." I saw a twitch of anguish across his face. But he was a clever fellow, you see. He quickly recovered and said: "Of course Sir, of course, come along." So we went. There was a wilderness around the school. These bush schools: I wouldn't have been surprised if a python had stopped us in our tracks. So, after about two hundred yards of walking, and all the wilderness around us, I began to wonder. So I said to this teacher: "Mr Mabaso," – that was the fellow's name – "these plots, they are quite far, aren't they?" "We're just about there, Sir," he said.'

'Man alive!' exclaimed the other man. 'This story is getting hot. Let me sip one more time.' There was silence while the man sipped his tea. Vukani's mother also lifted her cup to her lips. The women were now listening too.

'So,' continued Vukani's father, 'we walked another two hundred yards and I turned to look at the man. "We're just about there, Sir." I only needed to look at him and he would say: "We're just about there, Sir." '

Everybody laughed. 'You see, the fellow was now sweating like a horse.'

'So?' asked the woman visitor, laughing some more. She was wiping her eyes with a tissue.

'Then this fellow, Mabaso, shows me a hill about a mile away and says: "We're going there, to that hill, Sir, the plots are behind it. You see, Sir, I figured that since the wind normally hits the hill on the side we are looking at now, I should have the plots on the leeward side to protect the plants." What bosh!'

There was more laughter and the male visitor said, in the middle of it: 'Beatrice, give me some Kleenex, please.' His wife stood up and disappeared from Vukani's view. She returned. Vukani heard the blowing of a nose. It must have been the man.

'Please don't laugh, fellow Africans,' said Vukani's father. 'The man is a genius. What's this poem by the English poet? The man blushes unseen in the wilderness. He knew I would not go any further. So I really have no proof that there were no garden plots.'

'Of course there weren't any,' asserted Vukani's mother.

'Of course there weren't,' everybody agreed.

'You school inspectors,' said the male visitor, 'have real problems with these bush schools.'

'You haven't heard anything yet,' agreed Vukani's father. 'We just can't get it into these teachers' heads that we have to uplift the black nation. And we cannot do that through cheating and laziness. We will not develop self-reliance that way. That fellow was just not teaching the students gardening, and that is dead against government policy.' Vukani shut the door. In spite of himself, he had been amused by the story. He went back to the desk and tried to continue with the homework. He could not. What about going out through the window? No. That would be taking things too far. He wondered where Teboho, his sister was. Probably in her bedroom.

Teboho and their mother were getting involved in too many heated exchanges these days. Their mother tended to make too many demands on them. Vukani wished he could go and talk to Teboho. They had grown very close. Then he suddenly became frantic again and went to the door. He had to escape. When he opened the door, slightly again, it was the woman named Beatrice who was talking.

'You just don't know what you missed, you,' she was saying. The men laughed again.

'Please, you men!' appealed Vukani's mother. But they laughed once again.

'Do you want us to leave you and go to the bedroom?' threatened Vukani's mother. 'And you know if we go in there we won't come out.'

'Peace! Peace!' shouted Vukani's father. 'Peace, women of Africa!'

Then he lowered his voice as he continued to talk to the other man.

'What have I missed?' asked Vukani's mother, eagerly.

'Well, you just don't know what you've missed,' said Mrs Beatrice, pulling the bait away from the fish.

'Please don't tease me.'

'I want to do just that,' said Mrs Beatrice, clapping once and sitting forward in her chair, her legs thrust underneath. She kept on pulling her tight-fitting

skirt down over her big knees. But after each effort, the skirt slipped back revealing the knees again.

'You women are on again about the Housewives' League,' interrupted Vukani's father.

'Day in and day out,' supported the other man.

'Of course yes!' said Mrs Beatrice with emphatic pride.

'Forget about these men,' pleaded Vukani's mother, 'and give me a pinch of the story.'

'Mother-of-Teboho, you really missed,' Mrs Beatrice started. 'A white woman came all the way from Emmarentia, a high class exclusive suburb, to address the meeting on Jewish recipes. Came all the way to Soweto for that. It was wonderful.'

'Was it not Mrs Kaplinsky?'

'As if you knew!'

'Eh please, give me! Give me!' shouted Vukani's mother with great excitement, clapping her hands repeatedly. 'I'm fetching my pen, I'm fetching my pen. Give me those recipes.' But she did not leave to go and fetch her pen.

'I'm selling them, dearie. Business first, friendship after.' They laughed.

'Ei! Women and food!' exclaimed the other man.

'What! We cook for you,' retorted his wife.

'Exactly,' concurred Vukani's mother. 'More tea?'

'No thanks, dearie.'

'Hey you men, more tea?' But the men were already back to their conversation. Vukani's father answered while laughing, suddenly coming into Vukani's view as he brought his empty cup to the coffee table that separated the women.

'No thanks,' he was saying, 'No thanks . . . he he he hehehehe . . . that was a good one . . . no thanks . . . what a good one.' Then he took out a handkerchief from the pocket of his trousers, wiped his eyes, wiped his whole face, and then wiped his lips. 'A jolly good evening, tonight.' Then he went back to his chair, disappearing from Vukani's view.

'Thanks for the tea,' said the other man, blowing his nose.

'Teboho!' called Vukani's mother. 'Please come and clear up here!'

Teboho appeared carrying a tray. She had on denim jeans and a loose blouse.

'That was a nice cup of tea, Teboho,' said the other man. Teboho replied with a shy smile. 'When are you going back to varsity?'

'We have six more weeks,' replied Teboho.

'You are lucky to have children who are educating themselves, dearie,' said Mrs Beatrice.

'Oh, well,' said Vukani's mother shrugging her shoulders, as Teboho disappeared into the kitchen. There was silence.

There is not a single boy in the whole of Soweto, not even in Dube, who has a room like yours. This room is as good as any white boy's.

'Sometimes these South African Jews sicken me,' said the other man reflectively.

'Why?' the two women asked.

'Well, they're hypocrites! I mean look, they say they were killed left and right by the Germans, but here they are helping the Boers to sit on us.'

'How can you say such a thing?' asked his wife. 'People like Mrs Kaplinsky are very good friends of ours. Some of her best friends are Africans.'

'Because she gives you recipes?'

'Food, my dear husband, belongs to mankind, not just to one race.'

'Yes, exactly,' agreed Vukani's mother. 'Like art, literature and things. Completely universal.'

'Well . . . ' said the man, but he did not pursue the matter further.

'In fact this reminds me,' said Vukani's mother with sudden enthusiasm, her eyes glittering, 'instead of sitting here talking politics, we should be listening to some music. Have you heard my son play? He plays the violin. A most wonderful instrument!'

'Yes,' said Vukani's father, 'you know . . . '

Vukani swiftly shut the door, shutting out the living room conversation with an abruptness that brought him sharply to himself as he moved to the centre of the room. He began to feel very lonely and noticed that he was trembling. It was coming now. He looked at the history homework on the desk, then looked at the reading lamp with its circular light which seemed to be baking the open pages of the books on the desk with its intensity, while the books looked as if they were waiting for that delicate moment when they would burst into flame. Then he thought of Doksi his friend. He wondered where he was and what he was doing at that moment. Friday evening? Probably watching his father cutting the late evening customers' hair and trimming it carefully while he murmured a song as always. Doksi had said to Vukani one day that when he was a grown up, he would like to be a barber like his father. And Doksi did love hair. Vukani remembered his favourite game: a weekly ritual of hair burning. Every Saturday afternoon Doksi would make a fire out in the yard and when it was burning steadily, toss knots of hair into it. The hair would catch fire with a crackling brilliance that always sent him into raptures of delight. He never seemed to mind the smell of the burning hair. One Saturday after burning hair Doksi had said, while making the sign of the cross over the smoking fire: 'When God had finished burning hair, he thought that it was good.' Vukani had playfully accused him of sacrilege. But Doksi had continued suddenly looking very serious: 'Dead things catch fire,' he said. Vukani was suddenly caught by a wishful fascination to see the books on the desk aflame. Perhaps he should lower the lamp, bringing it closer to the books. It was a silly idea but he lowered the lamp all the same. But the papers shone defiantly with a sheen. It was futile. Then he saw his violin again, and felt the sensation of fear deep in his breast.

He looked at the violin with dread: something that could bring both pain and pleasure all at once. It was like the red dress which Miss Yende, their class teacher in standard four, occasionally wore. She had once said to the class: 'When I wear this red dress, children, know that I shall not stomach any nonsense that day. Know that I shall expect sharp minds: I shall expect quick responses to my questions, and I shall expect absolute seriousness. And I shall use the stick with the vengeance of the God of the Old Testament.' That dress! It was a deep, rich velvety red that somehow suggested that it had a flowery fragrance. Yet, because it also signalled the possibility of pain, it had a dreadful repulsiveness.

Vukani tried to brace himself for the coming of the visitors. It was always like that. Every visitor was brought to his room, where he was required to be doing his school work or practising on the violin.

Then he had to entertain these visitors with violin music. It was always an agonising nuisance to be an unwilling entertainer. What would happen if he should refuse to play that night? He knew what his mother would say. It was the same thing all the time. His eyes swept round the room. He was well provided for. There was the beautiful desk on which he did his work; bookshelves full of books, including a set of the *Encyclopaedia Brittanica*; a reading lamp on the desk; two comfortable easy chairs; a wardrobe full of clothes; his own portable transistor radio; a violin and music stand; a chest full of games – monopoly, chess and many others. His mother never tired of telling him how lucky he was. 'There is not a single boy in the whole of Soweto, not even here in Dube, who has a room like yours. This room is as good as any white boy's. Isn't it exactly like Ronnie Simpson's? You yourself, you ungrateful boy, saw that room when we visited the Simpsons in Parktown North. Kaffir children! That's what. Always ungrateful!'

What did all this really mean to him when it brought so much bother?

Vukani remembered what teacher Maseko had said at assembly one morning: 'Children, I would rather be a hungry dog that runs freely in the streets, than a fat, chained dog burdened with itself and the weight of the chain. Whenever the whiteman tells you that he has made you much better off than Africans elsewhere in this continent, tell him he is lying before God!' There were cheers that morning at assembly, and the children had sung the morning's hymn with a feeling of energetic release:

I will make you fishers of men
Fishers of men
Fishers of men
I will make you fishers of men
If you follow me.

Three weeks later, teacher Maseko was fired. The Principal had made the announcement at morning assembly. He spoke in Afrikaans, always. Concluding the announcement, he said: 'Children, a wondering dog, that upsets garbage bins and ejects its dung all over the place, is a very dangerous animal. It is a carrier of disease and pestilence, and when you see it, pelt it with stones. What should you do to it?'

'Pelt it with stones!' was the sombre response of the assembled children that morning. Vukani had wondered whether teacher Maseko was that dog. But how could anybody pelt teacher Maseko with stones?

Vukani heard another roar of laughter from the living room. But why did his mother have to show off at his expense like this? That Friday, as on all Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays, he had carried his violin to school. The other children at school never got used to it. It was a constant source of wonder and ridicule. 'Here's a fellow with a strange guitar!' some would say. Others would ask him to play the current township hits. It was so every day. Then one day his violin disappeared from class while he went out to the boys' toilet. He was met with stony faces when he pleaded for its return after school. Everybody simply went home and there was no sign of the violin. What would he say to his music teachers in town? What would he say to his mother? When he went out of the classroom, he found Doksi waiting for him. They always went home together, except on the days when Vukani had to go to town for his music lessons after school. 'Doksi,' he said, 'I can't find my violin. Somebody took it.'

'These boys of shit!' Doksi said with a curse of sympathy. He had not waited for details. He knew his friend's problem. 'Do you suspect anybody?'

'I can't say,' replied Vukani. 'The whole class seems to have ganged up against me. There are some things that always bring them together.' 'Even Gwendoline?' asked Doksi, with a mischievous smirk across his face. Gwendoline was the frail, brilliant, beautiful girl who vied with Vukani for first position in class. Vukani had always told Doksi that he would like to marry that girl one day. And Doksi would always say: 'With you it's talk, talk all the time. Why don't you just go to this girl and tell her you love her? Just look at how she looks at you. She's suffering, man!'

'Look,' said Vukani, 'this is no time for jokes. My violin is lost.'

'The trouble with you, Vukani, is that you are too soft. I would never stand this nonsense. I'd just face the whole class and say, "Whoever took my violin is a coward. Why doesn't he come out and fight?" I'm sure it was taken by one of those big boys whom everybody fears. Big bodies without minds. They ought to be working in town. Just at school to avoid paying tax. But me, they know me. They know what my brothers would do. My whole family would come here looking for the bastards.' Most of the children had gone now. Only those whose turn it was to

The Musician, lino-cut, W. Sol Mafa

clean the classrooms remained.

'Let's go and tell the principal,' suggested Vukani. The principal was one of those Vukani had entertained one day in his bedroom. He was a friend of his father's. 'But maybe we shouldn't,' said Vukani, changing his mind.

'Let's go and find out from the girls sweeping up your classroom,' suggested Doksi. They went back. The girls were singing loudly and the room was full of dust. 'Leave it to me,' said Doksi. There were four girls in there. Gwendoline and Manana were as old as Doksi and Vukani. The other two girls, Topsana and Sarah were older. Much older.

'Hey, you girls!' shouted Doksi, squaring his shoulders and looking like a cowboy about to draw. 'Where is the bloody violin!' The bigger girls simply laughed.

'And who are you, toughie?' asked Sarah, pushing a desk out of the way for Topsana to sweep.

'Hey you, Vukani,' called Topsana, 'I want to soothe your heart. I've long been waiting for this moment. Come and kiss me.' The smaller girls giggled, and Vukani regretted that they had come back. 'I mean it,' said Topsana. 'I know who took your violin. It's safe. You'll find it at home. I made them promise to take it there. There now, I want my kiss. I want to kiss the inspector's son.'

Doksi turned to the younger girls, 'Hey you, what is the joke? What's there to laugh at?'

'Hha!' protested Manana, sweeping rather purposefully. 'We have a right to laugh.'

'I can show you a thing or two,' Doksi said. 'Punch you up or something.'

'Doksi,' appealed Vukani, 'please, let's go.' Doksi clearly felt the need for retreat, but it had to be done with dignity. He addressed all the girls with a sweep of his hand, 'You are all useless. One of these days I'll get you. Come on, Vukani, let's go.'

The walk home for Vukani had been a long one. Better not to tell the parents. If Topsana had been telling the truth, then he should wait. Nobody asked him about the violin. But he would never forget the morning following that day when his mother stormed into his bedroom, black with anger. She had simply come in and pulled the blankets off him. She glared at him, holding the violin in one of her hands. Vukani had felt so exposed — as if his mother was about to hit him with the violin. It was very early in the morning. His mother was already dressed up in her uniform, ready to go to work. If she was on day duty, she had to leave very early for the hospital.

'Vukani!' she was shouting, 'What desecration is this? What ultimate act of ungratefulness is this? Is this to spite me? Is this an insult? Tell me before I finish you off!'

'What's happening, Dorkas?' Vukani saw his father entering the bedroom. 'Can you believe this? I found this violin on the doorstep outside as I was leaving for work. Can you believe this?'

'Vukani,' said his Father. 'What on earth could have made you do such a thing?'

'I didn't put it there, Baba,' Vukani replied.

'Nonsense,' shouted his mother, 'you don't have to lie. Ungrateful wretch, you have the nerve to tell your parents a lie.'

'Wait a minute, dear, maybe we should hear what he has to say.' Vukani had nothing to say. The deep feeling of having been wronged could only find expression in tears. He heard the violin land next to him and he recoiled from its coldness. He also heard his mother leave, saying that he was crying because of his sins. She never knew what happened.

But that had happened last year. Today he had been humiliated again in public, and there were people in that living room who wanted to humiliate him again. Right inside his home. It was all because of this violin. The homework had made him forget the latest ordeal for a while. The homework was like a jigsaw puzzle; you simply looked for pieces which fitted. All the answers were there in the chapter. You just moved your finger up and down the page until you spotted the correct answer. There was no thinking involved. But now it was all gone. It was not South African History, the story of the coming of the whiteman he was looking at, he was now faced with the reality of the violin.

There was that gang of boys who always stood under the shop verandah at Maponya's shopping complex. They shouted, 'Hey, music man!' whenever he went past their 'headquarters' on his way home to Dube. That very Friday they had done more than shout at him from a distance. They had stopped him and humiliated him before all those workers who were returning from work in town.

'Hey, music man,' the one who seemed to be their leader had called. Vukani, as a rule, never answered them. He just walked on as if he had not heard anything. But that afternoon, as he was coming up from Phefeni station, and was turning round the corner to go down towards the AME church, it was as if the gang had been waiting for him.

'Hey, music man!' this time it was a chorus. A rowdy chorus. Out of the corner of his eye, Vukani saw two boys detach themselves from the gang. He dare not turn to look. He had to act unconcerned. He tried to quicken his steps as imperceptibly as possible.

'Music man! Don't you know your name?' They were behind him now. Crossing the street had been no problem for them. They simply walked onto the street and cars came to a screeching halt. They were the kings of the township. They just parted the traffic like Moses must have parted the waves of the sea. Vukani wanted to run, but he was not going to give himself away. If he ran and they caught up with him, they could do a lot of harm to him. He had had that feeling of wanting to take advantage of something weaker than himself when he found a stray dog trying to topple a garbage bin. If the dog stood its ground and growled, Vukani would become afraid. But if the dog took to its heels with tail and all tucked between the legs, Vukani would suddenly be filled with the urge to run after the dog, catch it, and beat it to death. A fleeing impala must excite the worst destructive urge in a lion. Vukani had once seen a film in which a lion charged at a frightened impala. There had been a confidence in the purposeful strides of the lion, as if it felt this was just a game that would surely end with the bringing down of the prey.

A hand grabbed Vukani's collar behind and jerked him violently to a halt. The leader of the gang came round and faced him. He held Vukani by the knot of his tie. He was short but heavily built. He had puffed up cheeks with scars on them. His bloodshot eyes suggested the violence in him. He must have been four or five years older than Vukani.

'Spy!' the leader cursed, glaring at Vukani. 'So you are special! So we had to cross the street and risk death in order to talk to you. You don't know your name, music man? Everyday we greet you nice nice and you don't answer. Because you think you are being greeted by shit. By scum, hey? Why, spy? Are we shit?'

'Ja! Just answer that,' said the fellow behind, 'are we shit?' Vukani tried to free his neck.

'Shit!' screamed the leader, 'we just wanted to talk to you nice nice. That's all. We just wanted to dance to your music a little. Dance to your guitar a little. But no. You don't even look at us. Do we smell, music man? Do we smell?' There was a crowd of workers now who were watching the spectacle quietly.

'Shake him up, Bhuka!' was the chorus from the rest of the gang about thirty yards away at the shop.

'What are you rogues doing to this poor boy?' asked an old lady who had a bundle of washing on her head.

'Shut up!' said Bhuka. 'Go and do your white man's washing, he'll want it tomorrow.' Some of the crowd laughed

at this.

'Dogs of the street! Don't talk like that to your mother. Whose child are you?'

'I'm your child,' said Bhuka with a certain flourish. This time more of the crowd laughed.

'He's the child of his mother!' said the boy behind Vukani. None laughed at that one. He was in the shadow of his leader.

'You are laughing,' said the woman, bravely addressing the crowds. '*You* are laughing at this boy being harassed and you are laughing at me being insulted by these street urchins. I could be your mother and this could be your son. Sies! You rogues, just let decent people be.' The woman then left, taking Vukani's hopes with her. But she had not left Bhuka unsettled. He had to move his prey to safer ground. Too many lesser animals could be a disturbance. He tightened his grip around Vukani's tie pulling him across the street towards the 'headquarters'. Vukani looked at the fist below his chin, and saw that it had a little sixth finger. There were two shining copper bangles round the wrist. Part of the crowd left but another part wanted to see the game to its end. They followed the trio to the shop. The gang had then completely encircled Vukani.

'Do you have a sister?' Bhuka snapped. Vukani had trouble breathing now. Bhuka realised this and loosened the grip. Vukani thought of Teboho at home. If she came here she would fight for him. 'I asked you a question. Do you have a sister?' Vukani nodded. 'Hey man, talk!'

'Is your voice precious? His master's voice!'

'Yes,' answered Vukani in a whisper.

'I want to fuck her. Do you hear? I want to eat her up thoroughly. Do you hear? Tell her that.' Bhuka then paused and jerked Vukani to and fro so that Vukane's head bobbed. He then stopped and glowered at Vukani. 'And what song will you play when I am on top of her?' There was a festive laugh from the crowd. Bhuka looked round in acknowledgement. 'Tell me now, can you play *Thoko Ujola Nobani?* ?' It was a current hit.

Vukani felt tears in his eyes. He blinked many times to keep them in. Why couldn't they just leave him alone. That day would be final, he would simply tell his parents that he did not want to play the violin again. If they still insisted, he would run away from home. 'Please, leave me alone,' he heard himself say.

'I asked you. Can you play *Thoko Ujola Nobani?* ?'

Vukani shook his head.

'Why, music man?'

'I'd have to see it written first. I can't just play it like that.'

'Next time you pass here you must know that song. And come with your sister!' Then he gave Vukani a shove in the chest, and Vukani reeled backwards and fell on his back. But he still held on to the violin. 'Next time we greet you nice nice, you must greet nice nice.' Vukani got up timidly and hurried away, glancing backwards occasionally. Somehow he felt relieved. It could have been worse. The stories he had heard about the violence of this gang were simply unbelievable. He felt deep inside him the laughter that followed him as he slunk away. Just after passing the AME church, he saw the rubbish heap that people had created at the corner and wished he was brave enough to throw the violin there.

'My son,' his mother had said one day when Vukani had complained about the harassment he suffered as a result of the violin, 'you should never yield to ignorance.'

'But maybe you should buy me a piano,' Vukani had said. 'I can't carry that in the street.'

'If Yehudi Menuhin had listened to fools, he wouldn't be the greatest living violinist. A violin you have, and a violin you shall play.'

That's how it had ended. But his agony had continued three times a week.

Then the door opened. 'Here he is!' said Vukani's mother as she led the visitors in. His father took the rear. Vukani blankly looked at the homework: Question Three: Who introduced the European type of education among the Bantu . . . ? But Vukani felt only the solid presence of four people behind him.

'Vuka,' said his mother, 'I did not hear you practice today.' It was not clear from her voice whether she was finding fault with her son or was just trying to say something by way of introduction. Vukani turned round and smiled sheepishly. They all looked at him as if they expected him to defend himself, their eyes occasionally going to the table as if to see what he was doing.

'Are you doing your homework, son?' asked the male visitor.

'E!'

'Good, hard-working boy!' he said patting him on the shoulder. And Vukani felt in that hand the heaviness of condescension.

'He's a very serious-minded boy,' added his mother with obvious pride.

'You are very happy, dearie, to have a child who loves school,' commented Mrs Beatrice.

'And here is my Mozart's violin,' said Vukani's father, pointing at the violin against the wall. He took the case, opened it and took out the violin.

'Vuka!'

'Ma!'

'These visitors are the mother and father of Lauretta. Do you know her?'

'No, I don't think I do,' said Vukani, shaking his head.

'But you are at the same school together. Surely you know Lauretta the daughter of Doctor Zwane? Stand up to greet them.'

Vukani then remembered the girl, who was well known at school for her brilliance. She was two classes ahead of Vukani. But Vukani wondered if she could beat Gwendoline. Vukani greeted the visitors and went back to his seat.

'Baba, you will play the visitors something, won't you? What will you play us?' asked his mother. Vukani

Continued on page 40

Three sequences from FORGED NEGATION an epic poem by Nkos'omzi Ngcukana.

III

the stampede began
to beat
beneath
pulsations
feet hammering
the hard ground
and the pot-holed streets

fists ululations
accompanied
clapping of hands

the stampede in rhythm
like a song bellowed
burst
rampaging
mobbing
pitching
to confrontation

the buildings
gutted
scattered through
areas of silence

VI

captive
realising their limits
considering the worth
and futility
of their cries

caged solitary
abused
cursing
depressed and broken

jerking
shaking
shouting
and howling
their muscles ceasing
to obey

everything swimming
before their eyes
a feeling of emptiness

shackled yet
strength and hope
living in them

VII

the feet and hands
chained together
their throats dry
from shouting

exhaustion
from head to toe
deprived of sleep

they look at
the moon
through the bars
wanting to pray
with doubt

it would be better
to curse the curs
and praise
our fathers' gods

they walk
limping
trying to catch
the rhythm of the stampede

ON THE PERIPHERY

It could have been one world and love forever,
But it was a pensile bridge only,
Trying to unite two such different lives.
Why couldn't we build a bridge more solid,
Indestructible by the outside world?

We walk on the same earth, breathe the same air,
Get wet from the same rain and the very same
sun dries our faces,
But our worlds are incongruous, dissimilar and
forcefully separated.
Not needed, not wanted, not permitted a
foothold in your solitude.

I hang like a passenger on an overcrowded train:
'Let me in, I can buy a ticket, second class, first
class
whatever you want and more!'
'No – reserved for members only', and the
colour of my eyes
disqualifies me from membership.

Ellinor Joosten/Durban

AGELESS

Ageless distance
between thorns,
ageless lament
as the dust gathers
flowers,
vaster than hands,
timeless atrophy
of gulls hinders
the sky,
fires and smokes
the horizon,
and further off
a lonesome lorry sighs.

Roy Joseph Cotton/Cape Town

OF COOLIES AND CANEFIELDS

The coolie
Has watered the canefields
With his sweat.

Heaps of white sugar
Rise now like heroin
And drug his soul.

Mogambery Isaac/Durban

THE TAMING OF THE MAN

Dangerous creature,
You catch me and tag me
Scourge me and cage me.
Then limbless, you set me free . . .
Proud that I am now
So tame.

Mogambery Isaac /Durban

at times

at times
i sit alone
immersed in
deep thought
about some things
i see around and i
fail to fully comprehend
how man made as told in the
book of genesis can contradict
his maker and treat like
man in a manner as to
reduce him (who was
made in the image
of the creator)
to a position
of less than
a thing

benjlanga/Durban

Societa Secreta Subversa

AN ABSURD STORY BY DUNCAN FOSTER/ALBERTON

n.d. mazin

In his office behind the public section of the governor's fort, Pontius Pilate sat reading a copy of 'Acta Diurna' (which means, when translated, 'Government Gazette'). Keeping up with the law was no mean task for a man of Pilate's limited capabilities. He did not pretend to understand the implications of much of his work. It was enough for him to know that he was carrying out the letter of the law and that if the Roman Empire was ever threatened from within, it would not be owing to any neglect of duty on his part.

Indeed, at that very moment, from the courtyard at the back of the fort, came the sounds of someone being flogged. Pilate knew who it was – a truculent young man who knew, or pretended to know, scarcely enough Latin to say 'Consento, Dominus' (which means, when translated, 'Yes Boss'). Pilate had tried being reasonable with the fellow, but to no avail; he had simply refused to confess that he was an active supporter of the banned Societa Secreta Subversa, a subversive secret society. Eventually, Pilate had been obliged to submit him to a sound flogging in the hope that it might loosen his obstinate tongue. However, it was with a heavy heart that Pilate handed the man over to the tormentors, for Pilate was not at heart a cruel man. Verily, verily, I say unto you, in his own way Pilate had considerable affection for the tribes and tongues over whom he held sway. At least one ancestor of his, a centurion in the Batavic Legion, had served in the Great Campaign by which the citizen armies of Rome had subjugated all the land north of the Sinai Peninsula. Pilate also believed that that same ancestor had fought in the Battle of the Jordan River, when a vengeful Roman god had brought such destruction upon the refractory tribes that the soldiers said afterwards (in Latin, of course), 'That was really a ding-dong battle!' From which was derived the name of the now famous national holiday, celebrated annually from one end of the Empire to the other, Ding-Dong Day.

From this long and happy association of his family with the tribes, Pilate had inherited a profound understanding of their customs and beliefs which enabled him to treat them with jovial informality. When he occasionally visited them in their homes, for example, he did not feel constrained to knock before entering . . .

So Pilate almost winced at every stroke of the lash across the young man's back. The soldiers seemed to be taking their time about it, he thought, as he tried to concentrate on the legal jargon of the latest Amendments to Section II of the Revised Citizens and Barbarians Extra- and Intra-Marital Relations Act of the Senate and the People of Rome.

Presently the young man was escorted back into the office. He could hardly hold himself erect, so Pilate allowed him to sit on a wicker stool opposite the desk. He ordered the manacles to be taken off his hands and dismissed the guards. For fully five minutes he contemplated the prisoner in silence. At first, the man seemed to be having difficulty in breathing. He made rasping noises in his throat, interspersed with half-broken pants. He was a slim, ascetic individual. His eyes, set against the gaunt darkness of his face, mirrored his pain. But he was not obsequious; neither was he defiant. As the minutes dragged by, his breath came more evenly and soon Pilate judged that he was able to answer questions.

He phrased the first one carefully, wishing to sound authoritative without being bullying. He spoke in the bastardised 'lingua franca' which all the tribesmen of the Empire seemed to understand.

'Are you a leader of the Societa?'

To his surprise, the man answered quietly and without hesitation.

'You are already convinced that I am.'

Pilate pondered this statement for some minutes before he said, 'And if I hang you for it? What then?'

'Then nothing. I will be dead. That is all.'

'You are not afraid to die?'

'Yes, I am afraid to die. But in this case you see it is not up to me as to whether, or when, I am to be hanged.'

Pilate shifted his position to stand behind the prisoner. He gazed out of the barred window and across the hot courtyard to the prison block behind the main section of the fort. It looked deserted, though there must have been a score or so prisoners inside. Shabby men – dozing, sleeping, praying, waiting – all of them, waiting. Quite a few Pilate might have recognised as previous offenders. This one in his office, he thought, was quite different from any of them.

He spoke again, trying another tack. 'Supposing I were to hand you over to the tribal courts. How do you think they would treat you?' A wry smile flickered lightly across the prisoner's face. 'Since it was the tribal court that delivered me up to you, I think they would be very agitated to have me back. I am an embarrassment to them.'

'Why?' Pilate was genuinely curious.

The prisoner answered hesitantly, half-perplexed: 'They think I am a traitor to my people – an enemy within the gates.'

'And are you?'

'I have not submitted myself.'

'To what?'

'To the tribal court . . . amongst other things.'

Pilate was not sure that he understood this answer, but he felt that to question further on it would reveal some ignorance on his part.

Another long silence ensued. Then Pilate said, 'If I release you, will you swear to go back to your tribe and behave yourself?'

'I shall behave myself exactly as I have always done.'

Once again, impasse.

On an impulse of exasperation, Pilate turned and stomped out of his office to find the guard. He was surprised to see a deputation from the tribal court sitting stolidly in the public section. One of the deputies, he noticed, had eyes almost as large and white as those of the prisoner; another was abstractedly and disgustingly picking his nose.

'What do *you* want?' asked Pilate shortly.

The white-eyed man gave him a bland smile. 'We have come to see a certain man punished for sedition.'

'I have just interviewed this man,' said Pilate stiffly.

'Then,' ventured white-eyes suavely, 'you have no doubt extracted proof of the charges against him.'

Acutely aware that he was sacrificing face, Pilate retorted in a too-loud voice, 'I find no reason to punish or imprison the man at all.' The white eyes narrowed to gleaming slits. The nose-picker was stricken with sudden paralysis and sat stock-still with a finger up one of his nostrils.

'It is not possible,' said white-eyes sharply, then added in a tone that was

both conciliatory and threatening, 'Sedition, O Pilate, is certainly a most difficult thing to prove against a man who refuses to answer questions, but in this case *surely* . . . ' His voice tailed off at precisely the right point.

Pilate, losing ground hopelessly, asked in a tone riddled with weakness:

'What do you think I should do with the man?'

As he spoke he noticed, inexplicably, that the nose-picker had started up again, pick, pick, pick. But it was white-eyes who answered his question: 'Hang him.'

And before Pilate could respond, he added pointedly: 'Unless, of course, it is necessary to refer the case to a higher authority.'

Pilate was beaten. He turned abruptly back to his office. 'That,' he said, 'will not be necessary.'

Inside, the prisoner sat exactly as he had been left. Whether he had heard the exchange with the tribal deputies, Pilate could not guess. He hoped not.

Pilate seated himself behind his desk and fumbled through some official papers to win time. Through the window, by the last rays of the afternoon sun, he could see the soldiers lowering the Imperial emblem to the strains of the Imperial anthem, 'Vox Noster' (which means, when translated, 'The Voice', alternatively 'The Vote'). With some effort, Pilate looked at the prisoner.

'You are a dangerous, deceitful man,' he said. 'It is the obstinacy of people like you which prevents the full blessings of Imperial rulership from coming to your people. We cannot allow your type to go on obstructing progress and interfering with good race relations. Therefore I intend to rid the country of you and any others like you whom I lay my hands on.'

He expected the prisoner to say something to this. He had actually steeled himself to shut out any pleas for clemency. But nothing came; not one word. A little disappointed in spite of his conscience, Pilate called for the guard. The door banged open and two centurions clumped in. Pilate nodded towards the prisoner and said, 'Take him away. You know where he goes to.'

As he said it, he realised that he was still speaking in the bastardised kitchen dialogue in which he had conversed with the prisoner and the court delegation. The centurions hesitated a moment as their brains translated the command into Latin. Then they acted. One of them pinioned the prisoner's arms behind his back while the other kicked away the wicker stool. As he jabbed his knee sharply into the prisoner's ribs, he barked out an order in Latin:

'Opskud, kaffir!' he snapped, which means, when translated . . . ■

VOICES FROM ZIMBABWE

Four poems by Chirwa P. Chipeya

uhuru in zimbabwe

villagers
massing everywhere
clapped their
hands in haste
frenzied their
drums and stamped
the ground quick
the cock crowed
'zee zimbabwe'
to all the sons
of the soil living
to fulfil the struggle
seven years in the jungle
of the martyrs and heroes

and harare
was more sleepless
splashing endless
jubilation
and danced
its rhumba
in the streets
sending the ecstasies of
a people once oppressed
across the riversides

africa
saluted
this uhuru

farewell wakoloni

away forevermore
the rapturous rape
of the wakoloni*
that ushered
our destruction
and violated
our fulfilment
we struggled
with the bondage
of our own minds
leaning to the estrangement
from the love
of our own music
there was even a stranger reunion
with our African
heritage
in a changed
order of things
that saw us
forsaking the nature
of our own destiny
to be the half replicas
of past masters

* *Shangaan for colonialists*

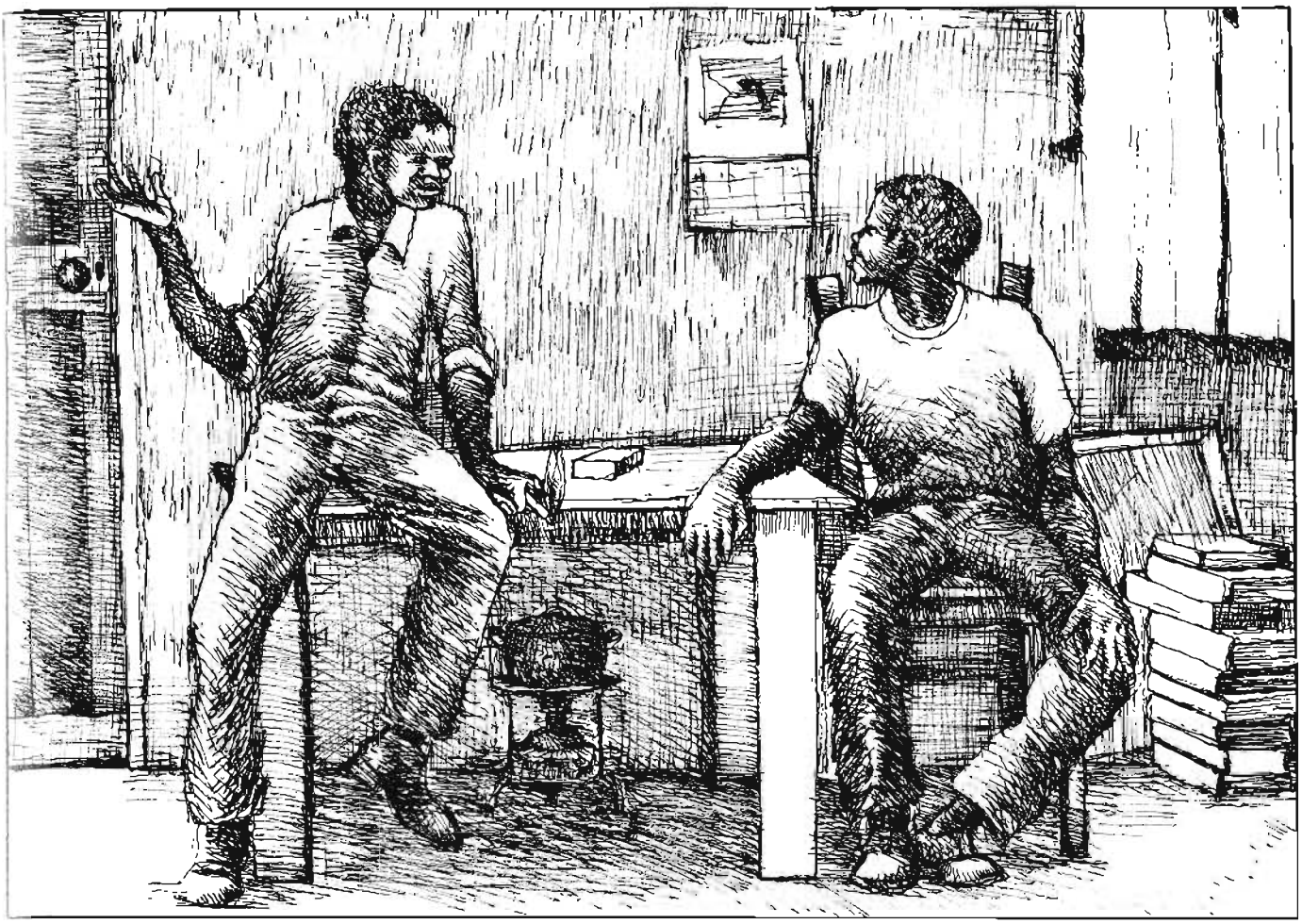
in the days of chimurenga

the skirmishes
the border raids
the martyrs
the heroes
the movements
the death of cultures
vulturous voices
that lived in
exclusiveness
exhausted
their propaganda
towns turned sour
homesteads were barricaded
villagers were hoarded
dissidents were concentrated
but the dreams of money
were scattered in the bloody
dust of bushes
so shattered the souls
of soil tenders
that lamented the gloom
of forced exile
in a war that never ended
it continued
and continued
drying juice
drifting peace
meetings followed
tigerish or fearless
year after year
the rebellion was there
haunted by nibmar*
it collapsed detente
across the bridge
and failed geneva
the war continued
tolling its tragedies
faring to the grind
of time and fate

* *nibmar — no independence before majority rule*

change

the clouds
losing the
lustre of
clarity
the sky
saturated
with imminent
tears
there's neither
breeze nor wind
to deceive
the vision
that the season
belongs
to the peasants



SOME KINDS OF WOUNDS

A Short Story by Charles Mungoshi/Zimbabwe

Illustrated by Goodman Mabote

Kute pushed the woman gently into the room and before she could sit down on the floor — as I saw she was about to, I quickly offered her a chair. Suddenly the smell in the room changed. The woman carefully sat on the edge of the chair, her hands in her lap, eyes cast down. Kute remained standing in the doorway.

'Okay?' he whispered.

'It's all right,' I said.

'Good. Won't be long. A minute to work the windowpane loose — and — hallelujah!' He was in sudden good spirits.

'Mind the neighbours,' I warned him.

'They call me Cool Cat Kute. And anyway who would hear a thing with that kind of roof-wrecking racket going on? Tell me Gatsi. How did I go and choose me a father like that?'

'The ways of the Almighty are mysterious and not to be sniffed at with our clay snouts,' I offered him the wisdom of our seven-month friendship.

'Amen. Could we borrow a knife?'

I handed him my all-purpose table knife. 'Mind you don't break it. It's the last of its kind in this country.'

'Priceless, to be precise,' he said, giving it the expert butcher's professional squint. 'It's in safe hands.' Turning to the woman, he whispered loudly, 'Patience. The reverend Gatsi here will take good care of you. I lost my key and the spare is opening up some bright futures for me in my father's dreams.' He said this last bit nodding towards the sound coming from his father's room down the corridor.

The woman didn't say a thing. He went out to the back where the door to his room was. The smell in the room was growing thicker. I guiltily looked at the window and saw that it was partly open. I couldn't bring myself to open it wider.

Slowly I turned my head towards the woman. She wore a sleeveless top of some faded very thin pink material that showed she had nothing inside to hold up her breasts. She had on a home-made black skirt and her dusty feet were covered by worn-out once-white tennis shoes without laces. Her head was covered in a headcloth that hid almost half her face down to the top of the bridge of her nose so that her eyes were in shadow. It gave her a very mysterious look which I was sure must have appealed to Kute's sense of the sensual. There were deep lines down from the flanks of her nostrils to the corners of her mouth. These lines gave her an old woman's face although I could sense that she was far from being old. In fact, there was a certain subtle awkwardness in her that made me feel she wasn't even aware that she was a woman.

She looked as if she had come a very long way on foot. She looked that dusty and travel-used — a kind of slept-in-every-place air about her. And she sat in that chair as if she couldn't trust herself to let go and relax, as if she knew that this was only a temporary resting place on the long road. And yet, in spite of all this, there was a kind of watchful-stillness about her, a kind of relaxation-in-motion that made me feel that she was as much at home in that chair as on

her feet or asleep. Walking, sitting or sleeping, her body had erased all the differences and acquired its own kind of separate peace with her mind.

She didn't look at the pot of sadza cooking on the fire, nor round this room which must only have been strange to her with the numerous books piled knee-high against one wall, some cheap reproductions of some abstract paintings, the typewriter, the single unmade bed and the clothes hanging from wire-hangers in a corner. She did not even look at me or at anything else except at her hands in her lap. I wondered whether she even saw those hands. The *silence* in her resting hands suggested some deep religious experience in her. Those hands – which were clearly not sweating from nervousness as mine would in the presence of strange people or unfamiliar rooms – gave me a feeling I had never had since coming to the city some ten or so years before. They belonged to the depths of the heart of the country and all that I missed. She reminded me of where I came from and suddenly the smell in the room was clearly a mixture of human sweat and soil and grass and leaves as we carted hay for the cattle. Once I knew what it was, I felt at home in it.

Outside, I heard the scraping of the knife on Kuté's window.

'He has lost his key and he is trying to remove the window pane so that you can get in,' I told the woman, for something to say.

She didn't say anything. Suddenly, I felt as if she were accusing me of something. I turned the stove low. I had lost all appetite. Then, remembering home, felt guilty all over again. I had lost the rural sense of hospitality and she would never forget how I had received her in my house.

'Want anything to eat?' I asked her, trying to cover up. And that was wrong too. You don't ask strangers who come into your house whether they would like food or water. You give them what you have and leave them to say no or to eat.

'I am all right,' she said.

'Honestly, I mean – it won't take long . . . '

'Don't worry, brother.' Her mouth gave the faintest suggestion of a smile and she left me to stew in my own guilt.

I took up a novel and tried to read. I read one line three times.

'Where do you come from?' I asked.

'Mount Darwin, Chesa.'

I put the book face down on the table and stood up to look out through the window. Behind me I could feel that she wasn't even taking advantage of this to look at me. I sat down in the chair and picked up the book again.

After some time the woman spoke,

Those hands . . . gave me a feeling I had never had since coming to the city some ten or so years before. They belonged to the depths of the heart of the country and all that I missed.

'He told me this is his house.'

'It's his father's, and he is the first born, so I suppose that makes it his.' She didn't seem to have heard me. I said, 'But his father sleeps in his own room and Kute has his room at the back.'

'And you are his brother?' she asked with the slightest hint at raising her eyes.

'I am only their lodger.' She didn't seem to understand that. 'I pay rent to them for this room. We are not related at all.'

She didn't say anything to this.

I picked up the book, decided that poetry would be easier in the circumstances. I threw the book on top of the pile of other books and pulled out a much-referred-to dog-eared paperback edition of Paul Celan's Selected Poems. His poetry was very difficult yet most of the poems were almost haiku-like in their brevity. I thought I would work on the meaning behind the verbal appearance while I waited for Kute. What bothered me was that the words were all quite simple – I didn't need a dictionary for their conventional meanings – yet the way they were used here was beyond me. Words.

'And his mother?' She startled me.

'His mother?'

'Your – your – '

I understood. 'She is keeping their home out in Manyene Reserve. She only comes to town for two weeks once every year.'

We fell silent. I returned to my poetry.

Later. 'Is he married?'

'No.'

Pause.

'Do you think he will let me sleep here tonight? Only for tonight?'

Down the corridor I heard the snoring reach such a pitch that it was impossible for it to go any higher.

'I don't know,' I said. 'He might.' But then you would have to leave at half-past four in the morning, I didn't tell her.

'It won't be long now,' she said. 'If he would only let me put up here for the night, tomorrow I am sure I shall be all right. I have got a friend in Highfield – that's what he said – Highfield. Do you know where Highfield is? This friend – I have known him for such a long time and I know he wouldn't lie to me. Back home. I . . . he . . . said he would take me to Highfield.' Pause. 'Is it far from here, this Highfield?'

I could smell the sadza burning but I didn't have the energy to take the pot off the stove. I had turned the flame low thinking it wouldn't need attending to till the woman had left the room.

'Is it far?' she repeated.

'No,' I said, suddenly unforgivably angry with Kute. I wondered what he had told her and *how* she had got here without asking for directions.

'This friend of yours in Highfield,' I asked quickly, 'did he ask you to come to him? Wasn't he waiting for you at Musika Bus Terminus?'

She simply shook her head and said nothing. How the hell could I help her if she wasn't going to talk? I looked out through the window, seeing nothing, feeling a newer kind of chilly guilt creep over me. I was suddenly aware of the depth of my hatred for Kute but I couldn't do anything and I just sat there feeling as if I were keeping vigil in a house of mourning.

'When he left there was no time to say goodbye,' she startled me once more. I turned towards her.

'My boyfriend,' she helped me although I was sure she couldn't have read my thoughts. 'I didn't even see him. He left word with one of his friends to tell me that should I ever come to Harare I should look him up in Highfield.'

'And the number? Where exactly in Highfield were you to look him up?'

'There was no time.' She hadn't heard me or she was just dumb. 'They came for him the following morning but he had gone.'

I was trying very hard to settle in between her lines so I didn't say anything.

'They knew he often came to our place to see me. I am sure they knew he was going to marry me. They know everything out there. They thought I would try and hide him. I wasn't there when they came. They shot my mother and my father. I was at a friend's – Chengeto – where I had put up for the night because of the curfew. Then we heard the shots and saw the flames and the smoke as our home burned down.'

'I am sorry,' I said and then felt very stupid. I was sinking.

'Chengeto's folks advised me to run away. Just as I was leaving I could see the dust of their cars making towards Chengeto's home.'

'Is it that bad out there?' What was I talking about? Or, rather, how do you – what do you say when someone tells you a story like that?

She looked up at me. Her eyes seemed to be points of light coming a long way through a tunnel. 'If the soldiers suspect you of harbouring or giving food to *vanamukoma* they kill you. If *vanamukoma* suspect you of

photo, Ralph Ndawo

passing information to the soldiers, they kill you. If your neighbour hates you he can tell either the soldiers or *vanamukoma* that you are a sellout and either way you will be killed.' She lowered her eyes. I would have felt easier had there been any kind of self-pity or suffering in her voice.

'So, what did your boyfriend do? Why did they come for him?' I felt it wouldn't be safe for me to ask her *who* came for him.

'Nothing,' she said. 'He didn't do anything at all. The soldiers just don't feel happy with a young man of twenty doing nothing out there.'

'But are you sure that he came here when he ran away?' I felt that it was more likely that he would want to join *vanamukoma* in the bush if the soldiers were after him. He would be safer in the bush.

'Wouldn't it have been safer for him to run into the bush?' I asked, seeing that she didn't seem to have heard me.

'He was going to marry me when all this fighting was over,' she said, apparently not interested in my questions. I felt like someone who had been invited to a party and then found himself ignored by the host. It made my guilty feeling more complex. I felt that she was silently asking me why I wasn't also out there. I looked at my pile of books and suddenly I wished I hadn't let her into the room.

'He was going to marry me,' she said. 'He would have married me if he hadn't felt that one day he might join the fighters — *vanamukoma*. He was quite friendly with them but they told him to help his old people on the farm. They didn't even recruit him to be a *mujibba* — that's the name for their messengers or spies — local village boys who keep *vanamukoma* supplied with information.'

'I know,' I said and then wished I hadn't said it. The pinpoints of light from her dark tunnel bored into me but she quickly dropped her head.

I looked through the window. I felt ashamed of the poetry. What was Kute still doing? The scraping had stopped.

'It must be tough living out there,' I said, wanting to hear more. It was like a sore which you felt needed scratching.

'We no longer think about it.'

'What are you going to do if you don't find him here?'

She looked up at me, but not accusingly, rather pleadingly, as if asking how I could be so cruel — but then I might have been wrong in thinking so because nothing in her showed that she needed my pity. Instead, I could feel a deeper silence settling in the room, that kind of silence one senses in places where a human life has been lost, the scene of an accident or some other disaster. A desperate, frightening silence that makes you ask metaphysical questions.

'How far is this Highfield?' she asked after some time.

I heard a tap on the window. I looked up and saw Kute looking in, grinning. I restrained myself from slapping that greedy meaty grin off his face.

'It's open,' he said. He came round to the door and entered without knocking. He handed me the knife. 'Thanks, Gatsi,' he said. 'Keep it safe for future journeys to the land of milk and honey — it's an all-purpose Moses's rod.' He nodded towards his father's snoring. 'Ask Pharaoh and the Red Sea.' He laughed and rubbed his hands.

I didn't answer him.

'All right, Reverend Gatsi. All right. Come on, sister.' He was angry.

They went out and Kute's anger reminded him to close the door softly. His father's snores were coming along the corridor like trapped wind in a tunnel. There were slight rustles and soft-footed thuds as they helped each other through the window into Kute's room. I sat in my chair, doing nothing.

Forty minutes later I heard a sound as if someone was crying. I listened hard and heard them coming out. Their shadows passed by my window and I heard their footfalls fade beyond the yard to get swallowed by other footfalls on the street.

Kute came back five minutes later. He entered my room without knocking.

'Silly bitch,' he said, sitting on the edge of the table. He wanted my compliments or some kind of comment that would make him feel good. He always felt he wasn't living until someone else told him so. When he saw that I wasn't going to answer him he went on, 'Thinks this is a home for the pregnant, destitute and aged.' He shook a cigarette from my pack which was lying on the table and lit it. He drew in smoke and filled his cheeks and then blew it out stintingly, afraid to waste a good smoke.

'Wanted to spend the night here. Wouldn't accept any money. And does she stink! If the old goat weren't around I would have asked her to have a bath first.'

'From where did you pick her up?' I asked.

'The pub.' He pulled on his cigarette and began to laugh. 'Can you imagine it, man. She was asking for directions to

Highfield *in* Highfield! Must have got into town today. Never even went to school. Can you imagine that — in this day and age?' He had a good laugh over that and went on, ' "Would you please tell me where Highfield is, brother." And I took her right to Highfield — here! I told her Highfield was too damn far to get there tonight.'

'Did she say what she was doing in the pub?'

'What else does her type do in the pub?'

'You didn't ask her?'

'That's her problem. If I had known she was pregnant I wouldn't have bothered with her. Silly bitch.'

I was quiet for some time while he smoked and thought over the wrong she had done him.

'Where have you taken her now?' I asked.

'I put her on the street and pointed east, south, north and west and told her this was all Highfield.' He laughed. The smoke caught in his throat and he coughed. 'You know, Gatsi, I just don't understand these country women. I offered her money and she refused it. And yet any fool can see how desperately she needs food, decent clothes, and if she is going to have a baby — hell. Probably she will throw it down some sewer drain or dump it on some rubbish heap for the dogs.'

I looked through the window. 'Where did she go?' I asked.

'How the hell should I know? Does her type ever lack places to go to? She just walked straight away from me without looking back — as if she knew where she was going. How the hell would I know where she was heading?'

I didn't say anything.

'You know, I think she was after something more than money. You can never tell in these times. Telling me she has walked all the way from Chesa or whatever place she mentioned — after her parents had been killed and she escaped — who does she think will believe that baboon-and-hare story in these times? Does she look the type that could have walked from Chesa to you? The dirt, the stink and the simple mentality might belong to Chesa yes — but don't let that fool you. She could have run away from home in Harare — her father after her with the old battleaxe for conceiving a bastard — and now she wants to con some fool of a man into keeping her till she delivers and later she will run away again with all his money and clothes and his everything — leaving him to look after her bastard. Damn silly bitch!'

He smoked for some time in silence. I knew he was looking at me, waiting for me to say something like 'Good old Cool Cat Kute', so that he could really begin to purr, stroking his whiskers and licking his fur as if he had finally landed the record-breaking rat.

'Hey,' he said suspiciously, 'what's got into you?'

I didn't answer him.

'Well, I got what I wanted out of her — Chesa stink, rags and all — and she can get what *she* wants from someone else. Saved me the trouble of scrounging for cigarette stubs though. Mighty considerate of her. *Kakara kununa hudya kamwe*, as the wise old folks had it. Dog eat dog.'

'Kute.'

'Yes?'

'You should have given her the money, you know. Forget about lying to her about Highfield. But the money at least.'

'Well, she refused it, didn't she? You aren't suggesting that I should have gone down on my knees and begged her to take it, are you?'

'She is not your usual type. Probably she didn't know all you wanted out of her is only *that*.'

'Heey! Come on, Gatsi. You know very well what she wanted — a good bed and a man for the night. Then tomorrow she would have come back again — and tomorrow and tomorrow till I was so entangled with her I wouldn't know whether my head comes before my arse or what.' He was now pleading with me. He didn't want me to get him wrong. He lived on the actor's habit, the clap of the hand and the cry for more.

I kept quiet but turned to look at him.

'Look,' he said. 'Why this sudden interest in that — that slut?'

'She is no slut. She may be pregnant but she is no slut.'

'Does she come from your home?'

'No.'

'Then?'

I didn't answer.

'Or you wanted her for yourself?' He had solved the problem for himself. He laughed long and hard. He patted me on the shoulder and laughed some more till tears stood in his eyes. 'Guts-less Gatsi! Why didn't you tell me you wanted her? I could have left her all to yourself and gone and found me another tail. Now you are growing up. You are coming to my way of thinking now. That's a good sign. The heavens augur well for a bumper crop in tail this year!' He looked at me as if I were a long-lost brother suddenly come home without warning. 'Tell you what,' he said. 'When I make my patrol tomorrow night we go together, right? Good Gutsy Gatsi. Man does not live on books alone but on . . . '

'I think you should take it slow,' I cut into his sermon.

'Take what slow?'

'You know what I am talking about. Once or twice per week is all right. Not everyday.'

'What the hell are you talking about?'

I could see dark anger and fear gathering in his eyes like storm clouds.

'It isn't healthy, you know.'

'What isn't healthy?' He was hedging trying to avoid facing it. He knew what I was talking about.

'This won't get you anywhere, Kute.'

'The hell you say!' He banged the table with his fist. 'Has my old man asked you to interrogate me about this?'

'I don't need your old man to see that.'

'Oh, so you have decided to play the saviour! With your kind of guts?' he sniggered. 'Look, you are just jealous, man. You can't do what I can do and you dream of doing it and when the moment of truth comes you haven't got the guts, right? You wanted that piece of tail and you hate my guts for doing what I have done to her. Why don't you ask me how it's done and I will give you a few elementary lessons, huh, Gatsi-boy?'

'That doesn't change the fact that you won't get anywhere. Look how many times you have been to the doctor. Your seat-hide must be as perforated as a sieve now. Sounding tough and brave doesn't get you anywhere either.'

'Hell, man, hell! And what has ever got me anywhere in this rotten world? Third division in Form Four and everyone at my neck saying I wasn't applying myself. Four years tramping round the country, knocking on every goddamn door for *any* kind of job and being shooed off with a boot in my arse and at home my old man out for my scalp telling me I am not searching hard enough. I would have drunk, taken drugs — anything to jump out of my skin — but that stuff hasn't just been good for me. And now you begrudge me the one and only little thing that keeps me going.'

As always, the anger was crumbling into his only other weapon that was even worse than the anger. It was as if I had taken the lid off a sewer-drain manhole knowing exactly what would come out but not quite prepared to take what finally came out of it.

'Listen,' I said, 'I am only trying to help.'

'Yeah? Give me a job then — and money and keep me sane.'

'You are getting more than enough money from your old man.'

'For my private studies. And he gave it to me until he saw you with all those books. He thinks it's the books that get one a job.'

'I don't see how else you want to get

a better job if you aren't going to study for it.'

'So you haven't heard of the university blokes who have been years looking for jobs?'

'That's no reason why you shouldn't study yourself.'

'What the hell do you mean, I am not studying?'

'Don't fool yourself, Kute. Since you bought those books you haven't touched a single one of them. If your old man had been to school he would know exactly what you are doing to him.'

He leaned towards me menacingly and hissed, 'You aren't going to let him hear that are you?'

I said nothing.

'Well, are you?' His nose was only a few inches from my face.

'It's your funeral, Kute,' I said, rising to close the window. 'But I wish you wouldn't take advantage of your old man in this way.'

He leaned back in his chair and brought his hands to his face, sighed and looked blearily at me. He said, 'You don't know how it is.'

'I know.'

'No, you don't.'

We were quiet for some time.

'Know what,' he said. 'When I ran into you that day in town – must be six months or so now – and you told me that you were looking for a room, you don't know how good I felt. To have someone – a classmate from way back those years in school – to talk to. Someone like you to confide in, someone who would understand. I knew I could trust you. You were one of those who always understood me. I felt good, I tell you. And the best feeling I ever had in my life was when I knew I could ask my old man – persuade him – to give you a room here. I knew he would know I was moving in good company. I knew he would know that I wasn't as useless as he seemed to think. That made me feel good, Gatsi. To be able to do something for someone, for nothing. I almost cried, Gatsi. It's a thing I have always wanted to do all my life but when you don't have what others have how do you do it? Who will believe you that you are sincere? I know I don't have your kind of brains. Even in school, but should the luck always come to those who have brains alone? Look at me now, still at the bottom of my class while you are well-tucked into that firm of publishers. And my old man believes it's because I am lazy. Do you know that my old man loves you more than me – his own son? Do you know that?'

'No.'

'The hell you don't!'

'Listen Kute. I know how you feel. I have been through something like it too.'

'But not four years, man. Four years is too long for any man to be still hoping.'

'But you can't just give up like this. You aren't helping anyone, least of all yourself, by being bitter and attacking your father and dropping your studies and chasing tail. You have to face yourself, find what you want to do and do it.'

He squinted dangerously at me, 'So I was right, huh?'

'Right about what?'

'You are together with my old man. Shit, man. I thought you were my friend. I thought you understood. I persuaded my old man to give you a room here and now you are better than me – his own son!'

'Don't hang your own shortcomings round other people's necks, Kute.'

'Dang shortcomings! I know you have been stabbing me in the back since that time you started staying here. Neither you nor my old man has the guts to say it to my face but I know it. I have been too long out among people to be fooled by toothpaste-advert smiles.'

'You are imagining things, Kute.'

'Exactly. And who taught you that word? Let me tell you. It's that pig grunting down the corridor who would sell his own son for chicken shit.'

'You are frustrated, Kute, and that's all. You can't face the real world that's doing this to you and so you turn those that would – '

'You mean people like you? You are damn right. It's people like you who come messing up things for us unfortunates who should be shot.'

'You are not an unfortunate, Kute.'

'The hell I am not! When they have looked inside my head and decided that I am not good for anything else and what kind of load do you think I always carry round with me if it isn't Maths – 20 percent; English Literature – 15 percent; History – 40 percent; Geography – 19 percent? They have made my old man and all people I know believe it and now you are pushing it further into my old man's head that I am completely castrated with your books and studies. He really believes it's this shit you are doing in here that makes people and because I can't measure up to it – I am lost. I am not his son any more. Do you realise what I am talking about, you squirty worm?'

'Listen. I just wanted to help. Forget all I said. I was just worried that you might catch it worse than what you are receiving treatment for right now.'

'Just like my father. Now you are the bigger brother that I don't have. Do you know what it feels like to be the big brother in a family of eight and never be able to help your little brothers and sisters just because you have been labelled incompetent by some smart Mr Know-it-all who has had the further luck of having it believed by your own family?'

'Then prove yourself!'

'Prove my death, you mean?'

'So you want to kill – you would rather kill yourself?'

'Who says I am killing myself?'

'How many times have you been to the doctor for the past half-year and he has diagnosed VD in one form or another?'

'So you told my father that too? You are not leaving any stone unturned are you? You want to see me completely destroyed.' He put his hands to his face.

'How could I tell him *that?*'

'Sure you didn't when you shout it out like that as if you were the short-changed tenth wife in a polygamous marriage!'

'Kute.'

'Don't Kute me!'

'Listen.'

'Listen yourself, Mr Gutbug! It's me who feels the pricks of the doctor's needle. It's me who is going to do the dying if there is going to be any dying around here. And you won't hear me complain when I am dead, hear that? Not a single word from me when I am down and under. I'll be so far away and out of it all that I won't bother you. Then you can continue with your books all year round, all your damn precious life. God, I wish I had never met you!'

I looked at him. There were pieces of broken glass in his eyes.

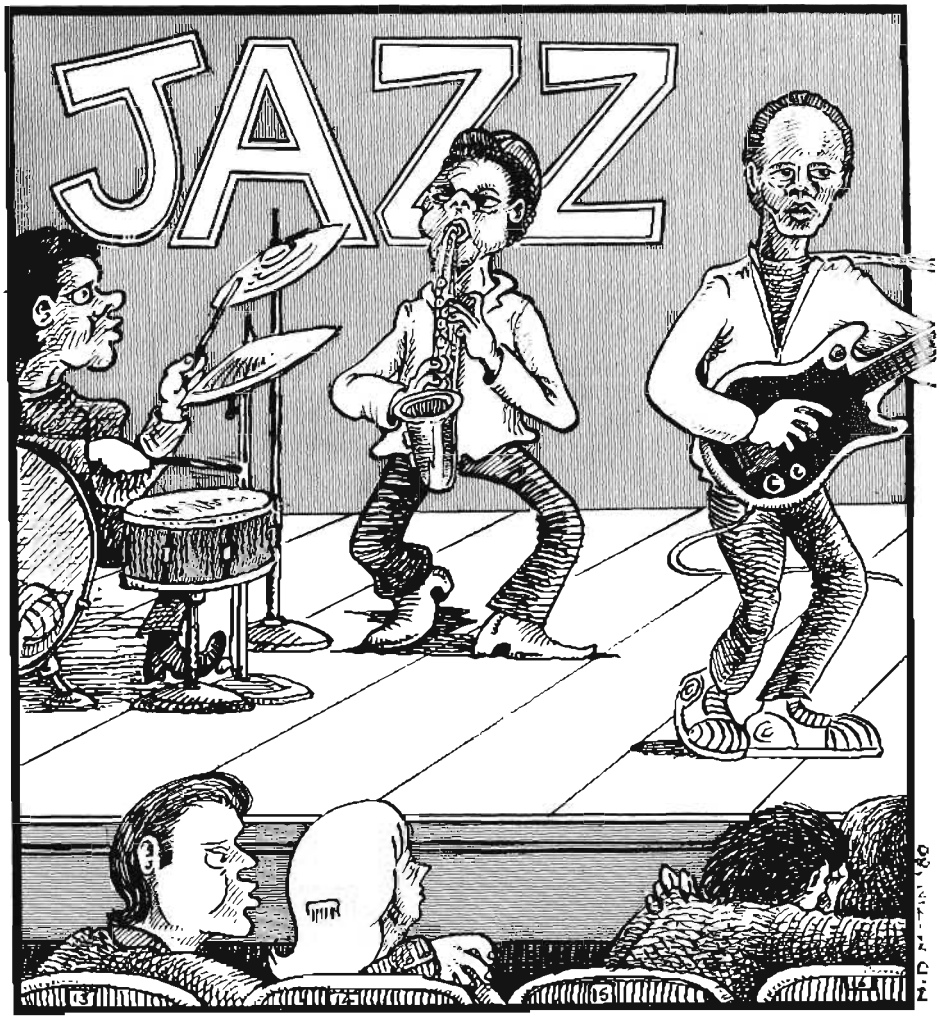
'Please leave me alone with my life, Gatsi, will you? I can't be as bright as you and you can't do what I can do although no one else thinks it's anything and when I die you will be king of the world and cock of the roost and I hope to honest God that you drown in your own piss so leave my goddam rotten life alone, will you?'

I looked at him and he turned his face away from me, swallowing hard. I looked through the window and saw only my reflection in the glasspane.

'Just stay out of my life,' he said, his eyes to the wall but his fists clenched so hard that several veins bulged out in his neck.

He stood up and, without looking at me, opened the door and went out, closing the door so silently that the echo of its eternal bang haunted me for the next three weeks as I tramped from one location to another in search of new lodgings. I had also given away the bulk of my books to friends because I found that it was just too much useless baggage to lug around with me whenever there was a need to change lodgings. ■

This is for you Adam, my first man, and for you Jane: this tale of my burned and wasted youth: for you have been taken by dark time, and I want remission through my utterance.



A story by Peter Wilhelm illustrated by n.d.mazin

It was when I had left school and was in my first year at university; eighteen years old, scrabbling around the campus with my bag of books and short-sightedness. Jane was in my English class and we sat near each other. She was very beautiful, a target for the predatory men who stalked women there, as always. But she held aloof, being an intellectual and, for those times, a radical.

Those times. The early 1960s, after Sharpeville, had the taste of revolution in the wintry wind. For me, South Africa has never been the country presented in the gross coffee-table books on tribes and wildlife, or the sunny panoramas of the Satour brochures. For me, this is cold country, and in winter the air itself tastes bitter, like the taste of generations of cruelty and oppression.

In winter, then, I sat near Jane for the warmth of her body; and the fire of her opinions brought warmth too.

Conrad, Lawrence, James: we read these books and wrote papers on them. I struggled, for my background was impoverished; not simply in the cash valuation you could put on it, though that was scant enough: but in the very aridity of the mental climate. I moved in the remotest suburbs of thought. Far away I saw the lights, and was drawn like a moth.

I cannot easily describe Jane. 'Very beautiful,' I have written, knowing it to be a cliché. Her hair was blond, she was tanned and 'athletic'. And at the end of that curt summation one adds, 'Etc.' The fact of beauty was there, like a cat in the house: but then I could match that by being handsome in a parodic fashion, and I played all the sports. She would not have been drawn to me through a reciprocation of prettiness. Had that been on, other men would have put her in their pockets with their meaty hands: after all, just ahead is the man who is better than you in every respect.

But because I had a carnal wish for learning, Jane came my way.

We dated regularly. We went to art movies. Now in those days sex had not been invented, so to speak. One took oneself to the extremes of passion in parked cars or bedrooms when parents were out for the night: but the essential was not consummated. Of course girls still say, 'No, no,' when they mean 'Yes, yes,' but back then the rebuttal was somewhat more in force. At the end of a fruitful and natural consummation could come a burgeoning foetus. And after that marriage, abortion, God knew what. Alien territory. So one did not transgress easily, and there was an understanding implicit in the gropings that in the end one would drive home in sexual agony.

I had worked part-time to buy an electric guitar, and I was a member of a band that played on Friday or Saturday nights at various student parties. We barely got by, musically and financially. There were four of us: lead guitar (myself), electric bass, drums, and a perpetually stoned dude who played all kinds of instruments very well – piano, saxophone, flute.

We played to order, like robots. There was no improvisation, no complexity, no jazz unless a few rehearsed riffs in the midst of a twelve-bar-blues number can be accounted such.

I had no ambitions musically. I played to earn money to keep up payments on my crotchety old car, so essential to getting around, and for spare change to buy Jane hamburgers after we had seen Bergman's latest contribution to cosmic pessimism. Jane generally accompanied me to the various dances at which I played, but was mostly bored. 'Why don't you ever play *real* music?' she would ask. She meant jazz. 'It's not that kind of band,' I would reply, on the defence. 'I can play jazz if I want to.'

She came from a very rich background; her parents had a castle in Houghton, with uniformed servants, a bar, everything. She did not merely have her own room: it had an adjacent study. Her father was the head of an important liberal organisation, and needed a study to concoct his ringing denunciations of apartheid; so, in a kind of dreamy intellectual deliverance, he had provided his sons and daughter with studies. They would need them. Everybody needed them, right?

'Prove to me you can play jazz,' Jane

'So I'm supposed to go to bed with you because I believe in freedom for the African people? That's the most nonsensical argument I've ever heard.'

said once. 'Bring your guitar to my house and see if you can play along with Parker or Mingus.' She had all the records. 'See if you can play like Coltrane, or only imitate Cliff Richard and The Shadows!'

Damn right I was going to try. So I practised at home, sending my fretful fingers over the frets, learning apparently spontaneous sequences of notes. I went over them, and over them again. Mother threw fits. 'Switch that thing off or I'll break it over your head! You'll have me in the bladdy lunatic asylum if you go on.'

'I make money out of it,' I would reply. 'I pay for my textbooks by playing the guitar.'

'No you don't. Your father pays for your textbooks by repping in the northern Transvaal, leaving me alone here to listen to your crap. You just play to show off to your rich little girlfriend.'

So it went on.

I went to Jane's house and played along with Parker and Mingus, their rich organic sounds coming out of vast hi-fi speakers that cost more than I could make out of my playing in a year. I played along, not very well, but surprisingly well enough to please Jane. Jazz, she explained to me (remember this was the Sixties), was the authentic music of the 'Negro'. It was, therefore, a bold statement about life from men who lived on the raw edge of danger and prejudice.

By implication, even listening to jazz showed not merely one's solidarity with an oppressed people, but was in itself a quasi-revolutionary act. Your heart was in the right area.

However. Jazz – as codified in those giant piles of records she had in racks and on shelves – was an imported subversion; the players were Americans. I put a hard point to Jane: wasn't all this a posture? In what way did it relate to the life content of South African blacks, 'our' blacks.

'It's the same thing. They use music in the same way. Look at Dollar Brand and Adam Moletsi.'

Adam Moletsi was invited from time to time to play on campus. The attentive white liberals would listen to him producing tortured notes from his saxophone, veritable cries of anguish and pride on which they would comment favourably.

After I had played along with Jane's records, we lay together on the bed and kissed. I took matters further.

'No, no.'

'Yes, yes.'

'No, stop.'

'I'd do anything for you. I want to make love with you.'

'You'd never respect me afterwards.'

'Of course I'd respect you afterwards. I'd respect you even more.'

'No.'

I sat upright, hurt and almost angry. 'You talk so much about freedom and all: why can't you be free with me?'

She shook her head. 'I'm not that kind of girl.'

'Well perhaps you should become that kind of girl. You're nothing but a – ' And there I stopped short of using a term very familiar in my background, but one which would have shocked her and driven her away.

'A what?' she snorted, also sitting up. 'Just what am I? Go ahead and say what you were going to say.'

'A hypocrite,' I mumbled, for that was the most acceptable alternative that occurred to me right then.

She laughed. 'So I'm supposed to go to bed with you because I believe in freedom for the African people? That's the most nonsensical argument I've ever heard.'

'Well,' I said, producing like a magic rabbit an idea, a threat, a strategy. 'Would you go to bed with me if I stood up on stage with Adam Moletsi and played jazz just as well as he can?'

The proposition had coalesced out of the variant threads of our conversation, our relation of bodies, our sense of each other's dimensions of soul.

And: 'Yes,' she said.

It happened that Adam Moletsi was coming to the campus within the next week. He would bring his usual backing band with him and would give a mid-afternoon concert in a medium-sized hall. Several hundred students could be expected to attend, and the university Jazz Society (to which Jane and I belonged) would charge admission to non-members, and Adam and his band would be given the money that was taken in. It was an easy arrangement.

I went to the president of the Jazz Society and told him I wanted to play with Adam.

'No, you can't do that,' he said firmly. 'People will be paying to hear Adam, not you. Besides, it would look ridiculous if you, a white, went up and tried to compete with an assured black jazzman.' The president spoke snottily; I had offended some sense of racial propriety.

'Well,' I said, 'I'm going to ask Adam if I can play with him. It's his scene; he can decide.'

'I still say no,' said the president; but he was unsure now.

'Perhaps if Adam says yes it'll be OK. But I don't want trouble.'

'Piss off.'

'Piss off yourself you arrogant twerp.'

Let me speak about myself briefly, as I then was. I was just a young white lad from a succession of poor suburbs. Blacks were not, so to speak, visible to me. I had been brought up in the proprieties and rectitudes of a normal family for that time and place – except that an entire section, a nation one might say, had been rendered invisible to me. My parents spoke easily of 'boys', and I seldom met black people who were not servants – not of that amorphous gestation of 'garden boys' and 'kitchen girls' who scurried around and beneath the skirts of white society, cleaning up and being humble. My view of the real world was therefore unbalanced.

Jazz players, for people like Jane, myself, and indeed the president of the Jazz Society, represented far more than a musical ambience: they stood for their people, a symbol in the liberal's mind. Yet, after all, they were simply men; they struggled under an additional yoke when the liberals made their play of them, as if they were cards in a bridge game.

No wonder Adam Moletsi drank. He had to stand up there in the face of those white youths and play nigger for them.

I made my preparations for the afternoon of the concert. Because I, a white, was going to stand up with those said representatives of blackdom, I would take upon myself a quantum of blackness. I knew that (and knew it was why Jane would go to bed with me because of it: she really wanted to sleep with a black man). However, because I full realised my physical limits when it came to playing the guitar, and knew I would be up front with professionals, I prepared myself psychologically for the encounter: I boosted my pride, lest there be cataclysm.

The hall filled. Adam and his band arrived. He was drunk. He waved to the girls and waggled his hips. There was some laughter in the hall.

Adam. A tall, cadaverous man, his liver mostly gone but giving to his light skin a yellow tinge. His blackness was inside him, not folded over his bones.

I went up. 'I want to play with you.' I pointed to a corner where I had in advance stacked my guitar and amplifier: a mean red Fender and a fine wood and metal amplifier with a great attached speaker.

Adam laughed, swaying over me. 'Hey man, you want to play with us?' He had an adopted American accent, like many black men of his generation. He was perhaps forty-five. An old soul.

The whole band laughed. The president of the Jazz Society, blushing like a rose, came up and whispered to Adam. I saw Jane sitting in the audience. Then Adam turned to me and said, 'Sure, you can join in on some numbers. Get set up.'

The band went straight into 'Bloomdido,' the Bird and Diz number that is scatty and great. Adam played a solo and then turned to me to bring me in. I felt total exposure. 'Bloomdido' was far out of my range. Absurdly, I shook my head and Adam let the drummer go for thirty-two bars, an impressive explosion that diverted attention away from my initial, devastating failure. I sensed Adam's concern not to embarrass me and was swayed by curious emotions.

The next number was a straightforward twelve-bar-blues: three chords, up and down. A child could do well. Adam, I was certain, had set this up for me and I played a perfect solo when my turn came, being really fancy and overriding notes so that it sounded like Chet Atkins had come in, but funky, good. You could feel it was good. I was applauded.

So it went. Adam now knew what I could do, so he did not ask me in on numbers beyond my scope. At one point he took a nip of brandy out of his coat pocket, sipped, and offered it to me. I took it, proud in front of all those envious white dudes.

The concert came to an end and the students filed out. I was left standing with Adam and the band, the president, and Jane, who came up and took my arm like Miss Universe. That was the proudest moment of my youth. I felt on fire. Perhaps the brandy helped, but I was at ease with Adam, and the thought of sex with Jane – assured now, on the line – churned in my bowels of compassion, as Lawrence would probably not have put it.

'You were very good,' said Jane. She smiled.

The president of the Jazz Society paid the band out and the men split, except Adam who sat back in one of the chairs, just like a student and thoughtfully drank his brandy. His saxophone was in a case on the bench before him.

Finally there was just Adam, myself and Jane. We talked desultorily, unsure of each other. Then Adam said: 'Hey, man: you got a car?'

'Sure.'

'Let's go for a ride. Us three.'

This was Life. I was tense and excited. So was Jane. 'Us three.'

So we went driving, packed into my Ford with conversation and brandy. Adam told us a lot about himself, how he lived close to the edge but had good high-class gangster friends who helped him out. He actually sat there, reclining in the back seat and told us stuff like that, nodding off from time to time. He directed me, and soon I found that we were on our way to Alexandra township. A black area: I felt trepidation.

But we were not soon into the township when Adam sat up alertly and told me to park.

'You stay here,' he instructed Jane. Then he took my arm and we walked out together in those bitter streets, frozen in the early winter, to a shop where a Chinese man sat and watched.

We bought from him *dagga*, the weed, *boom*, that which I had always associated with precipitation into blackness, the revenge of the blackman on the white whose consciousness cannot bear alteration.

A secret about drugs: any hell they give is better than the hell of the white man for the black.

We drove out of Alex, through mute, manicured, varnished suburbs, all order and the law incarnate, drove 'us three' with our cargo of hallucination and communication. We smoked the stuff and laughed like crazy as the world twisted and warped, and we twisted and warped and flickered into bizarre, meaningless awareness: that point where just one more toke will be too much, or will reveal all. The Allness waiting there in the next joint, like reality about to serve a summons.

We drove to the top of the Melville Koppies, looking down on the suburbs and the city itself: far from any cop, smoking, smoking, pushing out smoke from our lungs as if we were on fire.

And what did we talk about? God knows.

But I came to clarity when Adam said: 'Listen man, give up playing. You're no good. This afternoon, that was just playing games.'

'But I was . . . fluent . . . I was OK, wasn't I?'

Jane looked intently at us two.

'You were OK: but you don't understand it. You don't understand jazz. You don't understand the pain, the suffering, the longing, the rocking, the rolling . . . ' Adam was almost gibbering. He was very stoned. But, of course, I understood him all too well.

'I tried,' I said defensively.

'Sure. But that's not good enough. You'll never get there man: just face it, and you'll be happier.'

'What was wrong with my playing?'

'It was the wrong colour man, that was all.'

'I don't . . . '

'It was the wrong colour! It's not your music and you can't play it and you never will play it. Even if you put out sounds like Charlie Parker, and there is no difference between you and Charlie Parker, there will still be a difference. It's not your music.'

Then he turned to Jane: 'But you're my woman, you're my music.'

'No she's not,' I shouted. 'Take your hands off her.'

We all pummelled each other; it was farce. At last Adam gave up and simply laughed. 'OK white boy, she's your woman. Just take me to the station and drop me off. She's all yours.' Then, abruptly, he leaned over to me and kissed me; I could actually feel the essence of love there, a tolerance and an anguish; I smelt him.

I kissed him back.

I gave up my guitar. Jane gave me up. Adam died of cirrhosis of the liver. Jane married and had a child which drowned in her swimming pool, so she committed suicide.

The difference between youth and all that comes afterwards is a simple one, a stage or an event that puts matters into perspective. Real people really die. Real people have real limits.

Jazz is something I have on my record player.■

Exhibition: East Rand Black Artists

Review by Andy Mason

The squat five-storied building in Germiston which houses the offices of the East Rand Administration Board seems an unlikely venue for an art exhibition. After braving the rather daunting security check under the beatific smile of a large and lurid portrait of 'Oom Hendrik', we were led down a gloomy passage into a large room where the work of artists from the East Rand was on display.

A colourful barrage of images at the far side of the room, representing work by children at the Katlehong Art Centre, and a variety of work ranging from paintings and graphics to sculpture and ceramics, immediately dispelled the sense of foreboding engendered by the monolithic exterior of the H.F. Verwoerd Building.

The exhibition represented a wide range of artists working in a diversity of styles and media, some very well known and established, others relatively unexposed.

The work of Napo Makoena, a young art teacher at the Katlehong Centre, immediately stands out; solid images executed in a variety of media – especially 'My Identity', a drawing of a young man slumped into a corner, beneath a calender of staring eyes.

The sculptures and lino-cuts of Bhekisane Manyoni, also employed at the Katlehong centre, are striking and original. This artist, educated at Rorkes Drift Art School, is competent in pottery, sculpture and graphics. His densely-worked lino-cuts are suggestive of traditional story-telling, but concentrate more on unifying the elements of the composition rather than isolating particular personal emotions. His sculptures on the other hand, especially 'Crippled Lady Complaining' and 'Angry Man' portray a complexity of emotions; pain and anguish, self-pity and self-hate. Other accomplished artists represented in the exhibition are Judas Mahlangu, whose colour etchings show technical mastery in a difficult medium, and Speelman Mahlangu, whose previous sculptures are well known for their big feet. His sculptures and prints on exhibition show him to be moving away from pathos as a vehicle for emotion, towards a more angular, more mature style. Another well-known artist represented was Billy Molokeng, whose work continues to show the finish and style which has made it an eminently saleable commodity in various Johannesburg galleries.

But it is the work of younger artists like Martin Tose and Mos's Petlo which shows the most striking steps forward, as these students expand their technical and compositional proficiency.

Martin Tose's drawing, 'Brotherhood', a back view of a young man carrying his brother, is boldly executed, but his conte drawing shows more finesse where abstraction eases the necessity of representational drawing. Mos's Petlo's drawing, 'Figure', shows a relaxed and free approach to line-work which carries a lot of energy but also shows an as yet unfinished style. Some of his pencil drawings, tightly flowing lines expressing symbolic ideas, show the influence of artists like Madi Phala and Fikile, and are an advance on his prevous pencil work.

The work of N.P. Magatikele is also striking – an untutored abstract style in which archetypal African images are woven into dense surrealistic patterns which are obscure at a distance but reveal complexity and depth from a closer perspective.

Bhekisane Manyoni, sculpture – Crippled Lady Complaining

Gamakhulu Diniso, lino-cut – What About Us?

Unfortunately the venue of the exhibition is relatively inaccessible, not to mention inhibiting, and suggests that the position of the East Rand artists is rather dependent on government patronage, as the opening, plagued by one 'official' speech after another, clearly indicated.

However the extent to which young artists are drawn towards the facilities provided by the Katlehong Art Centre shows that their options are few, and that 'black art' in South Africa has a long way to go before it gets the public attention and patronage it deserves.

Katlehong Artists

The Katlehong Art Centre is situated in the township of Katlehong and administered by the East Rand Administration Board. From shaky beginnings the centre has developed into a popular educational and recreational facility in the township.

Andy Mason and Elaine Mohamed visited the centre and spoke with the four artists who are employed there as student teachers. They run the centre, work on their own projects, and teach the younger members. Excerpts of the interview are presented here:

Do you think there is something specific that you would describe as 'black art'?

NAPO: I think art has got to be universal, not to be this art or that art, or that other art . . .

So how do you explain the fact that there does seem to be a very specific style that one associates with 'black art'?

NAPO: Well, I suppose that most of the time it's because of lack of training that we find this, and then it becomes identified as 'black art' . . . I think one should be well equipped with some kind of 'touch' that comes from within, but there have to be some good basic principles of Art itself.

Do you think that black artists have followed a specific tradition of 'black art'?

NAPO: Well it's hard to say at present because I suppose the artists who are doing this art are also trying to distinguish between one kind of art and another: they come into some sort of collision with Art itself.

When you say 'Art itself' what do you mean?

NAPO: I mean in the sense that Art has always been Art, and whatever names are put to it are just to try and 'prove' it. But if we get down to the basics of Art, we find it to be a thing you learn by viewing the work of other artists, it's not going to be 'this' or 'that' kind of art, it's got to be a universal kind of thing . . . I think, in perspective, we've got to look at it in its total view, on a very broad scope.

Sipho, do you see yourself as specifically a 'black artist'?

SIPHO: At the moment I'm just an artist, for Art's sake, since I feel that Art is universal.

Bhekisane, your work seems to suggest, to be very connected with traditional art forms.

BHEKISANE: Yes it is.

Where does your subject matter come from?

BHEKI: It comes from my spirit (demonstrates with hands, a movement outwards from within himself). And in our place (back home) we especially use tradition . . . In our place, there are things which people have believed in many years ago, which now we cannot see, but we are still getting stories about them and are still worried about how we can get them.

Speelman, your more recent scultures are much less easily identifiable as being 'black art' than your earlier ones, the ones with big feet . . .

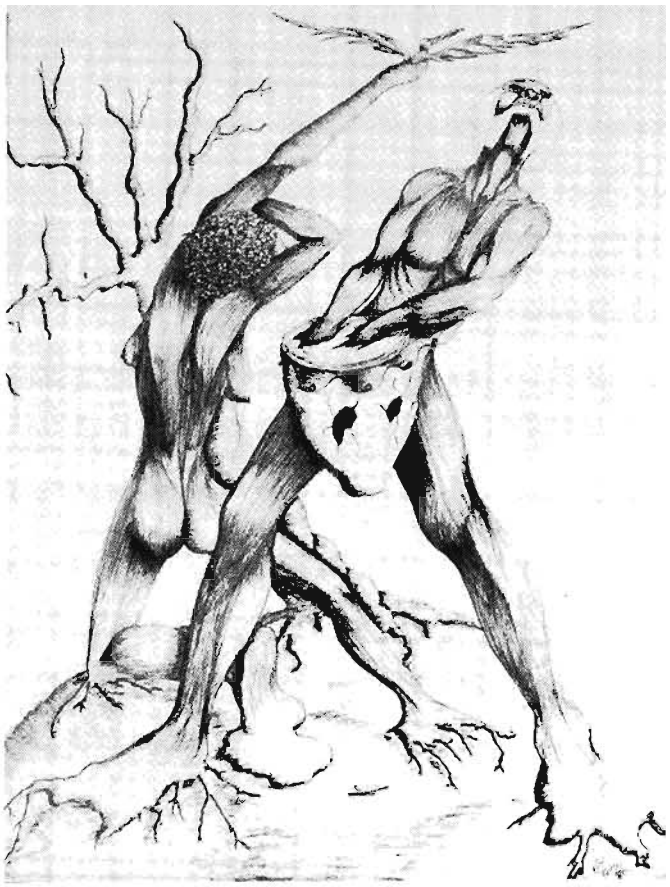
SPEELMAN: Before I was working too much from my inner self, rather from things I see . . . Now I can say that the things that I do are mostly the things that I see . . . every day scenes and the environment around the township.

This leads us into another area – the political aspect of your art. Most literary art by black writers at the moment seems to be explicitly political, but your visual art does not seem political in the same way. Why do you think this is the case?

SIPHO: Since we are still students I don't think we have the right to be political, but I think it is essential to improve ourselves in our studies rather than to concentrate on politics.

You mean the technical level of your art?

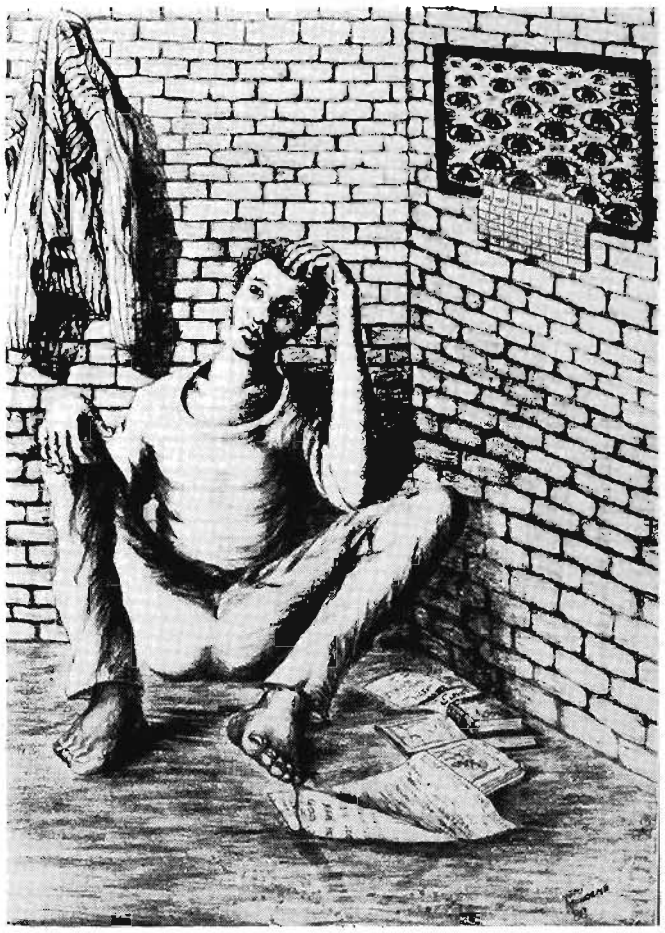
SIPHO: Ja, maybe afterwards when we have these tools, and we can express ourselves fully, we may be political or whatever, but at the moment we are working on projects, and



Moss Petlo – drawing

Napo Makoena, lino-cut – The Crusifix

Bhekisane Manyoni, lino-cut — Zulu Transfer from One Dwelling Place to Another



Napo Makoena, drawing — My Identity

they don't include politics.

But it seems there are two things; one is the subject matter and the other is the technical and formal side. As students here you are working to improve your technical capabilities, but should that affect your subject matter?

SIPHO: It does —

NAPO: But not exactly. One has subject matter within oneself. Maybe you are equipping yourself to fight against a particular kind of a system, or to prove that this is wrong or this is right — there is always some political aspect involved. I suppose everything is politics and it depends on whether your message can be driven through by your way of handling your technique.

It is not a question of separating the technique from the subject matter because whatever you feel within yourself is what you have to be technically good enough to reproduce the way you want it.

Are you saying you should avoid trying to deliver a message until you are technically equipped to do so?

NAPO: Not avoid as such. It's like singing. When you practice singing, you have a certain style of singing and to improve your style you have to use it with the subject matter you are dealing with at present. As far as I'm concerned, the stuff I use is as general as anything. If you understand my work, you'll realise how political it is, if you don't you might not. Or you might think, 'this is politics, this is not', that's how you might interpret any type of work that I do, it depends on the person who is looking at it, and Art is for the people and it's for me too.

About this idea of art being for the people . . . how do you see the function of the artist in society, do you see him as a teacher?

NAPO: I think Art deals with lots of subjects in itself and it is a teacher to people of course, but to do art is not to teach people.

Considering that your work is being exhibited at a venue which is far from where you live, the people of your community don't actually get to see your work. How do you feel about that?

NAPO: Well, I feel that, it's not for particularly these people or those people, it's for the public in general.

And the fact that it is exhibited in a government building, under the eye of the state, how do you feel about that?

BHEKISANE: I have no answer. There is only one thing; at this moment, you prefer to have something in your hands rather than nothing — I mean that.

NAPO: The art should speak for itself. The sole purpose in having that work there is to reproduce the inner drive. Like we say, Art should be universal; it should go to the public irrespective of race or class, irrespective of 'this should be a public place' or 'that should be a public place'. We are going to have an exhibition at Northmead Mall and it is going to be viewed by the public, right, and the very same exhibition is going down to Johannesburg, it's not specifically meant to be at a certain building.

Okay, but if we are talking about the relationsip between the artist and the community, we can say that art is universal and that it should cross barriers, but nevertheless we live in South Africa, which is probably one of the most separated, boxed-in societies in the whole world. In other words, the idea of a single 'community' is a concept, but it is not so in real life, the communities are separated. Do you as an artist see yourself as more responsible to the black community or to the white community?

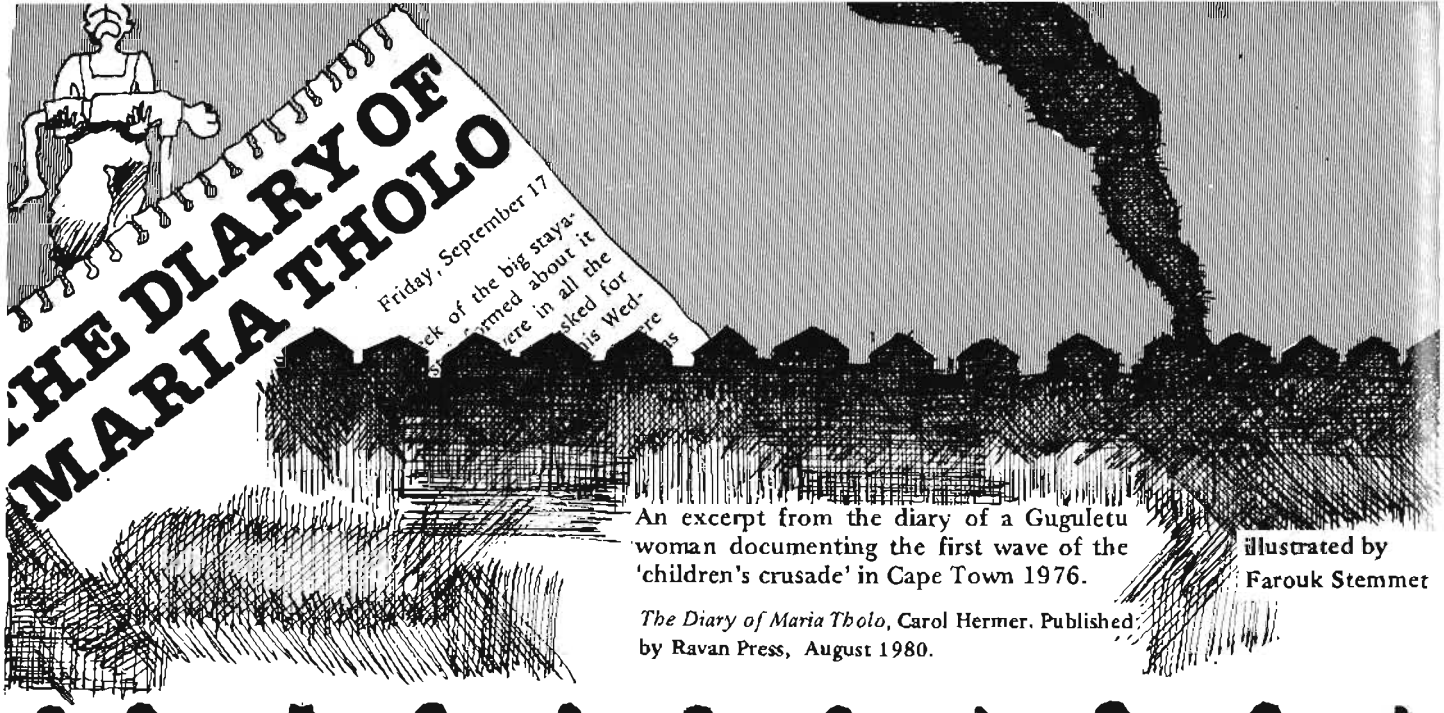
NAPO: I suppose to everybody in particular. I mean white, black, pink, red or blue . . .

But surely you relate differently to a certain person, say Piet Koornhof, who attended the exhibition, and someone from down the street? Isn't there a difference in your relation to a cabinet minister on one hand, and the guy next door on the other?

NAPO: At that point, yes. The one has a coat and the other has no coat. But to me as an artist there is no difference.

That's very interesting . . .

NAPO: To me they are both the same.■



An excerpt from the diary of a Guguletu woman documenting the first wave of the 'children's crusade' in Cape Town 1976.

The Diary of Maria Tholo, Carol Hermer. Published by Ravan Press, August 1980.

illustrated by Farouk Stemmet

Friday, September 17

This was the week of the big stayaway. We were first informed about it from pamphlets which were in all the post boxes last week. They asked for workers to stay home from this Wednesday till the end of the week. There had been rumours before but this was the first definite thing.

The night the papers arrived, Zeke and Joanna were over here and then Pete and Angela popped in as usual. Nomsa had told them the crowd was gathering at our place. Everyone was laughing about the stayaway, especially at Zeke. He's a big man and quite a bully. Gus said to him, 'So who says you mustn't go to work? Who are you afraid of?'

'No one,' he said. 'But you just sort of hear that everyone is going to stay home. It's a general known thing.'

We were all laughing at each other. No one knew who sent out the notices or who intended to enforce the stayaway, but we were going to listen just the same. It was like people driven by a force that they don't understand, but afraid enough to stay put and not venture too far from home.

Tuesday, the day before the big strike, was just like Christmas. The shops were so full you couldn't move. We took it in turns to leave the children. Nomonde and I went together but she likes to shop in Athlone so I left her there. In Claremont and Rondebosch there were crowds as if it were Friday – white people, everybody, stocking up for the Wednesday.

The shops were running out of things. I wanted mince but there wasn't any so they had to go and prepare more. People came back to the township loaded.

My neighbour opposite had gone to the farm to get eggs. I baked bread. Joanna baked buns and brought me some in case I didn't have bread. Angela also baked bread and brought me a loaf, and finally Grace arrived with the heaviest looking vetkoeke. They were completely unbaked inside but as she said, at least she'd made an effort. 'Just warn your brothers and your uncles I'm no cook,' she laughed. So we were well prepared for all the visitors that were expected during the big event.

Wednesday was dead quiet. Even quieter than on a Sunday because here in Guguletu shops are open seven days a week – but not this Wednesday. Gus didn't go near work. He wouldn't even venture out of the gate. Father was very, very ill. We had to get help but Gus wouldn't go with me in the car because of a notice which had said, 'No cars on the road.' So I had to go alone to fetch the doctor. His surgery was open in the morning but he closed it in the afternoon and brought everything he might need and saw Father. I think it was very brave of him.

There was one shopping complex that stayed open, the one near what was once the NY 6 administration building. I don't know what will happen to them.

Angela, the adventurous one, actually went to the racecourse. She and Pete work at Tattersalls, so Wednesday being a race day they thought they might as well go. They weren't brave enough to go in their own car. They were walking along to Mike's people when they passed a Kombi that usually goes to the course, so they stopped it and hitched a ride. Actually, we've heard that most people who could afford to go to the races took a chance and went.

It wasn't all easy. As the Kombi was leaving Guguletu to join Lansdowne Road a group of young boys stopped it. Angela said she was shivering. She was the one closest to the door. The boys demanded to know where they were going. When they heard the racecourse they said, 'Didn't you hear that no cars are to move out of Guguletu?'

The driver got cross and replied, 'You get out of the way. You people have no right to treat us like this.' Oh, but that was the wrong thing to say. The kids – they were between nine and fourteen – said, 'You say that again and you won't have anything to go back home in.'

Fortunately, the children started an argument among themselves. The older ones thought it alright to let people go to the races because it was not working,

but the younger ones were keen on the idea of bashing the car about a bit because it was disobeying the rules. Angela says Pete, who's usually the talkative one, never opened his mouth. Finally the kids let them through.

Isaac arrived here early Wednesday evening. 'Sisi,' he said, 'I could have picked up any wig you fancied tonight on the way. Did people get a beating! I came past Nyanga station and everyone who got off the buses or was seen carrying a package was stopped. People had to run for their lives.

'The ones who did the most bashing were the men from the single quarters. They said, "It was your children who made us stay away from work and lose our pay and now you go to work. We are also working for our children." And their kieries got busy.'

What had happened to the promised police protection? They always move in a convoy so they are never where they should be. I heard one funny story about 'police protection' from Mrs M. Her husband thought that if he went down to Heideveld station after nine o'clock he'd get away with going to work. So he sauntered down, trying to look casual.

Sure enough, outside the station was an African policeman and a white one. Now Africans always greet each other. So the black policeman said, 'Hei ndoda, where are you going?' Mr M. smiled back and said he was going to work. He thought the African policeman would be pleased.

But no. Instead, the policeman shouted, 'Hey, man, what's wrong with you? All our men are at home and you come shuffling along here. Get back, you are making our life difficult. We can look after you here at the station but what happens when you get out of sight?'

Mr M. was very abashed and turned back. The black policeman called him again. 'Don't let that white one see I'm turning you back. But I'm telling you it's safer for you to get out of here.'

There was a lot of stonethrowing but fortunately no one was killed. The police didn't know who to shoot at. They didn't seem to know how to stop the clashes. One funny thing is that the faces in our street seem to be different. We usually have the same mob loitering on our corner but Wednesday they were different. Pete also noticed it.

Mrs Nodada from 108 said it was because the stone-throwers were organized. She had seen a Kombi that picked up children from Section 3 and came back with a group from Section 2. So if you saw a boy throwing stones you wouldn't be able to identify him. I don't know who was driving them around. Everyone was too afraid to take the number of the van. Perhaps there were also adults involved. Either way the police shoot any stonethrowers, no matter what age.

Yesterday was still very quiet though some of the shops were open. Gus didn't go to work. Just as well. We hear that the beatings-up were even worse. Last night we visited Gus's cousin who has double pneumonia. For once her father was home. He'd shut up shop because of the stayaway. As usual, all talk was about the riots. Then suddenly the lights went out all over Guguletu. We rushed home before skollies could take advantage of the darkness.

Today was just about back to normal as far as work was concerned. Mrs M. came over late this afternoon to deliver the minutes for Monday's meeting. She'd just witnessed a most harrowing thing. She was opposite the shopping complex at NY 115. There was a group of children hanging around as always.

She looked up and saw some riot cars coming from the direction of Nyanga East. Her stomach twisted because she had sent her little girl to the shops. Now all the children are terrified of the cars and they run, and as soon as the riot squad see running, they shoot.

This was no exception. As soon as the group of children saw the riot cars they ran into the shops. The vans came charging along, came to a dead stop and out went the guns – shooting. At first Mrs M. thought no one had been hurt, because it seemed as if they were aiming into the air but once the crowd had cleared, in the quietness she saw a boy lying on the ground. One little boy, a nine-year-old, who was too slow to get to safety.

She could see that the child needed help but she didn't dare go near him. The other onlookers were feeling the same, murmuring among themselves but no one wanting to go nearer. There was a minister standing next to his car as if spellbound, looking at the boy and looking at the riot police but not moving.

By now the police had come out of their vans and were standing around to see who would move to the child. He was thrashing about, his arms moving as if he was retching.

Mrs M. couldn't stand it any longer. She walked towards the child. As soon as she started moving, the minister also woke up and both went towards the boy. After four steps one of the camouflaged police said, 'Hey, stop right there.'

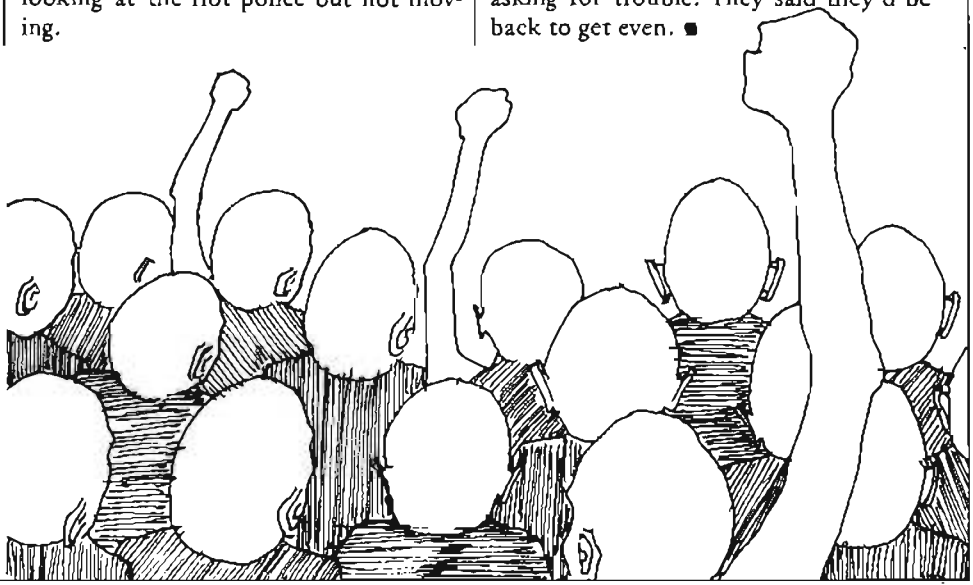
He went forward, picked the boy up by the scruff of his neck, thrust him into the van and off they went. Just like that. No wonder people are talking about shooting in cold blood.

That's not the first time the shopping centre has been in the middle of a commotion. Last time Mrs P. was involved. In fact, she was very gallant about it, not like Mr Gqiba. Mr P. was away so she was minding the shop when all of a sudden a crowd of boys came running in. She shut the front door and told them to get into the back. There are big windows in front and the riot squad would have been able to see the boys in the store.

But she hadn't reckoned on the riot squad coming through the back. They came straight into the shop asking, 'Is everything alright?'

'Yes, fine,' she answered, hoping to get rid of them quickly. But no, they went to look in the kitchen where the boys were huddled. But those boys thought quickly. There was a loaf of bread on the table and one grabbed a knife and started cutting away and handing slices around.

When the riot squad entered, all they saw was a group of labourers, sitting around a table having breakfast, probably shut in by the shopowner to stop them getting into the middle of the riot. So off they went. Other shopowners were not so helpful. Some threw the youths out. Mr Gqiba went one worse. He opened his door and called the police to come and get them. That was asking for trouble. They said they'd be back to get even. ■



Theatre of the Dispossessed

An article based on discussions with JAMES MTHOBA and JOE RAHUBE, by MATSEMELA MANAKA

What is theatre? What was our theatre before the coming of the white man? How does experimental theatre differ from conventional theatre? With whom is our theatre communicating – the dispossessed, the dispossessor or both? A class distinction must be made between the dispossessed and the dispossessors. What is the theatre of the dispossessed? Is it aiming at being popular or literary? My definition of 'literary' is intellectual, and 'popular' is fashion, though by fashion I do not necessarily mean sensational bullshit or non-committed entertainment. As a dramatist, there is a constant dramatic spiral of such questions challenging our creative abilities. Now that we are suffering from cultural malnutrition on this confusing colonial platform in search of our true selves, we shall constantly talk to those who tasted the colonial era before us. James Mthoba, an actor and director who appeared in a variety of plays since the fifties is still actively involved in the theatre arts.

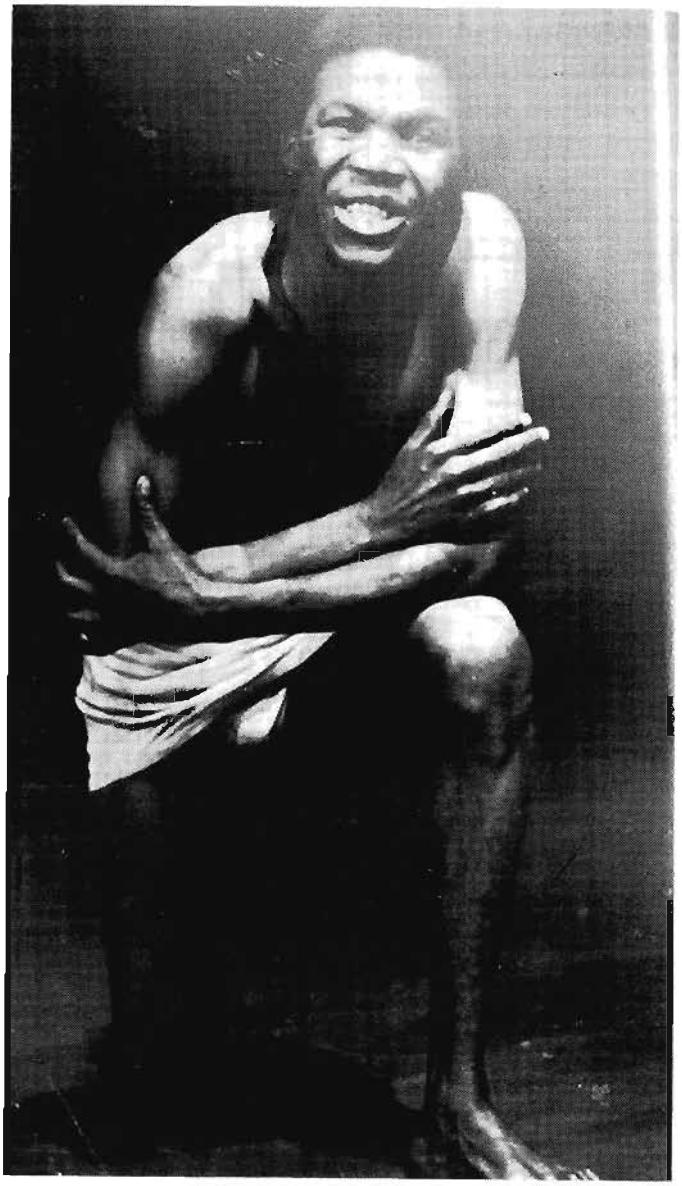
James, I understand that when you started being involved in the performing arts, you were doing what you called sketches. Apparently, I am told, at that time the performing arts were pregnant with music groups like Manhattan Brothers, Dambuza, Woodpeckers, Church Choirs and many more. And sketches were a must in all those musical shows. Now, despite the influence and dominance of sketches you managed to create an experimental play like Uhlanga. *How did you find working on* Uhlanga?

Uhlanga took us eight months to put together. It was a bit taxing, especially when we started. We did not know where to start. All we wanted to do was a one man play because we had financial problems. We decided to spend most of our time working on improvised lines. Mshengu as a director and myself as an actor. We went to Wits University, working two, three hours on different ideas, at times spending the whole night on one idea. It just did not work. Till one day, after such a long session we went to my home, tired. We decided to look at the whole problem over a bottle of beer. That was the beginning of things.

Meshengu said, 'Hey look at yourself. What do you see?' 'Steelen bones, the bones that have taught me how to relate to my ancestors, the bones that have taught me how to survive, the bones that have . . . ' Then Mshengu said, 'Let's have a play stretching back from the ancestors, the way they see things happening and how they lived before whitey came.' That was the beginning of *Uhlanga*. We had three phases; life before the coming of the white man, life today and life in the future.

So do you think experimental theatre could easily integrate the past, present and future?

I don't think there is any other theatre except experimental theatre. Experimental African theatre – No, let me say experimental theatre. I think that that is the theatre that can help us dig out our cultural past. Because in this theatre, unlike in conventional theatre, an actor is given a chance to explore, to experiment without restrictive rules.



James Mthoba, photo, courtesy Post

What is the future of experimental theatre in the midst of popular conventional threatre? To me experimental theatre is not yet popular. Even some of us who are trying to be involved in it hardly have a clear knowledge of what experimental theatre is. And this very experimental theatre seems to be addressing the intellectual elite. I don't know whether our theatre is aiming at addressing a wider audience or not – well if it is, then I would like to know whether you think experimental theatre will survive and become popular?

I really don't know. But I think there is a chance, because I have tried. I had a play which I directed called *Visions of the Night*. It was really an experimental piece. This play started at dawn. It was all my experience of dawn or of the night. It started at dawn and ended at . . . hey!, did I say dawn? It started at dusk, sunset, and ended at dawn. I spoke about one night in Soweto. It was really experimental and of course improvised.

After the completion of the production, because we knew we were going to have problems in presenting it, we decided to move in backyards, just inviting people and performing free of charge. This became the struggle to make our theatre popular.

We were going right out to places like Nylstroom, places where people had probably never seen drama before. And we would just ask people to vacate the grounds, football grounds, and start doing our thing.

That was street theatre and in terms of the Riotous Assemblies Act, I think it is no longer possible in South Africa. (Persistently) Well, what else can we do? But what I disagree with is what people say about the taste of the audience . . . They say they know the people's taste, know that the audience likes this kind of theatre, or that the audience does not like that kind of theatre . . . That thing, I really don't go hand in hand with, because I think that as a writer or dramatist, you must do the best you can. And do what you want to, not what the other person wants. If your contemporaries don't understand you, it's okay. The next generation will understand you. It's okay.

Undoubtedly, we all agree that our cultural wave today has to integrate the past, present and future. Literary black writers have already started. Now the dramatist should be concerned at all times about the audience. Communication is the key issue in theatre. It does not matter what language is used, what matters is whether the language communicates with the people being addressed. Obviously the theatre of the dispossessed is addressing the dispossessed *and* the dispossessor. And in creating any theatrical piece, the dramatist must be conscious of the fact that when using English as a language of communication (I say English because of colonial reasons) there are various categories of people among the dispossessed. We have the literate and illiterate, that is basically the black middle class and the workers. So it becomes the struggle of the dramatist to accommodate all the dispossessed people. Well with the dispossessor, we may say there is no problem because the language is his. A real problem, maybe not, may arise when the dramatist is addressing, at the same time, both the dispossessor and the dispossessed. Obviously the language used to accommodate all sectors of the dispossessed may be viewed as of poor quality by the dispossessor and the perplexed black educated middle class. And on the other hand, a sophisticated language will also become a boon to the other class of the dispossessed. This kind of problem will never be solved by history as long as South Africa is still enjoying the warm blanket of apartheid. Though to the dramatist we say popular language is the language of tomorrow. It is the language we shall carry along with those who will taste the dawn of a new day in our country. At this point in time, the dispossessed are destitute. They are very desperate for the realisation of their aspirations. They are in quest of freedom. They need no entertainment that shall make them oblivious of their state of subservience. They need no entertainment that shall make them submissive to their state of poverty and servitude. They need no entertainment that will be irrelevant to the black man's bone of contention. They need no entertainment that shall not respond to the call of freedom's cry. But they need realistic entertainment that will give them courage to survive and forge ahead. Entertainment that will bring hope for freedom in their life-style.

To the critics, we ask, how must the dramatist project his own true self in the midst of critical misconception which is based on western standards? We call upon the critic of black theatre to acknowledge a transition period in the theatre of the dispossessed. Critics do not necessarily have to go to school because we often wonder whether there is any school in this country that can satisfactorily teach us how to crit black theatre. The best school we can think of is inside the theatre. Critics should not wag their tongues from outside the theatre. They must attend as many shows as possible and acquaint themselves with a variety of plays. An honest and sincere criticism will come from someone who has seen the play, not from someone who heard people babbling about the play in the trains and buses. Critics must also be aware that good attendance from the audience does not necessarily declare a play a masterpiece. Nor does financial success determine the success of the play. The success of any play is determined by the effect it leaves on the minds of those who have seen it. This is what communication is all about.

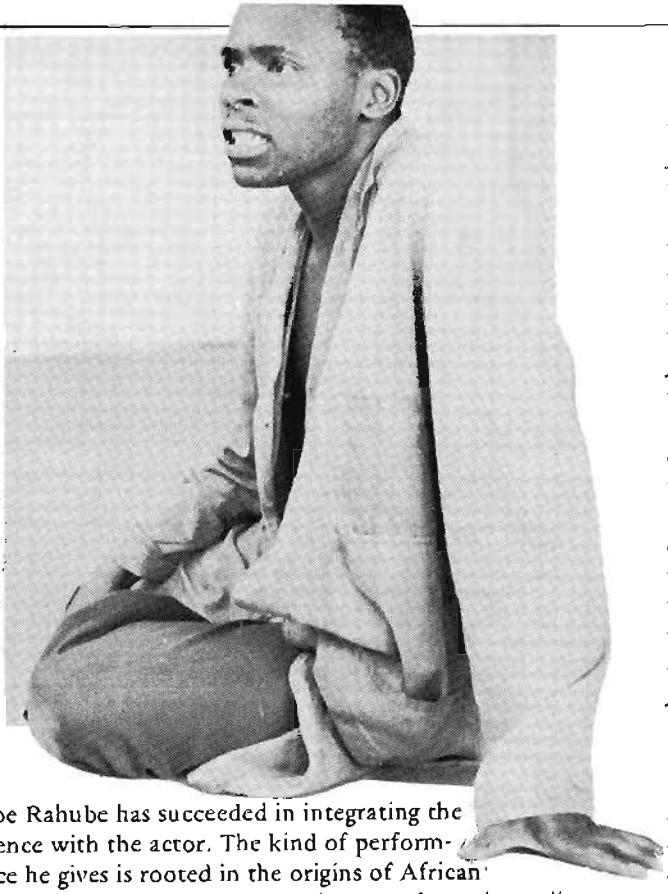
Anybody who has a love and passion for theatre can become a critic. Obviously this kind of person will constantly be prowling through his bookshelves and paging through his books of reference and listening to what other people have to say about theatre. Then through this kind of commitment, he can easily tell what theatre is and what our theatre was before the coming of a white man. Using this very little knowledge, together with love, passion and commitment he can do justice to the theatre of the dispossessed. In this case critics can easily avoid using western standards as a criterion to crit black theatre.

Dramatists have now become slaves of the people. All the time they are worried about satisfying the audience and their critical misconceptions instead of their main objectives of educating the dispossessed. James Mthoba seems to be a different slave. He has acknowledged that theatre of the dispossessed is involved in a struggle to integrate the past, present and future. On the other hand he is not prejudiced in terms of our language problem. Recently he has appeared in an Afrikaans play, 'Die Swerfjare van Poppie Nongena'. A number of black and white people were critical of blacks who appeared in Poppie Nongena. This is another grave critical misconception. Firstly we should ask ourselves a question. Whom is the play addressing? If it is addressing the Afrikaner, then there is no problem. What is the play, content-wise, purporting to say? Is it relevant or does it relate to the problems of the dispossessed? If it does, then there is no problem. What is the criticism all about? Let us share your genuine and authentic criticism when it comes to such dramatic problems. Once more we shall remind you that theatre is mainly aiming at communicating and not merely entertaining. Entertainment can also come in as a reflection of this present life. And a committed dramatist will not forget that popular language is the language that will easily communicate in an apartheid society like South Africa.

Mineke Schipper in her paper entitled, 'Origin and Forms of Drama in the African Context' says there is a growing gap between popular and literary drama. She goes on further to say:

'Several young playwrights refuse to limit their work to a small public of school and university. Instead they produce popular drama, mostly in the city. The popular playwright is not only inspired by the life of the common man in the townships but he also writes his play for him . . . The work of South African drama groups in the townships of the country, especially those performed by the now banned black students' organisation SASO, usually work without an official text in order to avoid the problems of censorship and banning. People in the townships are very interested in this kind of consciousness-raising drama which is directly related to the local context and their own situation.'

Actually, it is a well-known fact that quite a number of young dramatists are not popularly known in the so-called 'theatre world', but they are very popular in our urban traditional performances. They are an integral part of those who suffer death in the dusty streets of the ghettoes. When people celebrate their talent on a formal theatre platform, they commemorate their talent before the eyes of those in grief. They perform at all sorts of gatherings, and this becomes more like ritual theatre.



Joe Rahube, photo, Judas Ngwenya

Joe Rahube has succeeded in integrating the audience with the actor. The kind of performance he gives is rooted in the origins of African theatre – which never separates the actor from the audience. An artist becomes an integral part of the experience performed. Acting is not acting for acting's sake. It is a religious act.

We all take part when Joe Rahube is on the stage. Without any decor Joe would take the stage, natural as he would be at the time when called upon to perform. He would start by singing a song: 'Senzeni na?' and all the people at that particular gathering would join in. Joe with his painful gestures would start the poem:

Joe (with people singing 'Senzena')

Looking back is the last thing a man does
like you have heard those who came before you
murmur in bloody tones of no despair
phambile makwenkwe
phambile maAfrika

You have overheard your mother say
'Those who once met shall meet again'
after her baby was snatched away from her back
like when death once crept into your home

when I talk about death
look at me
my tongue clutched to my teeth
because of my bleeding heart
this wound
my sore
keeps telling me about
those who died
and were buried by the flood
keeps telling me about
those who died miles away from home

at the hour of separation
babies are seized from mothers' bosoms
fathers sent to island
children left alone
to rot to die in
despondency
shame!
It's a shame (then the audience joins in the chorus 'It's a shame!')

What is there to cry for
when mothers cry no more
for their stolen babies
who end up dying in the
bloody mud of soweto pavements
what is there to cry for
when mothers stay no more
with their sons
who end up dying far away
from home
what is there to cry for

at the hour of separation
what is there to cry for
when mothers watch nonplussed
helpless and hopeless
when their sons are sent to the gallows
what is there to cry for
when mothers weep no more
but sing songs of hope
for their husbands who are buried
on the island
the island of makana

At this hour of separation tell me
do you keep your head straight
do you draw your strength
from your little brother
hector

listen to the song of children
crying
stumbling
falling and being brutally killed

listen to the song
a song that was born of terrible memory
of how the breeze turned into hurricane
depriving us of every little we had
tell me
how can we smile
when our faces are forever like
scars of resistance
walking and falling
captured and killed

We can no longer
go down to our knees
with our heads bared
praying to an empty sky

I heard voices crying nkosi sikelele africa
maluphakamisi phondo lwayo
izwa imethandazo yethu
nkosi sikelela
i pondered
and asked myself
when shall nkosi hear us
when shall he ever sikelela us

This is the song sung by the dispossessed in their struggle to repossess. It is the theatre that talks about me and you today. It relates to the history of the dispossessed before the colonial era and comes along with the story through the colonial era until it will ultimately dredge us out of this colonial dung. This is the theatre that will not staffride the freedom wagon: it will ride on through heavy rains and bloody days until freedom dawns at the station of our birth. And after freedom our theatre shall celebrate our life and remain an integral part of our culture of the new day.■

MANGALISO
Creative Society

BRA BUSHY

Bra Bushy
The friend of the township children
They call him:
'Mandal'eshushu'
A walking brewery
Ja-a! He drinks eight days
In a week

Monday – Mokoko o ntshebileng
Tuesday – Mqombothi
Wednesday – Mankantshana
Thursday – Mbamba
Friday – Sebapa le masenke
Saturday – Mayi-mayi
Sunday – Patlama-ke-ho-seshe

And of course his day
His extra day
The day when he is
Dead drunk with the blood
Of the innocent souls

Morena King Monare

A GOSSIP

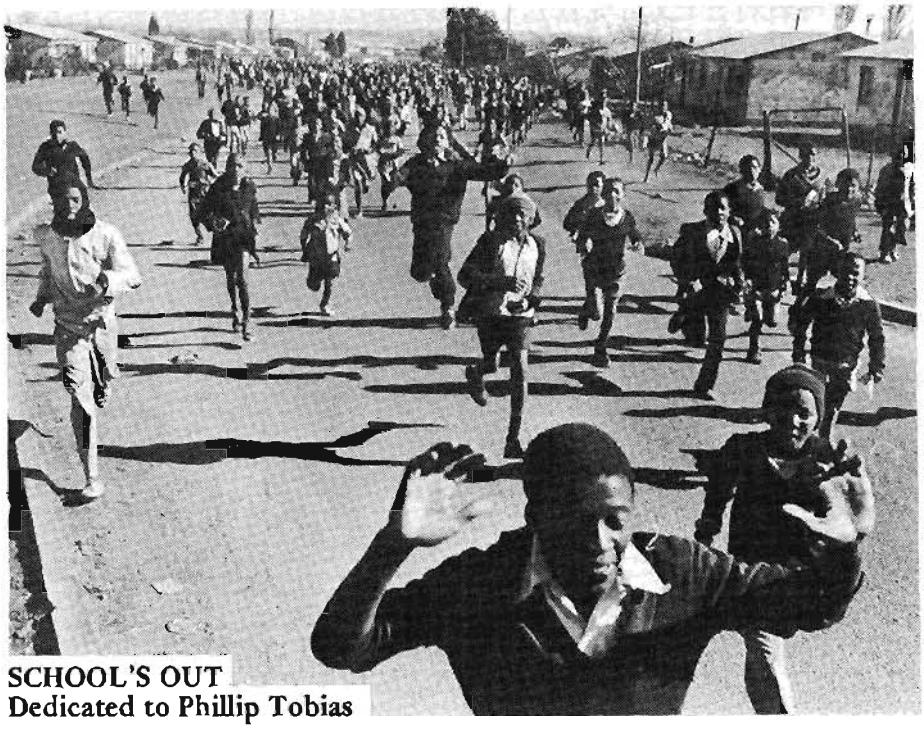
Did you know
That my 'Sheila's day' mother
Sings your little one
A funeral dirge to sleep
Instead of a lullaby
As she rocks it
In the whites-only park

Did you know
That my Christian mother
Daily chokes your little one
Just for a second
Wishing it was the zero-zero hour

Did you know
That my 'girlie' mother
Drowns your little one
For a few seconds
As she bathes it
Wishing it was for real

Morena King Monare

photo (top) Ralph Ndawo



SCHOOL'S OUT
Dedicated to Phillip Tobias

Go out a short distance from the city,
some sunny afternoon;
take a picnic or just go for a drive.

You will meet polished new school buses.
All you will learn about their passengers protected behind closed windows is that they are white and seem as identical as their brown leather satchels, though it must be admitted that some are now imitation.

But you will be able to distinguish the children walking to the location carrying books in plastic bags – the kind with shop names in large letters. You will learn that a few are taught to beg with open hands,
and to measure time by depth of expression rather than by size alone:
the larger, older kids will turn their faces from you or mutter something you will not understand;
the younger ones, those with much still to learn, will smile
and wave in their joy of life.

And you?
I tell you, return the smiles
wave now
before it is your turn to extend your hands in supplication
when the bullets those children learn to use in their real lessons
come looking for your blood.

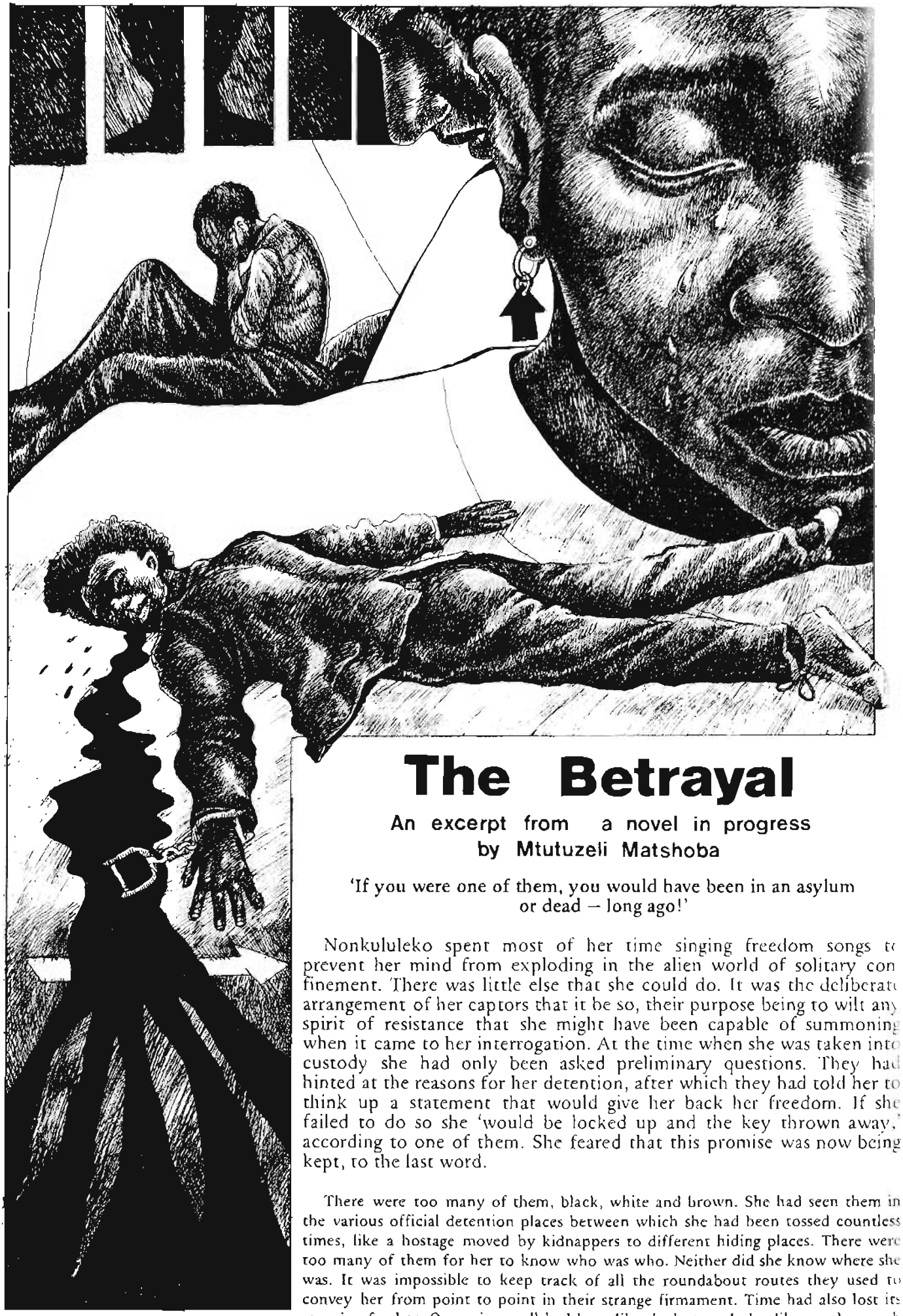
Ed Wilmsen

CITY JO'BURG

City Jo'burg
City of the yellow devil
City faceless as the night
City Jo'burg
City Purulent with
White mountains white privileges
City cold as death
City Jo'burg
City of tigers and foxes
City alive as hell

City Jo'burg
City born of our blood
Black blood Black sweat
Black hands Black hatred
City of white baases of life
Devourer of our youth
Castrator of our love
City Jo'burg
An earth quake
Is as inevitable
To an empty stomach
As death

Morena King Monare



illustrated by Mzwakhe

The Betrayal

An excerpt from a novel in progress

by Mtutuzeli Matshoba

'If you were one of them, you would have been in an asylum or dead – long ago!'

Nonkululeko spent most of her time singing freedom songs to prevent her mind from exploding in the alien world of solitary confinement. There was little else that she could do. It was the deliberate arrangement of her captors that it be so, their purpose being to wilt any spirit of resistance that she might have been capable of summoning when it came to her interrogation. At the time when she was taken into custody she had only been asked preliminary questions. They had hinted at the reasons for her detention, after which they had told her to think up a statement that would give her back her freedom. If she failed to do so she 'would be locked up and the key thrown away,' according to one of them. She feared that this promise was now being kept, to the last word.

There were too many of them, black, white and brown. She had seen them in the various official detention places between which she had been tossed countless times, like a hostage moved by kidnappers to different hiding places. There were too many of them for her to know who was who. Neither did she know where she was. It was impossible to keep track of all the roundabout routes they used to convey her from point to point in their strange firmament. Time had also lost its meaning for her. One prison cell had been like the last, each day like another, each night like another for six months -- same lonesomeness, same jailhouse smells, same bedbugs – no visit from anybody but the grim-faced white wardress and the girl who brought her the half-cooked porridge, soft in the morning and hard in

the afternoon, and the slightly-sweetened, weak, black coffee. Occasionally they also brought her a change of clothing from home, although she never knew how the clothes got to her. They were thoroughly searched before she received them, so that there was no possibility of smuggling in even a little message from the outside.

She was so bored with being alone that she often found herself missing her 'kidnappers'. Waiting for them frayed her nerves to painful shreds. When they came she could at least hope for a drive in a car and a slight change of environment to another police station, usually at night. He only escape was singing:

Unzima lomthwalo,
Ufuna siblangane
Asikhathali noma siyaboshwa
Sizimisel' inkululeko
Unzi . . .
(Heavy is this burden
It calls for a united effort
We are not afraid of going to prison
We are determined to fight for our
Freedom).

Her song stopped abruptly when she heard the rattle of the jail keys in the grille which linked their passage to the reception room on that floor, through which she had passed on her way in two weeks previously.

'*Mos* she never comes at this time,' she said to herself and went to stand anxiously near the grille inside the door of her cell.

'Are they coming to take me away elsewhere so soon? Surprising! They usually entomb me for at least a month before they remember me. I'll wait and see.'

The sound of the footfalls grew louder. 'There are two of them.' There was a shuffle outside her door. Steel grinding against steel and the cell was open.

A well-known wardress with a grim face. Behind and towering over her, John Moloi, the man with the oversized shoulders and the beret. Nonkululeko stood facing them from the gloom of her cell, her arms folded across her chest, the wary look she had learnt to wear at the approach of her captors intensifying in her big almond-shaped eyes.

She was a beautiful girl, that Nonkululeko — although mention of it both embarrassed and bored her, as she had heard it for as long as she could remember. Her long hair formed a glorious dome, like a black halo around her delicately-formed dark face.

It was the man who spoke. 'That was your friend.'

She did not grasp it immediately. Her mind was concentrated on feeding her soul with hatred of the figures before her. The arrogance of the man on the night they took her returned vividly to the screen of her memory. He had refused to leave the room to give her a chance to get out of her nightdress, so that she had been forced to slip her gym dress and her elder sister's overcoat on top of it. The last straw had come when the man had demanded, as she was rummaging in a wardrobe drawer for extra underwear, that she shake the garments in front of him to ensure that nothing was concealed in them.

He thought that 'DS' and the Captain were being naive in hoping that he could soften the girl by conversation.

He repeated: 'It was your friend Langa. His pig-headedness did not gain him anything.'

Nonkululeko remained silent.

'He also tried to play 'deaf and dumb.'

She probed the remotest corners of her mind for an explanation of the man's paradoxical outlook on life. She tried to figure out why he hated his fellow blacks to the extent of participating in their persecution. She could forgive the unforgivable from the whites involved because they had been misled by lifelong brainwashing into believing that ruthless suppression of any black opposition was the only way to extend the lease of white domination in those parts of Africa where it still survived. They, though wrongly, thought that they had reason for their actions; but she could not see what possible cause a black person could have for rejoicing in the hunting-down and destruction of his own kind. Had he not been born black and undergone all the harsh experiences of life in a black skin in a racially structured country ruled by an unscrupulous white clique? She gave up her search before she had gone too far, for she was convinced that she would never arrive at an appropriate explanation.

'What friend? And have I told any of you that I am deaf and dumb?' she asked, becoming as hostile as she could to show him just how little she regarded him.

He seemed not to grasp it. 'Your friend, Langa,' he said.

Her heart skipped. The expression in her eyes was quickly replaced by an indifferent, unknowing look, enough to hide her shock.

'It is not as if it was something new in this country that is ruled by evil, with the aid of people like you.'

'That is the trouble with you little freaks. You do not care about your companions' and your own lives.'

'As if you did.'

'Of course I do, my daughter. Right now I'm wondering what makes a lovely little girl like you think that she can meddle in politics instead of remaining at school and preparing a bright future for herself.'

Nonkululeko decided that that deserved an answer. 'There can be no bright future for anyone in a discriminatory society, ntate. Especially if those who are discriminated against are unaware of it.'

'I do not believe that what you're saying represents your own ideas, girl. At nineteen you're still a toddler in such matters. These people who agitate you to rebel against Law and Order are merely manipulating you for their own ends. Take my advice and never listen to them again.'

'Mh. You don't believe? You have a lot of homework to do if you want to know us, ntate. Ours is not a subservient generation like most of yours was. Considering what you've achieved in life we know that it's not what we would be satisfied with.'

'Those of us who would not accept what was given to them learned the hard way. Where are they today? Where is Mandela? Where is Sisulu? Where is Sobukwe? Where is Tambo? And without looking so far, where is your friend, Langa? They did not stand a chance against 'Makhoa'. You can't possibly think that you do.'

'Because life for black people is the same as prison, and life and death no different, there is nothing for us to lose in fighting for our human rights.' She was beginning to show signs of losing patience with the man. 'There are many of us who have resolved to stand up and make our aspirations known to the world, and there will be many more; the tide will keep growing. You're fortunate because you've only just seen the beginning. We pity those who will face the main onslaught.'

Moloi saw the change in the girl's manner and himself started feeling hot under the collar. He thought that 'DS' and the Captain were being naive in hoping that he could soften the girl by conversation. He knew her kind; they needed stronger persuasion to loosen them up, like open threats: 'With your stupid cheek you fail to realise that what you've just said amounts to a confession of your involvement in the disruption of Law and Order,' he fumed.

'Heh, ntate. Do you have any children?' the girl asked as sincerely as she could, ignoring the twitches of anger that kept distorting the sweaty black face. The grim-faced wardress watched the exchange blankly, wishing she could understand what they were saying in seSotho.

Moloi's eyes narrowed. 'If you were one of them, I would have sent you to a place of safety or killed you long ago.'

'I bet that it would not have been the

first time that you usurped someone's freedom or taken his or her life. How many children have you robbed of mothers and fathers?'

'No doubt you want to follow them.'

'These children you have – they must be your exact duplicates to allow themselves to be called by your name. I would have disowned you as a father the day I was born were I one of them.'

That stung John Moloi's pride deeply. It reminded him of his two sons who had one day returned home saying that they were leaving school.

Asked why, they had replied: 'We are tired of being called sellouts by our schoolmates. They will not even be seen with us. If they ever talk to us it's only to ask us why we don't make you resign. We feel ashamed of ourselves because . . . '

'Because of what?' he had growled.

Knowing his temperament, the boys had held back the rest of their explanation.

'Who are they? Tell me you . . . ' he searched for an adequate description which he did not find. 'I'll make them . . . !'

'And endanger my children's safety? You leave schoolchildren alone!' The angry words came from his wife, who had been listening unnoticed. 'I have experienced the same thing as these two boys. No one who knows you will talk to me anymore. You should have remained the crime-busting policeman that you were and never applied for your present job!'

He had tried to meet her halfway. 'Am I not doing it to feed you and ensure that your children get a good education? None of you have any appreciation for what I do for you. Who can support a family of five on an ordinary policeman's salary? Only the other day you were telling me that we were underpaid . . . '

'This new job has made no difference. Our standard of living has not really changed for the better. It is not worth the scorn with which we have to live . . . '

'Will you listen to all these fools who think . . . '

'So you are the wise one, heh? Everybody is a fool?' His wife had left what she had been doing in the kitchen to advance on him with her fists planted on her hips, in a typical fighting woman's pose.

'But, Wilhelmina, listen . . . '

'I won't listen to anything you say, John. Your so-called sacrifice to keep us well fed is too great – it includes even us! Think of your children. No one can live alone in this world. Surely you don't expect to move to Randburg or Sandton or anywhere among Makhoa a hao when you're ostracised by your own people? Because you won't be tolerated even there – in spite of your concern about "state security"!'

He had felt that a three-pronged attack on his ego was rather more than he could handle and had left his family in a fit of pained anger and battered pride. Once out and in the car, he had discovered that he had nowhere to go and let off steam. He had no friend to lean upon for kilometres around, nor was he a welcome patron in any shebeen. The revelation brought another one, namely that he could only find solace away from his home either at another policeman's house or inside a police station. Truly, he had become an integral part of what 'they' called 'the system'. Since he had joined the new department he had found himself becoming gradually alienated from his community without being aware of it, only to come face to face with the unpleasant fact right inside his own household. He could not deny the truth of his wife's allegation that everybody outside the force who knew his occupation regarded his whole family with the utmost distrust. Even people with whom he had struck up an easy acquaintance when meeting them for the first time always withdrew completely from his company as soon as they got to know about his job.

All these thoughts, inundating his mind and his conscience, gave him the urge to crash his car into a lamp-post as he drove at an insane speed down the dusty Diepkloof street. The pedestrians scampered out of the way and clung to the fences like chickens during an invasion of their fowl-run. However, he did not obey the yearning. Instead he promised himself: 'I'll get them! All these people who make my life and that of my family so miserable.'

The vow had marked an intensification of his enthusiasm for his new job. If his whole world was going to turn against him, he had thought, he too would brace himself to face it. Watching those who sought to make him an object of derision whining for his mercy would be the source of the self-importance he needed to buttress his crumbling self-confidence as a man. 'Ya, I'm going to show them!' he had repeated.

He thought of his oath as he looked at Nonkululeko behind the iron bars. The girl glared back without the slightest flinch, waiting for him to continue.

He did, with an exacting pretence at calmness: 'My girl, you will soon see that all which you could have done about your life was to attend school, get a good education, be married to an educated young man and start a family. You should not have meddled in affairs too big for mere schoolgirls. Leave politics to the politicians. Makhoa a tla ho lokisa, jong. The white people will fix you. If your parents have failed to keep you in line, they are going to do it – with my help, too. I would like to see you there in the box, giving evidence against the very boys that you are so prepared to lay your life down for.'

'You should tell us to leave politics to the *police*, ntate. It is they who seem so concerned about it – even more than the politicians themselves. Moreover, if you think that demanding one's rights is politics, you do not know what you're talking about.'

John slammed the door on the girl with a bang that reverberated inside the whole cell block. The grim-faced wardress locked it with a triple turning of key and led the way down the passage.

As soon as they were gone the reality of the news she had heard sunk into the girl's mind. 'Langa! Destroyed by these sadists? But why, why, oh Nkulunkulu?' With that she broke down, crying like a woman with a big family bereaved of a breadwinning husband. She flopped on the coarse bedding and let her tears gush out of the core of her soul as water does from a broken dam. She cried for two full hours, until, unable to cry any more, she sat there letting sorrowful thoughts run freely through her mind. At length they lulled her into a heavy but broken slumber, for the thought of Langa descending thirty metres under the pull of his weight to his death had torn her heart apart.

From that day onward she could no longer hold herself together. Her resistance was almost at an end. For three days and nights she thought, cried and slept – the only evidence of any remnant of a will to live was when she nibbled at the food they brought her twice a day. According to her reasoning, if Langa was dead and had died in the way he had, what use was there in her continuing to live? She had withstood what she had to support him against his enemies, their enemies, the enemies of justice, peace and the oppressed.

On the third evening of her anguish they paid her another visit. She heard them, as always, when they opened the passage grille, and subconsciously tried to figure out from their footfalls how many they were.

Nonkululeko did not stand anxiously just inside the cell bars this time, but lay face down on her bedding as if oblivious of their presence, although she felt their eyes on her after they had opened the door.

They first stood in the passage exchanging puzzled looks. Then the wardress opened the inside grille and Nonkululeko raised her head to see what was happening. Seeing the wardress entering

the cell she turned to sit facing her with her blanket-covered knees drawn together against her chest, her arms folded around her shins.

'What is wrong with you? Are you sick?' asked the wardress in her curt manner, the grim face reflecting no emotion. There was, however, a barely noticeable switch of attitude in the tone of her voice which made the girl wonder why for the first time her captor was showing concern about her condition.

'Wake up. You're going for a check-up.' She was standing to the right, directly above the girl, her left hand on her hip, the other dangling the keys.

With an unfamiliar obedience Nonkululeko rose slowly, first to her knees and then to her feet, taking her time about folding her blanket. The two men at the door, 'DS' and Moloi, again exchanged glances.

'She's probably ready to co-operate,' remarked 'DS'.

'Ja, meneer.'

'See now, be nice to her. Show some encouraging sympathy. Otherwise she may decide to clam up again.'

'Ja, meneer.'

'I want to change. Will you tell those two at the door that I need some privacy?' Nonkululeko sounded as meek as a young nun who had just taken her vows.

The wardress instructed the men to move away, which they did. Then she said, her voice softening, 'There's no hurry about it, girl. You can even wash. I'll get you clean water and good soap and see what I can find in the form of food. What would you like?'

'Anything,' Nonkululeko answered weakly.

'Okay then,' the wardress said and left the cell. She did not forget to lock it behind her.

Nonkululeko had decided. The scene of the death of a friend was going to haunt her until she lost her mind. Not the tragedy's immediate scene alone, but any other prison environment would be intolerable. She could not overcome the memory of Langa. She could still see him with the eye of her mind – medium height, shoulders that told of above-average strength in a man who had turned twenty-one only a few months previously in prison, square determined dark face, unshifting angry eyes, long uncombed hair: an appearance which reflected the revolution that had taken place in his mind and the one which he had tried to effect. She felt the emotion stab through her heart when his scream filled her head once more. Then she imagined him on a cold morgue slab, his folks, their friends. Had they believed the news when they were first informed? She had never needed the comfort of her own people as much as at that time – and they had probably needed her, the girl who had been with Langa when he left them forever. She wanted to be at the funeral to mourn together with them.

She felt the emotion stab through her heart when his scream filled her head once more. Then she imagined him on a cold morgue slab, his folks, their friends. She had never needed the comfort of her own people as much as at that time – and they had probably needed her, the girl who had been with Langa when he left them forever.

The wardress returned with a pail of luke warm water and a cake of Lux toilet soap.

'Wash and change. I'll be back with the food.'

Nonkululeko did not thank her. After fifteen minutes she had scrubbed herself all over with the soap, hoping that it would kill the nauseating prison smell – at least drive it from her body, for it clung fast to the clothes she had. She smelt them, garment by garment in a futile attempt to choose the ones that carried the least jail odour.

The key turned in its hole and the woman gaoler-turned-angel entered with a warm pie and steaming coffee in her hands.

'Who bought these?'

'I did.'

'Why?'

'You must be smart when the doctor sees you.'

'I know that, but why?'

'The main reason is that you may be going home if you co-operate. That's why you must be examined by a doctor. They must return you home the way they took you.'

'And not like the other one. They reckon two accidents at the same time might be too much?

For a fleeting moment the wardress's eyes crystalized into diamond stones.

'Eat. We'll be back to fetch you,' she ordered coldly.

Another forty-five minutes – during which she had magnified the prospect of a reunion with her loved ones to the extent of feeling her heartbeat gaining speed and force, and the subconsciously prayer, 'Tixo, let it be so,' on her lips. They came for her.

'Take your clothes with you,' the wardress said.

Stepping out into the passage was the most exultant experience in her life up to that time. But then, it did not last long as another probability presented itself. What if this was one more leg in her endless nomadism? 'It cannot be. They never give notice when they come for me. They are never so seemingly nice, either', she silently reassured herself.

They led her to a room with two tables, each between two wooden chairs on opposite sides, two for interrogators and two for 'clients', on adjacent sides of the room.

'DS' took the one behind the door and John the one opposite it. There was a tangible silence as 'DS' rifled through a pile of papers. John sucked long breaths and released them slowly, audibly. Nonkululeko sat where she had been ordered to sit, opposite 'DS', her bundle of clothes pressed on her tight thighs, with both hands resting on top of it. She snapped her finger joints. John smiled at her uneasiness.

When 'DS' found the two paper sheets he was looking for he raised his eyes to the girl. She picked one of them up, 'On this page is a statement,' he said with a heavy accent. 'Your statement, which I have pieced together from what the others have told me. When you thought you could hold back on us, others were singing. If this is ever proved in court, and you know that it will be, you're going to jail for a very long time. I would advise you not to sign it.'

He put it down and took the other. 'On this one is another statement. Again your own, containing all the information that would release you from detention and remove the long prison sentence hanging over your head if you attest to it. I would advise you to sign it.'

Placing the two typed documents challengingly in front of the girl, 'DS' asked: 'Which one are you going to sign?'

'What do they contain?'

'I told you. Which one are you signing?'

'Think well, girl,' John chipped in in seSotho. 'He is not joking.'

There was a long pause as Nonkululeko consulted with her conscience.

'How can I sign a statement I haven't given or even read?' There was little, if any, resistance in her words.

'The choice is yours,' replied 'DS' summarily.

She again consulted with her conscience and, while at it, 'DS' added: 'You will know the details in due course. It will be as easy as "Yes" or "No" in court. Or you will listen to the other being read against you in court.'

Desperation clutched at her heart. She turned to face John: 'Kanti, ntate, you're not going to release me?'

That was the begging he looked for in all his customers. Adopting an air of importance, he answered, 'If you stop hesitating and do as you're told by the white man.'

She turned back to the table: 'I'll sign the one that'll release me.' ■

ANOTHER GLIMPSE OF SLAVERY

A Lawyer's View

Last year Mtutuzeli Matshoba's collection of short stories *Call Me Not A Man* was declared undesirable by the Publications Control Board in that it was 'prejudicial to safety of the state, the general welfare or the peace and good order'. In their reasons for the banning the Board, while conceding that there was 'not inconsiderable merit in much of the writing', took exception to the story entitled *A Glimpse of Slavery*; a story dealing with the parole labour system. The Board stated that 'even if all these situations had occurred, which is improbable, and had occurred in this accumulated context in which they are set in the story, the presentation of these scenes in a popular medium would be undesirable. The presentation is calculated to exacerbate race feelings between the black and white races reciprocally; it is calculated to promote a sense of grievance without sufficient particular grounds to justify the grievance feelings in the minds of African readers.'

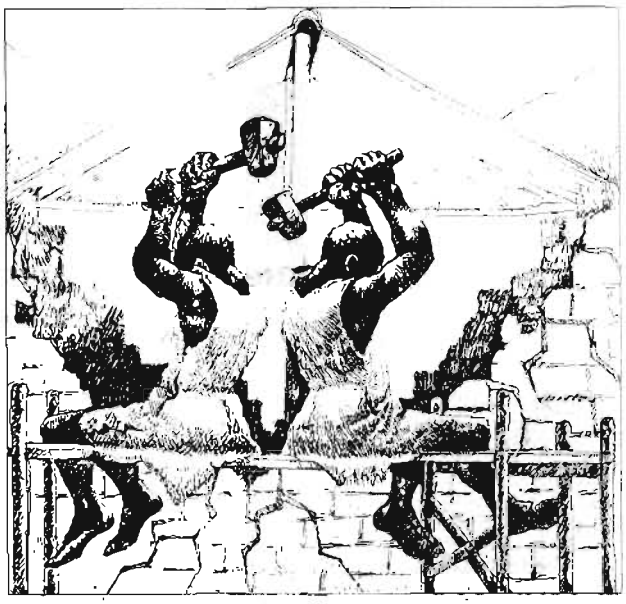
In the story, the narrator is sentenced to three months imprisonment for an assault and finds himself paroled from Modderbee to a farm where he suffers various indignities. He is forced to wear a sack, he is sworn at and assaulted; in the end he escapes and returns to Johannesburg.

The parole labour system is, of course, not the creation of Matshoba's imagination. Thousands of short-term prisoners (unable to pay their fines) find themselves labouring for little reward on farms throughout the country. Since September last year the minimum wage for such parolees has been 60 cents per day; prior to that it was 45 cents.

The precise extent of the parole labour system is difficult to gauge. In 1973 the Minister of Prisons was asked on two occasions how many prisoners are made available daily to work on land or premises other than those of the Prisons Department. On the first occasion he was unable to give an answer, saying that the only statistics were those kept by the individual prisons, on the second occasion he said that 24 000 prisoners were made available daily.

Since that date the Prisons Act has been altered to make a substantially larger number of prisoners available for the parole labour system. Prior to 1979 prisoners whose total sentence was less than four months could be paroled; now prisoners whose total sentence is less than two years can be paroled. Reservations have been expressed about the possibility of policing such a system. In 1979, after the Minister of Prisons had been unable to give an answer to her question about the number of parolees, Mrs Suzman questioned whether adequate checks were made to ensure that parolees received their wages, adequate food and lodging. She also said that she found it difficult to believe that an adequate check could be kept on persons working throughout the country as farm labourers. The system was one which lent itself to abuse, especially if careful supervision was not maintained.

A recent case in the Transvaal Supreme Court in Pretoria throws both the parole labour system and the banning of *Call Me Not A Man* into sharp relief. In this case a former parolee Petrus Mofokeng (the Plaintiff) sued a farming partnership, L.A. Becker (Jnr.) for R4 000 damages for an assault he alleged had been perpetrated on him while working on their farm. As the case concluded in an out-of-Court settlement, all that was said in the Court remains at the level of allegations, as the Court was not required to make any finding on them.



'There we go Majita, let the hammers pound!'

Mzwakhe's illustration for 'A Glimpse of Slavery'. Acknowledgement: *Learning Post*.

In his evidence, Mr Mofokeng said that on 16 November 1978 he was convicted of a failure to pay General Tax and sentenced to a R100 fine or 100 days in prison. Unable to pay the fine, he was taken to Modderbee Prison from which he was fetched by Becker (Snr.) and taken to the farm in the Bronkhorstspruit district. At this stage Mofokeng had no idea that he was being paroled; in prison he had signed a form with his thumb-print but had not been allowed to read it, although he can both read and write.

On their arrival at the farm, according to Mofokeng, Mr Becker (Snr.) told the new parolees that they would be beaten if they did not work because his son 'hou om 'n kaffir te slaan'. After their arrival they were taken to work in the fields. That evening they were taken to a large room with barred windows which the parolees referred to as the 'cell'.

Mr Mofokeng then alleged that that evening Mr Becker (Jnr.) had entered the cell with five of his black employees. He stated in Court that the new parolees had been ordered to one side and told to strip. Becker and his employees then hit all the new parolees on their backs with sticks. No reason was given for this beating although Mr Mofokeng said that he later found out that it was to stop the parolees running away from the farm. The next morning, he said, his back was smeared with blood and he felt pain for two weeks. It was this particular assault which formed the basis of Mr Mofokeng's claim for damages.

While cross-examining Mofokeng, the Beckers' counsel put it to him that these beatings in the cell were, in fact, carried out by old parolees on the new arrivals, carrying out an initiation ritual. The counsel then said that Becker would give evidence to the effect that he had the parolees locked up at night because he feared for the safety of his wife and

ch[illegible]en. Becker (Jnr.), their advocate said, would say that at nig[illegible]he would hear singing from the 'cell' and that he would th[illegible]know that assaults were taking place. In response to th[illegible]Mr Mofokeng asked why, if Becker knew that fighting w[illegible]oing on, he did not come and stop it, as it was his duty to [illegible]otect the parolees. Counsel then said that Becker (Jnr.) w[illegible]d say that he had come to the 'cell' and talked to the p[illegible]ees from outside. But Mofokeng denied that this h[illegible]ened while he was on the farm. Mr Mofokeng went on t[illegible]k why those parolees who would not listen to Becker (J[illegible]s) instructions were not taken back to the prison by th[illegible]Beckers.

[illegible]ocking or having prisoners locked up at night is in c[illegible]avention of the undertaking that an employer signs with th[illegible]Prisons Department when taking parolees. One of the c[illegible]itions of this undertaking is that the parolees will be h[illegible]ed without any restriction being placed on their freedom o[illegible]ovement. One of the Beckers signed such an undertaking i[illegible]72, but it was not until 1979 that they were deprived of th[illegible]supply of parolees by the Prisons Department because o[illegible]mplaints against them.

[illegible]Mofokeng went on to allege that while he was on the f[illegible]other groups of new arrivals were beaten in a similar f[illegible]on. He also stated that while working in the fields the p[illegible]ees would be beaten by the Beckers' employees. These b[illegible]ngs were not as severe as those in the cell, and their p[illegible]ose was to make them work. He also described a punish-m[illegible]during which the parolees were forced to lift concrete b[illegible]ks above their heads and then lower them. They were a[illegible]made to run with the bricks and if they dropped them th[illegible]would be hit.

[illegible]t the conclusion of Mofokeng's evidence, his counsel c[illegible]ed their next witness, Mr Joseph Tiwane. He stated that h[illegible]ad received a sentence of four months or R120 for p[illegible]ession of stolen goods. He said that he had been found w[illegible]paint he had bought but did not have receipts for. He h[illegible]only spent four days (12 to 16 June 1979) on the farm, f[illegible]by that time his fine had been paid.

[illegible]e alleged, in his evidence, that on his arrival at the farm B[illegible]er (Jnr.) had told the new parolees that this was not the c[illegible]and that those who did not work would be beaten. He [illegible]that Becker (Jnr.) then proceeded to strike one of the [illegible]arrivals. That night, he continued, the prisoners were [illegible]ed in the 'cell' and the new arrivals were assaulted by p[illegible]lees who had been on the farm for sometime. They were [illegible]e to strip and stand against the wall and sing while they w[illegible]e being hit. Neither of the Beckers was present.

[illegible]t this point counsel for the Beckers objected to this type [illegible]evidence being lead as it did not relate to the specific [illegible]ault on which Mofokeng was suing. After legal argument b[illegible]both sides the judge ruled that such evidence was relevant [illegible], therefore, could be led, in that it was part of an attempt [illegible]show that a system of assault had existed on the farm. [illegible]uld a system be proved it would render the single assault [illegible]which Mr Mofokeng was suing more likely. At this point [illegible]Beckers' lawyers made a proposal of settlement which [illegible]accepted. The details of this settlement have not been [illegible]sed to the press.

The point, of course, is not who hit Mr Mofokeng but that [illegible]was exposed to this type of risk. Prisoners convicted of a [illegible]chnical offence, such as contravention of the pass laws, [illegible]themselves working as farm labourers for a minimal [illegible]uneration. Often, they are on a farm before their relatives [illegible]friends have an opportunity to pay their fines. They are [illegible]in need of rehabilitation, nor is the system capable of [illegible]ding it.

[illegible]to point out the risks involved in such a system is to [illegible]nger the security of the state, the Publications Director-[illegible]might well find themselves having to restrict the public-[illegible]of certain Court records. ■

Poetry/Johannesburg

LATE RISER

Believing fast in gravity, the law
that all must fall (the child
from the medical couch, the cup
from the tightening hand, the upright
walker from his height), I clung
with a simple-minded dread
to be held: 'Hold . . . ! Hold me!
Catch . . . !' I would fling down
to destruction unless contained
in a lap, an embrace, a caging cot,
or solid on the swallowing floor.
I've since learnt that law
to be no law: earthpull is conventional:
everything can fly: will and whim
waft the fallible porcelain
or lumped lead; fluids from brim to brim
bridge firm; a grand piano floats
on the wrists of men miming a stagger;
children go easy through air;
and there are, indeed, mimes,
jugglers, trapezists, free-fallers
who barely confess to descent
as they play in the sky.
Enlightened even I have risked
and risen and balanced and ridden
and mounted steep flights
and now count falling exceptional
accident, no rule, as I over-ride
(after all) satiable floors
and spurn the avoidable ground.
But somewhere the heavy recollection
lurks; I take no lightness for granted;
in every quickening above a sluggish crawl
I apprehend brave miracle,
my biped stance sustained
only by a counterfaith,
my watery weightiness raised in a dancing column
by love.

Lionel Abrahams

SAIC

The money-faggoted councillors
dispense themselves
to the tune of stacked notes
sticking to platitudes
like flies to cow-dung
defending, pledging allegiance
and dishing out shit
on SATV
Sloshed up quotes and watery metaphors
and Puerile Pap that entrenches us
in the Laager.

Zulekha Dinath

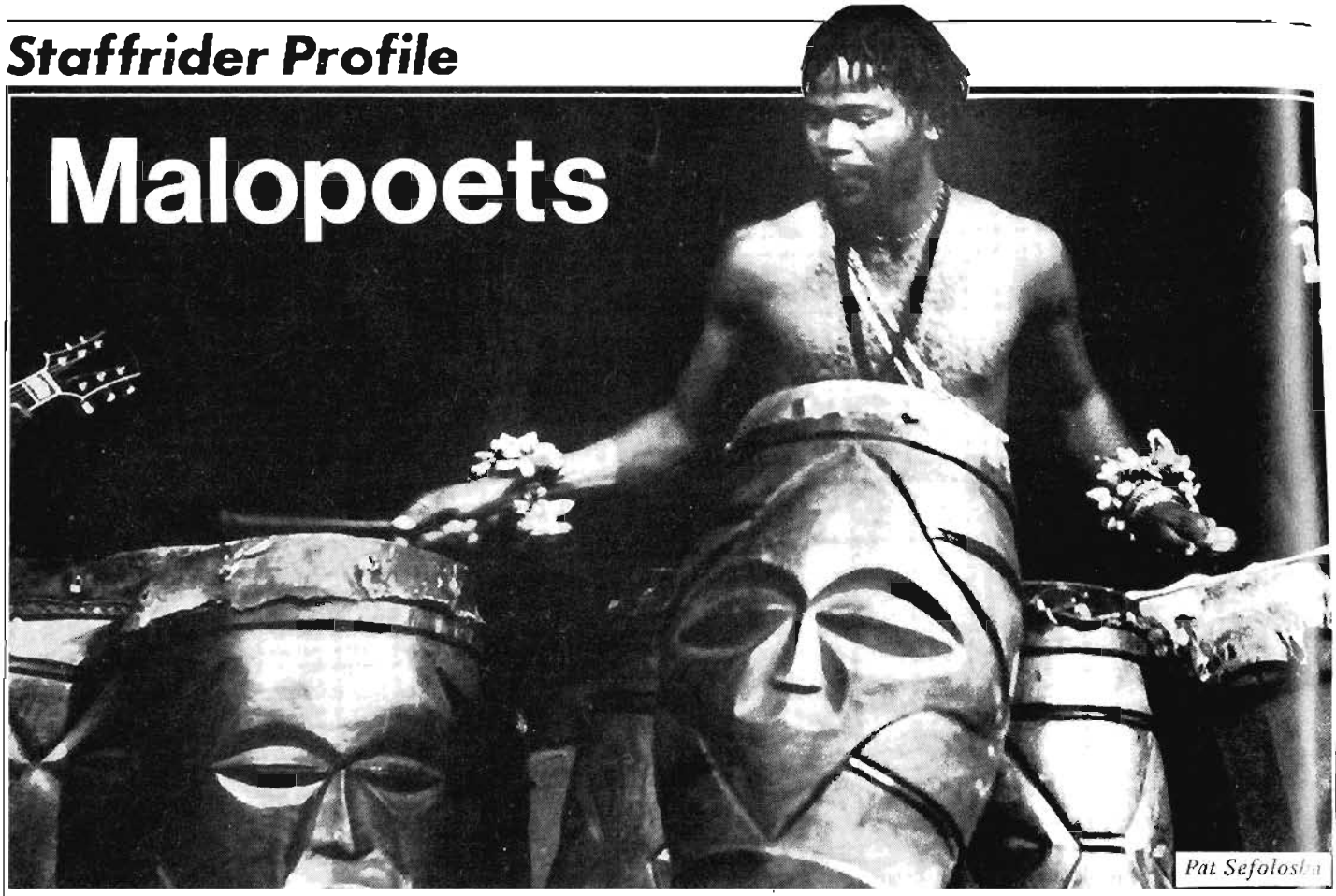
IN A CLASSROOM

Dizzy eyes
with swaggering
heads
staggering . . .
lean hopes
untold fears

Time spent in endless turnings
laughing, crying for sad joys
shouting, then screaming
for voiceless, undefined things
The children of the universe play.

Haroon Mohamed

Malopoets



Pat Sefolosha

Probably South Africa's most unrecognised indigenous musical group, the Malopoets have had a hard struggle, since 1978 when the group was formed, to get their music across to the South African public.

The group is composed of Pat Sefolosha (African drums, saxophone and vocals), Samson Shabalala (rythm guitar, percussion and vocals), Patric Mokoka (bass guitar, marimba and vocals), Duze Mahlobo (lead guitar and vocals), Bruce Madoda Sosibo (western drums, marimba and vocals) and Moss Manaka who has recently joined (flute and percussion). Pat, Samson and Patric were previously with 'Africa', the group led by Abbey Cindi, formerly of 'Molombo'.

Staffrider spoke to Pat Sefolosha, currently with the group in Johannesburg for a series of gigs held at The Box at Wits University and at the Market Theatre.

Pat tells of how the group was formed in Durban on 17 July 1978, the anniversary of the death of the late great jazz musician, John Coltrane, who died on the same day in 1967. 'Coltrane is the godfather of the group,' he says, 'we get much of our inspiration from his records, although he played jazz music and our sound is closer to "African traditional music".'

Is this the name you give your music?

PAT: Well, when we started playing we didn't know a name for our music — we just played what we felt. The name came from the press, when they described our music in the papers. In the beginning we played quite a few gigs, mostly at universities and festivals, but in Durban, you know, there are no promoters, no venues for our kind of music other than festivals — we would have to wait around for six months for a music festival. The only other possibility was to hire a hall, which was impossible, we had no capital.

People in Durban, you know, would only listen to disco music, the only venues were these disco clubs.

The Malopoets play purely their own compositions, except for their popular rendition of 'Days of Slavery' by 'Burning Spear', which integrates a reggae sound into their music. The lack of available venues has been the group's most basic problem since their formation, despite the fact that they received generally good reviews in the Durban press.

PAT: Times were hard, three of us shared a small room in Kwa Mashu, as we were from Pretoria, and we even had to phone Matsemela at one time to ask him to pay our rent. Our instruments were borrowed, at that time, from another group, 'Third Generation', which had split up. Except for my African Drums, which I had been using with 'Afrika'.

Then the group was 'taken for a ride', as Pat puts it, by a well-known music producer. In November 1979 he booked them a studio at Gallo in Johannesburg, to record their music for an album to be entitled 'The Birth of Malopoets'. A contract was signed, but the group never received their copy. Two days were spent recording in the studio, a cover was designed by Natal artist Charles Nkosi, but the record never appeared.

PAT: We went back to Durban. We spoke to the producer on the phone a couple of times — he told us things were coming along, he had booked the studio for the pressing. He had the cover printed and sent us a copy. After that we heard nothing from him — we couldn't reach him. We wrote letters, but got no response. By that time we had overseas contacts, people were waiting for demos, promoters overseas had expressed interest. Since then we have had no contact with him.

Have you made any attempt to contact him since you've been in Johannesburg?

PAT: No. You see, since then we have been working hard, the quality of our music has improved. The record doesn't matter any more — we want to get into the studio to make a better record. But the group nearly split up after this crisis.

What kept you together?

In Durban we were the only group playing this kind of music. Not all musicians are prepared to sacrifice. Others see music as a job, for the money. But the five of us were prepared to sacrifice for this music — we found satisfaction in the music even though Durban people were not aware of this

kind of music. When people hear something different for the first time, it takes a while for them to realise, you know.

Was there anyone helping you out at this time?

PAT: A woman called Ellinor Joosten, who is from Germany, was interested in the group. She used to attend all our performances and helped us out in many different ways. When our borrowed instruments were taken back she helped organise money for us to buy instruments on higher purchase. When we could not pay the instalments she helped us out from her own salary, sometimes we could not repay her – we were living pretty thin ourselves.

Didn't you go overseas at one time?

In April '79 I went overseas with *Umabatha*, playing drums for the show. But we were only there for five weeks. The show was picketed for political reasons. I felt bad. I had felt it was a chance to go overseas, I never expected that such things might happen.

Did you feel politically compromised by this situation?

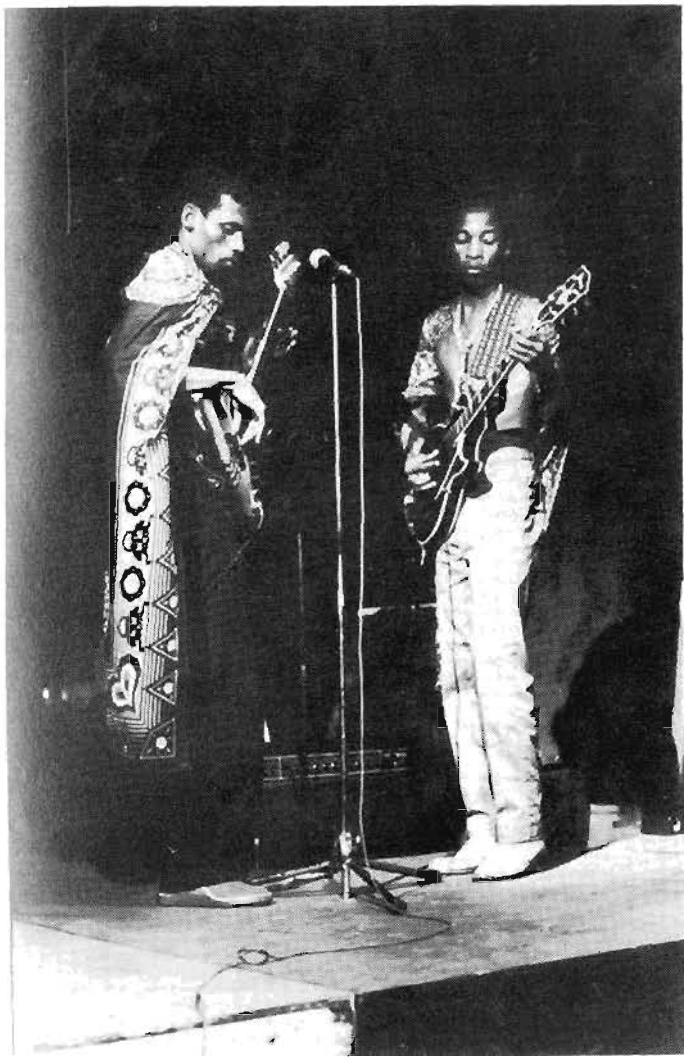
PAT: No. The pickets were not against individuals – it was against the whole show, the promoters. I was just a musician behind the stage.

You say you felt bad.

PAT: I had to come back too soon. *Umabatha* was supposed to be there for six months.

What happened to the Malopoets while you were away?

PAT: They went through hassles. They had opportunities but never played, they were afraid of a bad performance without the drums . . . It was a difficult decision for me, but I felt that I must know what is going on outside the country.



Patric Mokoka and Samson Tshabalala

Photographs by Paul Weinberg

Moss Manaka

Pat returned to a lower than usual time for the Malopoets. Gigs were scarce, they only played once in Durban from the beginning of 1980 until September, when the group headed for Johannesburg and greener pastures.

PAT: We have been looking forward to coming to the big city. We want to make the most of it.

How have your audiences been?

PAT: As I say, it takes people time to realise that something good is around. Our performances at The Box were good, the people liked it.

Moss Manaka joined the group shortly before the performances at The Box. 'I like the music,' he says. He plans to stay on with the group. The group plans to stay in Johannesburg, possibly to the end of the year, and hopes to go back into the studio to make another recording. But Pat has reservations about whether the group will be able to play as they want to.

PAT: In South Africa you can never do as you want to. We will have to make our arrangements more commercial otherwise they won't take it. If you want music to be on record, it can never be as you desire it to be. Many groups end up playing the producer's music, not their own. This is happening with many black musicians in this country.

Is there a way out?

PAT: I can't think of anything. Only that the artists should come together – if we could form a big musicians' union which could accommodate all musicians. Musicians here in South Africa are competing against each other . . .

Do you see a positive future for the group?

PAT: Mmm . . . (long pause) Ja.

That took a long time. (laughter)

PAT: The only place we can really make it is outside South Africa. But to get there is the problem. So the group must work hard.

And if you make a record?

PAT: If we get a record we can send demos to our contacts – But to get on record the music will not be the way we want to make it . . . ■

The Music of the Violin

Continued from page 11

looked at the violin in his father's hands. He was explaining to Dr Zwane the various kinds of violins.

'This type,' he was saying, 'is very rare. You do not find it easily these days. Not at all.'

'It must have been very expensive,' observed Dr Zwane appreciatively, 'one can judge from its looks.'

'Five hundred and fifty rands down,' butted in Vukani's mother, 'made to specifications. You just tell them how you want it and they just make it. This is special.'

'One has to pay to produce a Mozart,' said Vukani's father with finality.

'We had lauretta start on ballet recently,' said Mrs Zwane, 'and I am happy to note that she seems to be doing well.'

'All these things have to be taught at our schools. You school inspectors have a duty to ensure that it happens.'

'Indeed,' agreed Vukani's father. 'But do you think the Boers would agree? Never. Remember they say Western Civilisation is spoiling us. So we have to cultivate the indigenous way of life.' The conversation was stopped by Vukani's mother.

'Okay now.' She clapped her hands. 'What will you play us?'

Vukani's father brought the violin to him. He took it with his visibly shaking hands. He saw the red, glowering eyes of Bhuka that afternoon. He heard the laughter of people in the streets. He remembered being violently shaken awake by his angry mother one morning. He remembered one of his dreams which came very frequently. He was naked in the streets and people were laughing. He did not know how he had come to be naked. It always occurred that way. He would be naked in the streets and people would be laughing. Suddenly he would reach home and his mother would scold him for bringing shame to the family. But the dream would always end with him leaving home and flying out into the sky with his hands as wings.

Vukani found that he had instinctively put the violin on his left shoulder. And when he became aware, he felt its irksome weight on him. What did people want of him? He did not want to play. He did not want to play. And for the second time that day, he felt the tears coming to his eyes and again he blinked repeatedly to keep them from flowing. This was the time.

'Mama!'

'Yes, son.' But Vukani did not go on.

His mother continued: 'Why don't you play some selections from Brahms? You know some extracts from his *only* violin concerto? Perhaps Mozart? Yes Mozart. I know that sometimes one is in the mood for a particular composer. What about Lizst? Where are your music books? There is something on the music stand: what is it? Ahh! it's the glorious, beautiful Dvorak. Tum tee tum!' She shook her head, conducting an imaginary orchestra. 'Come up and play some of this Dvorak.'

Vukani wanted to shout, but his throat was completely dry. He wanted to sink into the ground. He tried to swallow. It was only dryness he swallowed and it hurt against the throat. Standing up would be agonising. His strength and resistance were all gathered up in his sitting position. All that strength would be dissipated if he stood up. And he would feel exposed, lonely and vulnerable. The visitors and his parents soon noticed that there was something amiss.

'What is it Vuka?' asked his mother. 'Is there something wrong?'

'Nothing wrong, ma.' He had missed his opportunity. Why did he fear? Why did he not act decisively for his own good? Then he felt anger building up in him, but he was not sure whether he was angry with himself or with his parents — together with the visitors whose presence was now forcing him to come to terms with his hitherto unexpressed determination to stop doing what brought him suffering. At that moment there was a dull explosion from the kitchen, of something massive suddenly disintegrating into pieces. There was silence for a while. Then Vukani's mother muttered: 'The bloody street girl has done it again.' And she stormed out of the bedroom. Her voice could be heard clearly in the kitchen: 'Awu, lord of the heavens! My . . . my expensive . . . my precious . . . my expensive . . . this girl has done it again. Teboho, has the devil got into you again? Do you have to break something every day?' Vukani's mother was now shrieking with anger. 'Do you know what? Maybe you don't. I gave Mrs Willard three hundred rands to bring me this set from Hong Kong when she went there on holiday. And I have told you countless times that you should be extra careful when you handle those dishes. Such care doesn't cost much. How many households in the whole of Johannesburg, white and black, can boast of owning such a set — a genuine set? But you, you refuse to appreciate that. Don't just stand there . . . '

'Mama, can you please just stop that,' said Teboho in a voice that sounded urgently restrained.

'Is that how you are talking to me?'

Then Teboho's voice seemed to lose all restraint: 'You don't want to listen to anybody, you just come in shouting.' The voice was loud and defiant.

'Is that how they teach you to talk to your parents at the university?'

'Mama, that is not the point.'

'Are you arguing with me?'

'The point is that you have been showing more interest in your dishes and your furniture than in your children.'

'What?'

'I'm not going to say anything more.'

'Slut! That's what you are! What decent girl would talk like that to her mother?'

'Mama, will you stop.' There was the sound of a slap. Another explosion. Lighter this time — perhaps a glass.

'I'm leaving this house,' screamed Teboho. Then the door to her room banged shut, rattling some cutlery. Vukani's father was about to leave for the kitchen when he met his wife at the door. She grinned at the visitors.

'I'm sorry for that unfortunate diversion. Children can be destructive. Since Teboho went to that university in the North, she has come back with some very strange ideas. Opposes everything. Defiant. Yesterday she said I was a black white woman. She said I was a slave of the things I bought; that the white man had planned it that way. To give us a little of everything so that we can so prize the little we have that we completely forget about the most important things in life, like our freedom. I won't have that nonsense in my house. Fancy, doing all that rubbish when the visitors are here. I've had enough. I felt I had to remind that girl that I was her parent. I wonder what all this showing-off is for?'

'One can never know with children, dearie,' observed Mrs Zwane.

'Indeed!' said her husband.

'Well, Vuka,' said Vukani's father, 'Can you heal our broken spirits?'

'Yes,' agreed his mother. 'We have been waiting for too long.'

Vukani thought of his sister. He wanted to go to her. They were very lonely. Their parents disapproved of some of their friends. Even Doksi. His mother had said he should have friends of his own station in life. What would a barber's son bring him? This had brought Vukani and Teboho very close. He decided then that he would not let his sister down. But could he? He thought of smashing the violin against the wall and then rushing out of the house. But where would he go? Who did he know nearby? The relatives he knew lived very far away. He did not know them all that well anyhow. He re-

membered how envious he would be whenever he heard other children saying they were going to spend their holidays with their relatives. Perhaps with a grandmother or an uncle. He remembered that he had once asked his mother when they were ever going to visit his uncle. His mother had not answered him. But then there was that conversation between his parents.

'By the way,' asked Vukani's mother, 'when did you say your sister would be coming?'

'Next month.' There was a brief silence and then his father continued, 'Why do you ask? I have been telling you practically every day.'

'I was just asking for interest's sake.'

'Well,' said the father, putting down the *Daily Mail* and picking up the *Star*, 'I just feel there is more to the question than casual interest.'

'You think so?'

'Yes, I think so.' There was silence.

'Relatives,' the mother came out, 'can be a real nuisance. Once you have opened the door, they come trooping like ants. We cannot afford it these days. Not with the cost of living. These are different times. Whites saw this problem a long time ago. That is why they have very little time for relatives. The nuclear family! That's what matters. I believe in it. I've always maintained that. If relatives want to visit, they must help with the groceries. There I'm clear, my dear. Very clear.'

Vukani's father had said something about 'whites are whites; blacks are blacks' but Vukani's aunt never came. Nobody ever said anything about her. Doksi liked to say: 'It's nice to have many relatives. Then when you are in trouble at home, you can always hide with one of them. And your father will go from relative to relative looking for you. When he finds you, he will be all smiles trying to please the relatives.'

'Vukani!' called his mother. 'We are still waiting, will you start playing now.'

Vukani stood up slowly and walked round to the music stand. Then he faced his mother and something yielded in him.

'Ma, I don't want to play the violin anymore.' There was a stunned silence. Vukani's mother looked at her husband, a puzzled expression on her face. But she quickly recovered.

'What?' she shouted.

'I don't want to play the violin anymore.' Vukani was surprised at his steadiness.

'This is enough!' screamed his mother. 'Right now . . . right now. You are going to play that violin right now.'

'Now you just play that instrument. What's going on in this house?'

His father's voice put some fear into him.

'Wait, dearie,' pleaded Mrs Zwane. 'Maybe the boy is not well.'

'Beatrice,' answered Vukani's mother, 'it's nothing like that. We are not going to be humiliated by such a little flea. Play, cheeky brute!'

'Today those boys stopped me again.' Vukani attempted to justify his stand.

'Who?' shrieked his mother, 'Those dogs of the street? Those low things?'

'What's bothering him?' asked Dr Zwane. Vukani's mother explained briefly. Then turning towards her husband she said, 'As I told you the other day, he keeps complaining that people laugh at him because he plays the violin.'

'Jealousy,' shouted Mrs Zwane. 'Plain jealousy. Jealousy number one. Nothing else. Township people do not want to see other Africans advance.'

'Dear,' answered Vukani's mother, 'you are showing them a respect they do not deserve. If you say they are jealous, you make them people with feelings. No. They do not have that. They are not people; they are animals. Absolutely raw. They have no respect for what is better than they. Not these. They just trample over everything. Hey, you, play that instrument and stop telling us about savages.'

Vukani trembled. He felt his head going round now. He did not know what to do to escape from this ordeal. The tears came back, but this time he did not stop them. He felt them going down his cheeks and he gave in to the fury in him: 'I do not want to play . . . I do not want to play . . . not anymore . . . ' Then he choked and could not say anymore. But what he had already said had carried everything he felt deep inside him. He felt free. There was a vast expanse of open space deep inside him. He was free. He could fly into the sky. Then he heard Dr Zwane say:

'How difficult it is to bring up a child properly in Soweto! To give them culture. Black people just turn away from advancement.'

Those words seemed to build a fire in Vukani's mother. They had sounded like a reflection on her. She let go at Vukani with the back of her hand. Vukani reeled back and fell on the bed letting the violin drop to the floor. It made no noise on the carpet. Vukani's mother lifted him from the bed and was about to strike him again when Teboho rushed into the bedroom and pulled her mother away from her brother.

'Ma! What are you doing? What are you doing?' she was screaming.

'Are you fighting me?' shrieked her mother. 'You laid a hand on your mother. Am I bewitched?'

'You never think of anybody else, just yourself.'

'Teboho,' called her father. 'Don't say that to your mother.'

'Please, dearie, please,' appealed Mrs Zwane, 'there is no need for all this. How can you do this to your children?'

'Sies! What disgraceful children! I am a nursing sister, your father is an inspector of schools. What are you going to be, listening to savages? You cannot please everybody. Either you please the street, in which case you are going to be a heap of rubbish, something to be swept away, or you please your home which is going to give you something to be proud of for the rest of your useless life!'

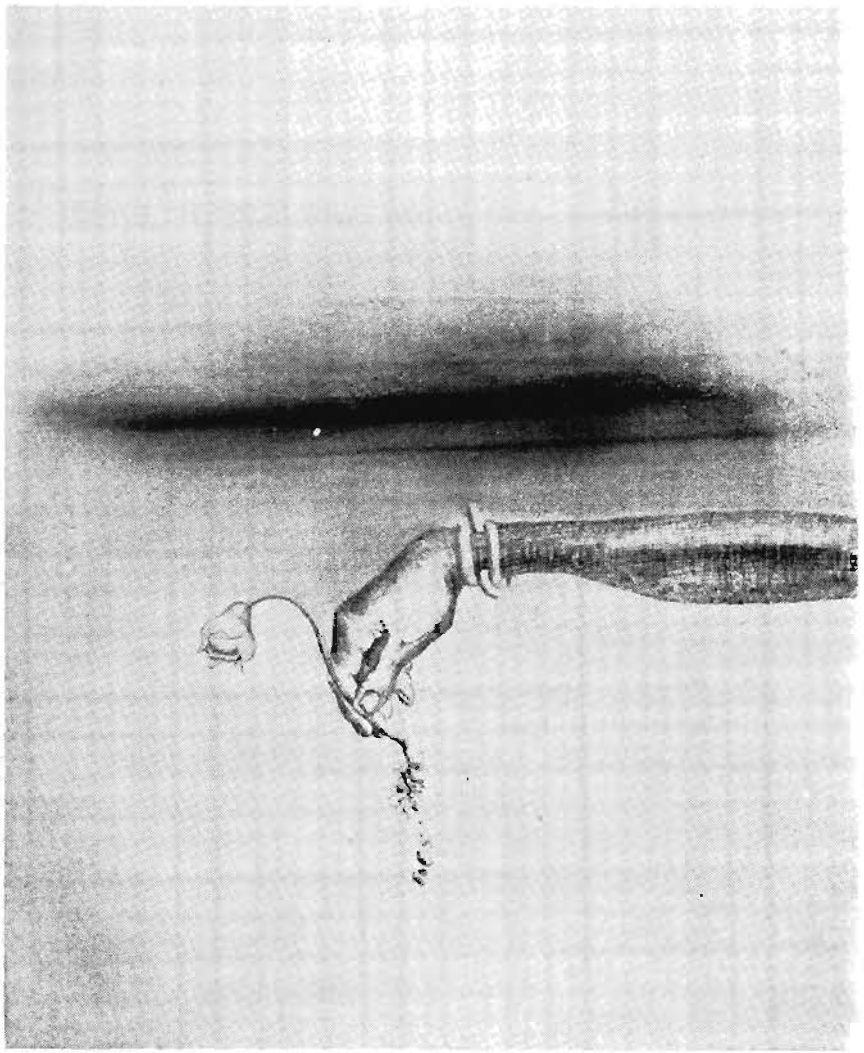
'Dorcas! That's enough now!' She looked at her husband with disbelief, a wave of shock crossing her face. Then she turned for the door and went to her bedroom, banging the door violently. There was bitter sobbing in the main bedroom. Then it turned into a wail like the wail of the bereaved. ■

Rock Against Management

RAM (Rock Against Management) was set up as an instant musical response to the appeal by the Western Province General Workers Union for funds to aid the striking meatworkers. Possibly the first programme of its kind in South Africa, its aims to create a political culture through which musicians of all kinds can situate their music within the social and political realities of South Africa. Watch out for details of future RAM concerts.

A NEW DAY

During the events of 1976 in Soweto, Thami Mnyele, Ben Arnold (sculptor) and Fikile held an art exhibition at the Dube YWCA. Here, Thami Mnyele of MEDU Art Ensemble speaks about the exhibition.



Untitled/Thami Mnyele

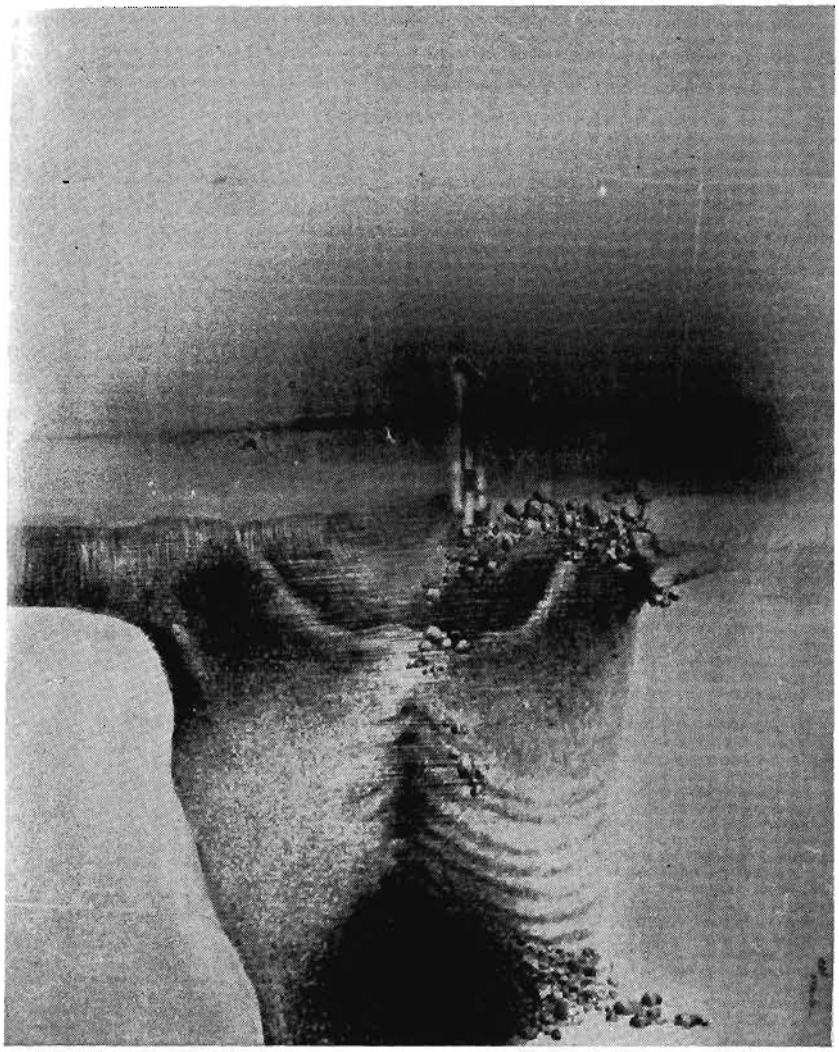
The exhibition, 'A New Day', was the most interesting of my life. In my opinion it was also the most important one, because it happened at a crucial time, when we had to make a decision and take a stand to say: were we involved in the struggle and life around us or were we merely producing 'pictures'? So we made that exhibition after having discussed very thoroughly both what we paint, why we paint . . . you know, something to do with what was happening around us. We got a very interesting response, a very critical response. The youth were very critical of us in a positive sense. Of course there were some elements who were opposed to the whole idea. We experience this kind of opposition often when people say 'so long as an artist indulges in politics, then it seldom becomes true art.'

Well, it is a very simple thing to say, but if one involves oneself thoroughly or properly in life, then that is politics and that is life. So our exhibition was attended by thousands of people. In South Africa, as far as I know, not so many people attend art exhibitions, especially not people from the black sector. We had people standing at the door counting and there were more than a thousand people crammed into the place and there were more waiting outside. This exhibition was very interesting because at the end the students took over and there was almost a riot in the hall. We the artists were very excited because it meant we communicated, you know, something clicked. The works that were exhibited were means of communication, not just 'curio' pieces. So it was a very important exhibition in my life. I think there are lots of things to learn from exhibitions like that, mainly relating to an artist versus the people, or versus his surrounding, rather than an artist there on his own, as an individual. There has been a lot of mystification regarding artists and art in life, and the exhibition *(A New Day)* was about involving an artist in the affairs of his own life and therefore of the life of his people. But I must go back a little and point at the cruel tragedy that permeates the lives of us black artists at home, this monster that has conquered us like a grave secret disease — individualism; an alienation from the artist's environment and an entry into the spiritual isolation of the petty bourgeoisie — I mean this attitude of detachedness and seeming comfort in dreams, Bohemianism and monk-like solitude within a situation that needs artists desperately.

I believe that the pen, the brush, and the song must be inspired by the significance of the purpose, the nobility of the task and of course the scale of the characters. The true artist in his artistic strivings must coincide with the interest of the class, and I don't know if there is one of us so far who has achieved this precious sense of social commitment in our activities as artists. I mean this precious element of socialism. As Sekou Toure said: 'To take part in the African revolution, it is not enough to write revolutionary songs; you must fashion the revolution with the people. And if you fashion it with the people, the songs will come by themselves and of themselves . . .' Our work hasn't yet developed above the mere stage of protest; we're still moaning and pleading. And even that we do with inferior craftsmanship and insincerity. We must partake actively in the struggle, to paint sincerely.

A New Day became a concept after we had sat around discussing what the exhibition was all about, why it had to be in Soweto and not, as is conventionally done, in town — black artists in white galleries. This time we had to decide that the exhibition would take place in Soweto because of the kind of works that we had produced. The theme itself or the themes, had a lot to do with our lives as people: These products had to be exhibited where people are. So it was a new day, completely different from other days, culturally. When I grew up I found that black artists exhibiting in town were well-known in town by white people only. I found artists associated with rebels and I found artists seldom sober. I was still having difficulty in analysing the problem, I mean the origin of the 'plague'.

Thami Mnyele is now a working artist in Botswana, attached to MEDU ART ENSEMBLE, Gaborone.
'Statements in Spring', an exhibition of his works, was recently held at the National Art Gallery in Botswana. ■



Dilemmas of a Writers Group

Mogorosi Motshumi of MALIMU, a Bloemfontein-based writers group, analyses the hazards and difficulties which the group has had to face.

'Being involved' is fast becoming the ladder to quick, personal fame, in line with the trend of thinking in the present generation. We are too prepared to exploit the situation of being involved — and thus being hero-worshipped among the people.

We are content, in fact, to create a situation where wherever we go we are recognised as the few who are in the struggle. 'Involvement' is deliberately cooked in an infernal pot and is dished out to the people in such a manner that an individual's part in the struggle becomes an open secret. We should never be seen as mere loudmouths who are simply seeking fame, recognition and acceptance.

We are involved and feel great when we are recognised as such. The stinking part of it is that we miss or deliberately kick the dedication part of it aside. And this, being very specific, is true of us here at MALIMU.

Confining myself to MALIMU (and not ruling out the possibility of this being the case with other groups) I would state these as being the most debarring factors to any significant progress: lack of dedication; submission to harassment; submission to fear of potential harassment; unemployment.

LACK OF DEDICATION

Our group membership has always been constant, but in number — rather than in continuity of members.

When this group was formed at the beginning of 1979, there were four of us and we all went out to find people who would be interested in joining the group.

Individually we met and talked to local artists and writers. We called and attended a very informal meeting. Well, the three new members who had turned up 'joined' the group.

We had at that meeting not yet decided on the name of the group. In fact, we had been linked to a Kroonstad-based group, MALEPA, through whom we had been sending some of our works to *Staffrider*.

When we left the second meeting (where two of the new members had been replaced by two new ones) we were all bubbling at the prospect of being a group, and not simply individuals who were more susceptible to the perpetual harassment thrown at us by the ever-alert Big Brother. We had also heathened our group MALIMO, which has since been changed to MALIMU (Mangaung Artistic, Literary and Musical Unit).

We were now ready to start the bad times rolling.

And this is where all the enthusiasm and excitement previously shown took a back seat to excuses and disappearances.

When the first challenge came, neatly wrapped in the form of Don Mattera, we had already made it such a big open secret that a group of this kind had been formed in Mangaung.

Here is Don 'celebrating' his sixth year as a banned writer (that was November last year) and here is a group of writers and artists that has been proclaiming solidarity with all those in the same stormy sea. The stage is set and the audience has already filed in. The lights are switched off and well . . . the projector has jammed. And the understandably disgusted audience files out. Er . . . actually the projector got jammed like-let-me-explain — through this little dialogue:

FIRST MEMBER: We'll be reading poetry on the 26th in solidarity with Don.

NON-MEMBER: Well, that'll be great. I wish I were you.

FIRST MEMBER: Of course, but it's got to be a secret. You see we don't want to invite the SB's who are sure to louse things up.

THOUGHT: And how do you keep them out?

NON-MEMBER: Do you mean you are not going to put it in the press?

FIRST MEMBER: No! That would only be inviting trouble. SB's will be there in their hundreds if we do that. I don't want to spend my whole life on Robben Island, you know, and for nothing at that.

NON-MEMBER: Then how are people going to know?

THOUGHT: Stumped!

FIRST MEMBER: We'll find means . . .

Of course it is published, this declaration of solidarity with Don. One member promises to secure a venue for the session and another promises to

provide the group with an alternative one should the first one fail.

Dawn the day of Don.

And they soar, the disappearances and excuses I mean.

Second Member: Sipho (fictitious name) said he'll be attending a church choir practice today. And er . . . by the way I'll also not be around . . .

Well . . .

Booked this hall for a what? I never heard anything about this poetry reading session of yours. Anyway, it is already too late to book now. You should at least have told me a week ago.

Well . . .

SUBMISSION TO HARASSMENT

December 16 is a National Day of Prayer, and this day last year provided our group with yet another challenge as to its dedication. And here we are on this day, with three new members . . . again.

We read poetry and stage a play, all to the pulsating background of bongos and a flute. This is happening at Batho Social Institute and as the name suggests, this place is situated at Batho. All goes well and the people sit up and listen to MALIMU. After this session we do two others the following weekend. This time it is only a few of us.

Going back a little, before the December 16 session takes place, a member sets off to Soweto where he is partly going to negotiate for a playscript by one staffrider whose name I don't recall him mentioning. The other part of course being his going there to see his folks.

On his arrival in Soweto he learns from friends that Big Brother has been on the lookout for him. He passes this message on to the group on his return. Members have up to now been cautious as to their involvement with this play we have been busy polishing and now news that they have been in the company of a wanted man spurs them on to throw this caution to the wind and quit. They have reached the point where they do not care whether they will be branded as cowards or not – this is to their relief, and ours, because we feel that keeping such people in the group would have been tantamount to keeping potential er . . . sellouts – and so we try to understand their position.

The show has to go on and the skeleton group just squeezes through. A week after the session the same question is being asked among members; Have they (Big Brother) been to see you?

Of course they have been to see me, but they cannot pin any crime on me, neither on you.

Although there's no response to this assurance, it is clear that Big Brother has put the fear of the devil into this one, and once more we lose a member.

Mix all this concoction well, and you have a stew that causes cultural stagnation and non-progress.

In diving headlong into SUBMISSION TO FEAR OF POTENTIAL HARASSMENT, I will state that Mangaung is cursed with a huge number of people who have a deep fear of the unknown. There are also the brilliant 'political mathematicians', who, had they concentrated on aiming their diabolically 'accurate' calculations and deductions in the right directions, would have been bearable. They possess the knack of always arriving at the right answers.

You see this government has this habit of displaying its muscle where it is bound to be seen by all, every now and then. We in Bloem do most of our shopping, fashion-parading, pick-pocketing, mugging, you-name-it, in Maitland Street, St. Andrew Street, and in the F.V.B. Centre, and this is where the muscle is mostly displayed.

We have never been shot at by the police, except in the usual skirmishes of a good white cop who, in the execution of his duties and the maintenance of law and order, chases a 'pickpocket' who has just nabbed a madam's purse and shoots him in the back after he has 'run' two steps because, 'If I hadn't shot the bastard, who is incidentally an escaped convict, he would have escaped.'

We all gawk at this deed of brutality inflicted by one human being on the other and are powerless to do anything about it. POWERLESS! For lucksake. This is neither alpha nor omega. Of course we are not powerless, only if . . . but this is not the point now.

As I was saying, our students have never been shot at, we do not know what tear gas is and we definitely do not want to breathe the foul stuff into our clean lungs. We have never heard the gunfire (except when the boys are target-shooting). We do not want to hear the piercing scream of a boy whose brain has been shot out. We do not want to spend five years in Leeuwkop and be banned to a remote area for five years, and another five, and another.

And this is where we meet the mathematicians. Their argument is logical, and very mathematical.

'Now look at it this way,' they argue, 'Soweto has got a very big black population. In any struggle they are in with a chance. They have leaders such as the Motlanas and the Tutus. They are united in that whenever there's any thing to be done, it is done in total unity. But,' they go on, 'look at what happened to them in June '76. They were mowed down. They were killed, detained, gassed and banned. Imagine what could happen to us here in Bloem if we were to try and stand up for our rights.'

Of course we do not know what may befall us. We have an army camp right here in Bloemfontein. Booming sounds are heard frequently in the night. Jets zoom overhead every now and then. And in Maitland Street for everybody to see, we have this exhibition of Soldiers marching along, armed.

Sure, we may be mowed down – FOR STANDING UP FOR OUR RIGHTS. The mathematicians, for all their brilliant calculations, should get it into their heads that it is US, and not they and theirs who should be engaged in this war. And the mathematicians, for all the logic they show, where are they hiding that positivism? They might argue that this word does not exist in mathematics.

Fear of the unknown has got us by the throat and is shaking us so violently we are just afraid to get off our asses and face the truth, instead of hiding behind 'logic'. Big Brother is doing his homework, and we simply have to do ours.

UNEMPLOYMENT in the big city of Bloemfontein has robbed us of those members who, I can say without doubt, were the most dedicated in the group. One member, actually the person who introduced me to *Staffrider*, because he wanted to save a few cents to further his studies, found himself in Vryburg, a remote area in the Northern Cape, where he was employed as a . . . well that I have no business to tell. I guess he has collected enough because I have since learned that he has enrolled with Fort Hare (I think.)

Then there is another who left with no alternative, had to go as far as Durban before he found a job. Then finally the third one and myself could only find work in Thaba 'Nchu. Fortunately it is not very far from Mangaung. It is about one and a half hour's drive by bus, so that we commute every day. And this is in no way helping to keep the group members together.

Added to all this, is a non-cooperative press. We have had some of our poetry reading sessions publicised but no play. It would seem that our local paper is bent more on reporting funerals and community council issues than black cultural activities.

We have had those artists and writers who, after being told that money was not the primary concern, with this group that is, showed no interest.

Mix all this concoction well, and you have a stew that causes the cultural stagnation and non-progress here in MALIMU.

S.O.S. (Save Our Solidarity). ■

The Early Years...

n.d. mazin

nils burwitz

An excerpt from a conversation between Zeke Mphahlele and Noel Manganyi in which Zeke remembers the early years of *The Voice* and *Drum*.

A long interview covering many aspects of black cultural history in South Africa is contained in *Looking Through the Keyhole* by Noel Manganyi, to be published by Ravan Press, October 1980.

MPHAHLELE: We ran a paper called *The Voice* in Orlando. Khabi, myself, Matlhare and Ngakane. Ngakane only joined us later on. But this was much later. This was the founding core of *The Voice*. We were mimeographing a paper of about six, sometimes eight pages. It was a paper of social and political criticism. Very Orlando in flavour. It often took a very strong satirical line against the elite who were trying to play their role in an anti-social way, we thought. Bantu Education also became a topic. *The Voice* ran from '49 to '52. It contained virulent attacks; we just didn't pull any punches at all. Nakene saw himself being satirised and made a fool of. We didn't sign our names on any article. Nobody knew the authors of *The Voice*.

MANGANYI: I see.

MPHAHLELE: Only much later we disclosed them. This was long after we had been dismissed. But even today there are many people who still don't know . . .

(Laughter)

A Special Branch fellow came to Orlando High, to inquire about us. You know what a white person will do. He will go straight to the person in authority and let him know what his people are doing. You see? He won't say 'I want to see so-and-so.' No. He wants to establish his presence. It was also intended that Nakene should know that he had dangerous people in his school. You see? That was enough to make Nakene shake in his pants.

(Laughter)

He wanted to see me and Khabi, this fellow with shaggy white hair called Sergeant Muller. He told us, 'Well, you fellows, I hear you run *The Voice*.' So we decided that we were going to come clean. They'd find out anyway. We said, 'Yes, we do.' He said, 'Well, I am going to send you a summons because you've been publishing a paper without registering it and without stating your names or where it's published.' We were, in fact, using a fictitious address in George Goch. And you have to have an address.

MANGANYI: I see.

MPHAHLELE: It was actually the address of a fellow called Nhlapo, Walter Nhlapo, who had allowed us to use it. He has since died. We were using all kinds of places for mimeographing because we didn't have a machine, you see, and we were always borrowing one, here and there . . .

MANGANYI: Zeke, can we move on to another important area – the area of writing, of journalism, at the time when you got involved in it, which was subsequent to your being a teacher. There again, we who are younger often feel that there came into being, particularly in Sophiatown, an *era* that has since passed. I mean, apart from you and a few other people it seems to have been a self-contained period in terms of creativity and writing.

MPHAHLELE: Quite.

MANGANYI: Could you say something about it?

MPHAHLELE: It was a fascinating time. *Drum* was founded in 1950. And it started first almost as an anthropological kind of journal, with pictures of rural life, pastoral beauty and so on. Then Anthony Sampson became its Editor. He changed the whole policy of *Drum*; it became a real proletarian paper. It talked about the urban black man generally. I had already started writing and my *Man Must Live* short stories had appeared in '47. My first story appeared in *Drum* in '52 and then again in '53. But I didn't join them until '54, when I came from Lesotho. I had just written my Honours when I joined *Drum* at the end of '54 as fiction editor. My first assignment was to go through the literary contest manuscripts. There were lots and lots of entries. This literary contest had been an annual event since *Drum* began. Can Temba won the first prize in the first contest, which is why he was immediately taken onto *Drum*. I was coming into a real literary renaissance, right in the middle of it. People had been waiting for a journal to publish their stuff. Fiction and reportage – things like that. People were really writing furiously in a lively, vibrant style. It was quite a style of its own, an English of its own. It was my duty to encourage this literary activity, this fiction writing. There wasn't much poetry then. Fiction was the strongest medium. The non-fictional prose sketch was also a kind of social comment. Quite a lively movement. The exposés that people like Henry Nxumalo and Can Themba were writing – the exposés of the Bethal potato farms, prison life and so on – were really dynamic. There was, as I say, a new kind of English being written. Significantly, it was the black man writing for the black man. Not addressing himself to the whites. Talking a language that would be understood by his own people.

MANGANYI: That's interesting.

MPHAHLELE: And very significant. There was no appeal or pleading at all to the white man to try to understand us. We were writing about our own lives, replaying our own experiences to our own people. Unlike the literary renaissance of West Africa, for instance, which I entered in the late '50's. West Africans were writing and being published abroad, for a general world readership. Ours was really a proletarian literature. Yes, people like Matshikiza, Can Themba, Bloke Modisane, Arthur Maimane, Richard Rive, James Matthews, Matthew Nkwane, Henry Nxumalo, Casey Motsisi. We were not having meetings and talking about this, no. And yet there was some controlling force that made it a movement.

MANGANYI: What was it? Dedication? What put it together?

MPHAHLELE: What put it together? I think it was a kind of collective consciousness. People had been suffering, and people had been living in harsh conditions without a voice. Well, they found a voice then. It was a life that had been an on-going experience, so writers began to capture it. They were ready to go. Many of our writers were not university people. I had already graduated although I had started writing in my undergraduate days. Can Temba was a graduate. That was all. All the others were Matric people . . . and below Ma-

tric people. And yet they had a command of English.

MANGANYI: That says something about education . . .

MPHAHLELE: That says something about education, for sure. That the education we had had still allowed for freedom of mobility – intellectual mobility. There were things that people could unearth in the libraries, in the bookshops. There was a good deal of Afro-American stuff in book form and magazine form and we were reading it. Those are some of the factors that gave the literary movement an initial push.

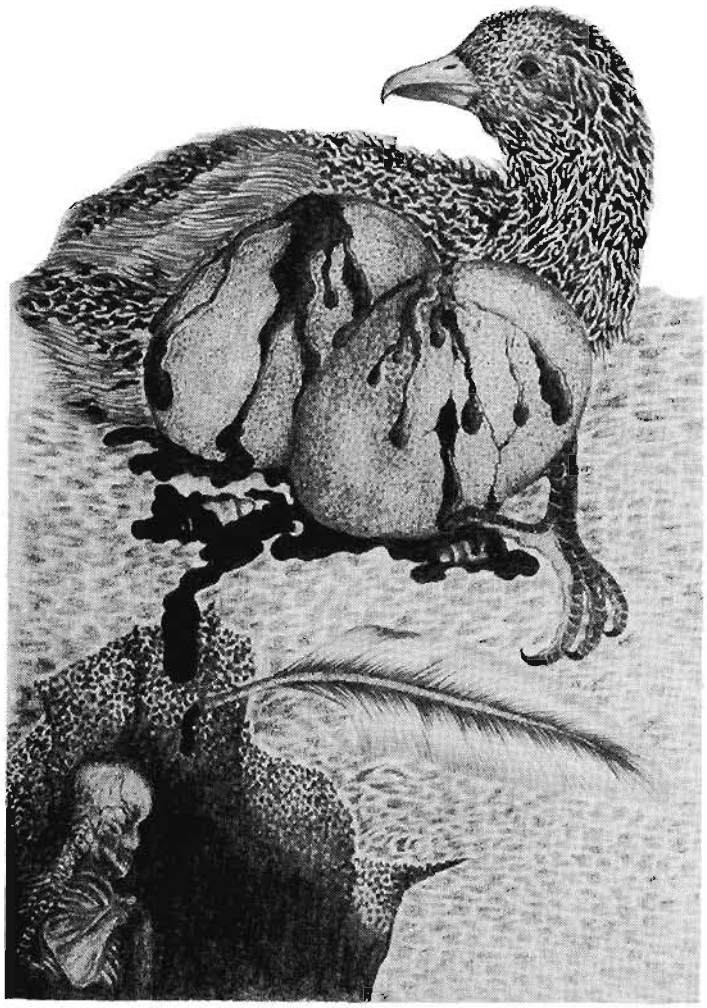
MANGANYI: How did that tie up with the social institution in black life called the shebeen? In Sophiatown . . .

MPHAHLELE: In Sophiatown and Orlando, shebeen life was quite a vibrant institution and it might have injected something into our literary movement. I don't think so much from the literary standpoint as from the social standpoint. I don't think anything was manufactured in the shebeen. I would consider it as one of those sub-cultures with its own quality of life. It was more an interesting back-drop than an organic part of the movement, even though it was a cult for journalists. And maybe it did something for people who frequented the shebeens, like the Matshikizas, the Modisanes, the Nkwanes, the Can Tembas and Motsisis. It gave Motsisi a subject for his satires. It gave Can Themba a subject also. Especially at the level of reportage, the level of the prose sketch.

At another level, imaginative writing was stimulated by education and the political climate. The political climate was a busy one in the fifties. First there was the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950 and the riots that resulted from it; then in 1952 the Defiance Campaign of the Congress Alliance in which whites and blacks participated; in 1951, the Eiselen Commission Report and our kind of ferment against it; the Bantu Education Act in 1953 and the removal of Sophiatown which almost coincided. The ANC tried to get people to resist the move, but . . . and schools were being boycotted at the same time, that is 1953. In 1955 the Kliptown Conference adopted the Freedom Charter. That was quite a big get-together because a number of people came from the Cape and Natal and so on. Nineteen fifty-six: there was the Treason Trial. A lot was going on and the political scene was very active. For me personally it created quite a context.

MANGANYI: Well, I often feel that from our point of view as blacks that is one period that really requires to be studied in great detail.

MPHAHLELE: Oh, it does. It really requires study.■



drawing, Mpikayipeli Figlan

Women writers speak

Amelia House:

A SPECIAL PAGE FOR WOMEN?

Staffrider has started a women's section which has started some controversy. Some women feel that they should not be set aside from men. Others feel that there is a need for the woman's point of view. We then have to ask the question – Do women have a special role in the society? In the fight for equality do they want to be special, different and separate?

In the struggle for equality there has first to be the recognition of existence. A special section for women is a necessary first step. Since the women writers do not always put a particular feminine or feminist view in their work and since we cannot always rely on names to point to the sex of the author, we must have a way of recognition. Once a clear presence has been established then we can ask for equality.

Is there a woman's point of view? Can a man write honestly about a female character? Can a white write about a black? Can a black write about a white? These are questions that have been asked over and over again. Do I suffer in any special way because I am black? There are things that I suffer because I am black but pain is not exclusively a black experience nor is suffering. Yes, blacks suffer in South Africa and other countries for no other 'crime' than for blackness. We do not want to escape blackness, but only the suffering inflicted on us by laws because of it. To that extent a white can never really know what it feels like to be black in a country like South Africa or in parts of the USA. There are certain experiences that are also unique to women. Some writers do write about childbirth and about mothering. This brings a particular point of view, but women should not permit it to become limiting. Women might be or have been the first teachers that children know, but those roles are changing even in South Africa. With pressing economic times it might once again become a matter of women rather than men going out to work and men will have to take over child-rearing.

For the present it is necessary to observe that women do write and that there is diversity in their writing.■

Four Poems by Lindiwe Mvemve

DO I HAVE TO DIE TO GO TO HELL?

the ticklings of life are numbed
in the veins of my blood
and this intoxicated fire
that my insides have caught
these starved flames
jumping like little children
galloping like fear-stricken wind
and in spasms
drowning me in ashes of inferiority complex
pulling me out
and immersing me in blood-stained
subhumanity.

your soul
my blood is cold enough
frozen flesh . . .
like a rainbow chicken
i walk like a zombie
seeing red where there's green
and cockroaches like human beings
creeping in the background
poor damn souls
their blood is cold too
to share such affinity with me
it may be aura
it may be the colour of the skin
that traps me in the prongs
of this still creeping fear
whispering 'you are the next one to travel
in vain naked, lonely and dead.'
dead in the arms of hell who has
long known the taste of my flesh
even the ants and their larvae won't partake
of this flesh that died when it was born
4/2/58.
this flesh that had to suck from
the breasts of sulphur and brimstone
and i was christened in pools of sweat
what horrible smell will rise up from
the tomb of my burial?
rise up to choke this infested sun
as the smell of hell becomes
colder, colder than the dog's nose.

ON THE GROUND OF THE STREET

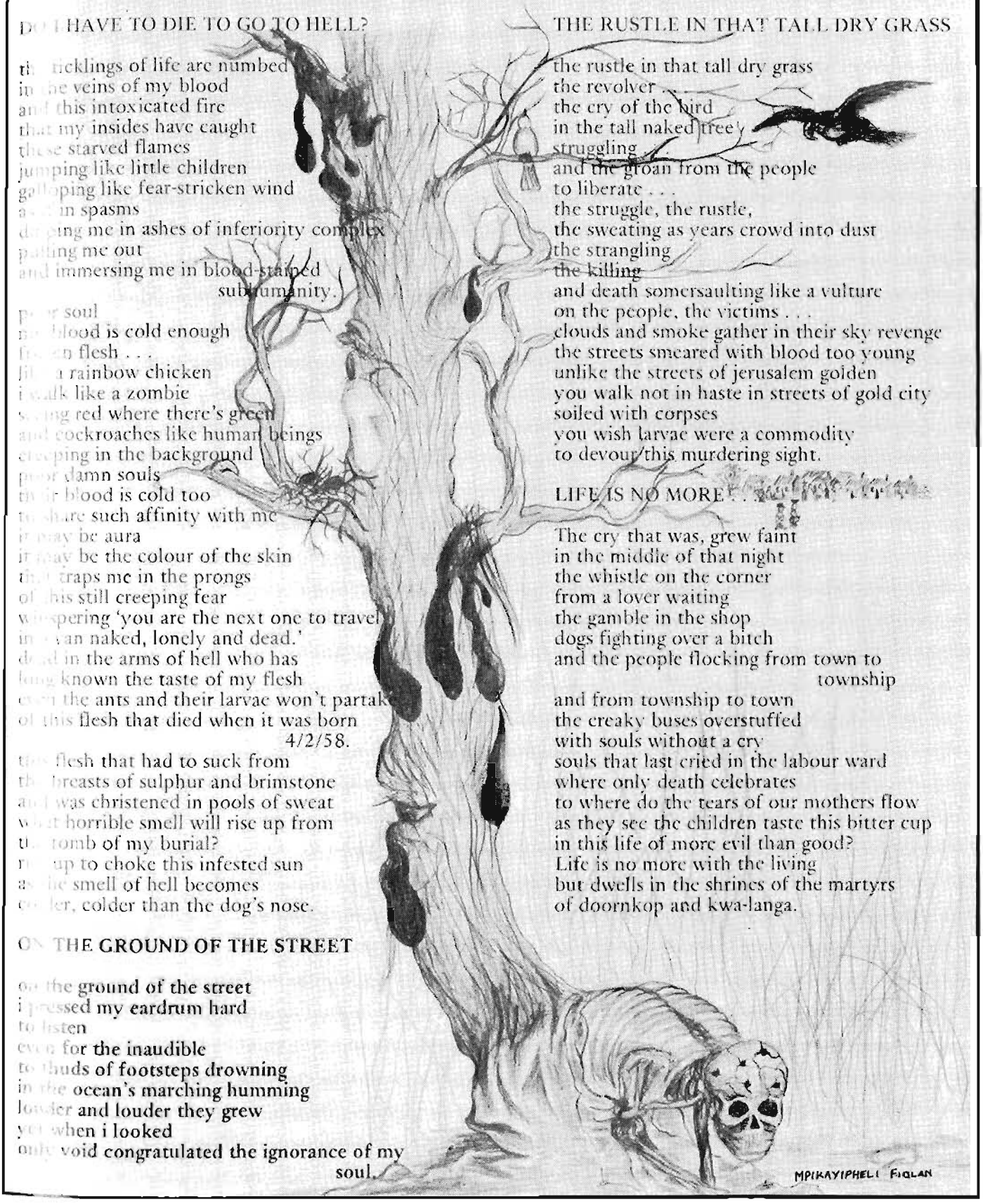
on the ground of the street
i pressed my eardrum hard
to listen
even for the inaudible
to thuds of footsteps drowning
in the ocean's marching humming
louder and louder they grew
yet when i looked
only void congratulated the ignorance of my
soul.

THE RUSTLE IN THAT TALL DRY GRASS

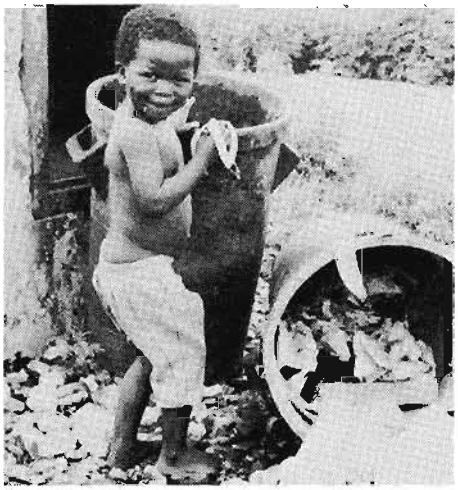
the rustle in that tall dry grass
the revolver . . .
the cry of the bird
in the tall naked tree
struggling . . .
and the groan from the people
to liberate . . .
the struggle, the rustle,
the sweating as years crowd into dust
the strangling
the killing
and death somersaulting like a vulture
on the people, the victims . . .
clouds and smoke gather in their sky revenge
the streets smeared with blood too young
unlike the streets of jerusalem golden
you walk not in haste in streets of gold city
soiled with corpses
you wish larvae were a commodity
to devour this murdering sight.

LIFE IS NO MORE . . .

The cry that was, grew faint
in the middle of that night
the whistle on the corner
from a lover waiting
the gamble in the shop
dogs fighting over a bitch
and the people flocking from town to
township
and from township to town
the creaky buses overstuffed
with souls without a cry
souls that last cried in the labour ward
where only death celebrates
to where do the tears of our mothers flow
as they see the children taste this bitter cup
in this life of more evil than good?
Life is no more with the living
but dwells in the shrines of the martyrs
of doornkop and kwa-langa.



Following Heather Bailey's statement, 'The idea of a special page for women writers is anathema to me,' in the last *Staffrider*, the controversy about whether or not there should be such a page has come out into the open. AMELIA HOUSE gives her viewpoint on the opposite page. *Staffrider* invites other readers, both women and men, to contribute their views to this debate.



THE DUSTBIN BABY

The dustbin baby
Member of the helpless lot
Product of ignorance
Son of negligence
Who is pregnant with curse
Before the eyes of the world
Which supplies no aid
For those in need

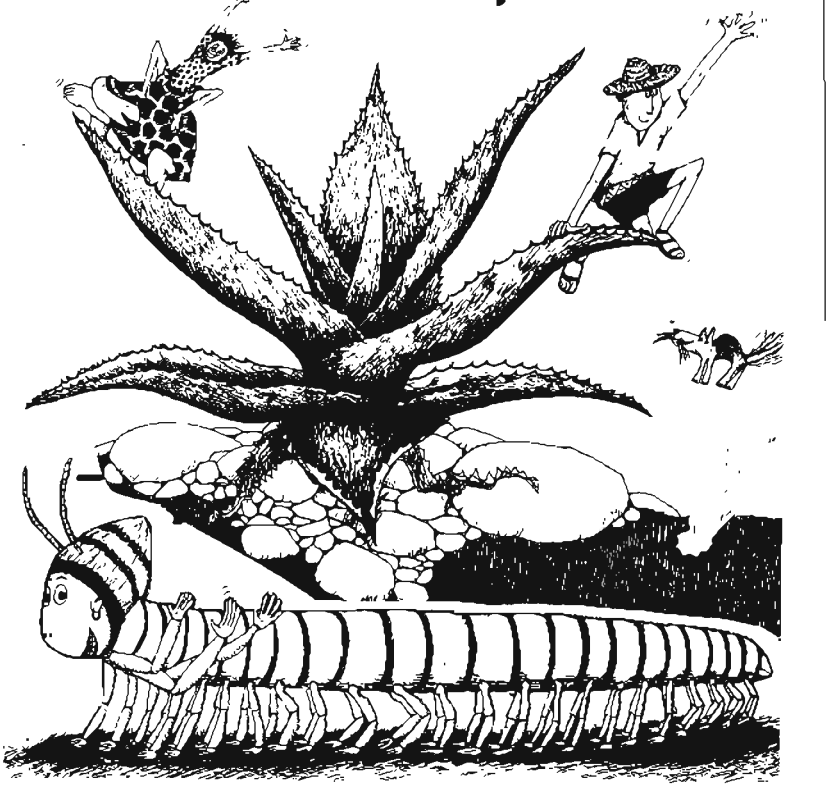
I am mothered
By mother-dustbin
Who gave me birth
With the spirit of compassion
During the ungodly scene
When I was thrown away
By mother-man

I am fathered,
By the reasoning dustbin
And starvation is partially defeated
For an act is better than no attempt
And the pieces of pie satisfy
The one in need
Gloomily I focus on
The pillars of life

Who is considered a social disease
That cannot be halted?
Who survives as a criminal
For he needed to satisfy hunger?
Who is considered a menace
For wanting to overcome distress?
Who am I?
An outcast –
The dustbin baby

Landi kaThemba

MOLO SONGOLOLO



***Molo Songololo* is a magazine for all children in the Cape . . . Among other aims, *Molo Songololo* wants to encourage children to express their ideas and experiences and provide them with an opportunity to gain a greater insight into the environment they find themselves in. *Molo Songololo* appeals to all children to read and contribute to it and so help to educate one another.**
The address is: 330 Southwest House, Shortmarket Street, Cape Town.

CHASING THE BABOONS
By Lloyd Zarry

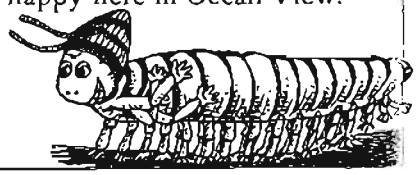
One cold winter's morning we were standing at the road waiting for a lift to school. We hitch-hiked for a long time. A few hours later we got a lift with a truck.

The school was at Ocean View, but the truck went to Kommetjie. We got off at the crossing near Ocean View. But as we got off the truck we saw the police wagon standing there. The police was blocking another car. We were afraid that the police might hit us because we were walking in groups. The high school pupils said they were going to turn back. When they went back I also followed them.

When we came to Witsands we saw some baboons. We started throwing stones at them. They ran up the mountain with us shortly at their heels. After a while we were tired and sat down to rest. While we were sitting there we watched the small baboons playing in the trees.

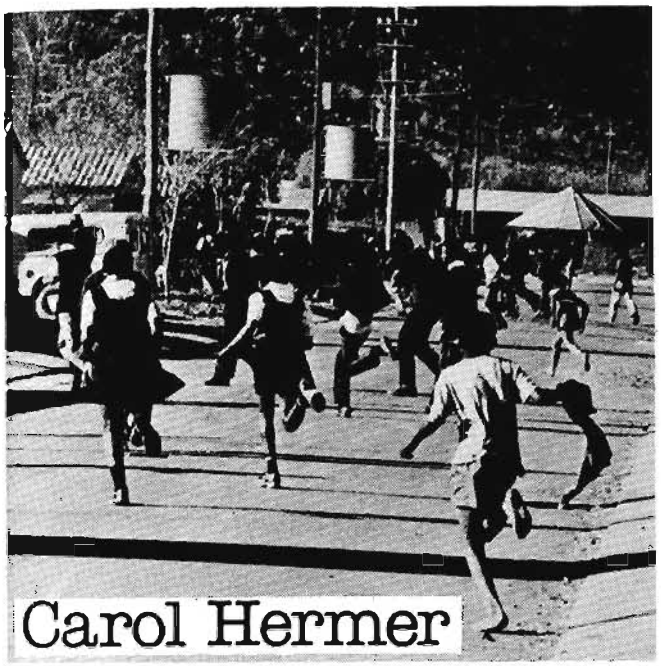
TREK TO OCEAN VIEW
by Barisha Karlie

We lived in Simonstown till I was three years old. Then we moved to Ocean View. In Simonstown we lived across the sea. I can still remember the earthquake we had when I was one year old. I could walk that time. I climbed out of bed and the house shook so that I fell to the ground. We had a small window on the roof. I looked up and saw a baboon shivering of the cold. The next day a man came round and told my parents that we had to move to another town. Simonstown was to be for the whites. We hired a truck to bring our furniture to Ocean View. Ocean View is also situated five kilometres away from the sea. It is called Soetwater. At first I did not like it in Ocean View, but I came accustomed to it. Now we live happy here in Ocean View.



New Books from Ravan Press

THE DIARY OF MARIA THOLO



Maria Tholo is a middle-class woman whose story is set in the townships of Guguletu, Nyanga and Langa – the black 'dormitories' of Cape Town – during the first wave of the 'Children's Crusade' of 1976.

Sympathetic to the demands of the school children, she is swept along by the sheer momentum of the popular struggle. Yet she feels threatened at times by the pace and violence of events around her.

Her viewpoint is uniquely revealing and very human.

Carol Hermer constructed this book from tape-recorded interviews, and her commentaries recreate the context of Maria Tholo's vivid personal encounter with her time.

Forthcoming Books

Mzala – The Stories of Mbulelo Mzamane (Staff-rider Series number five)

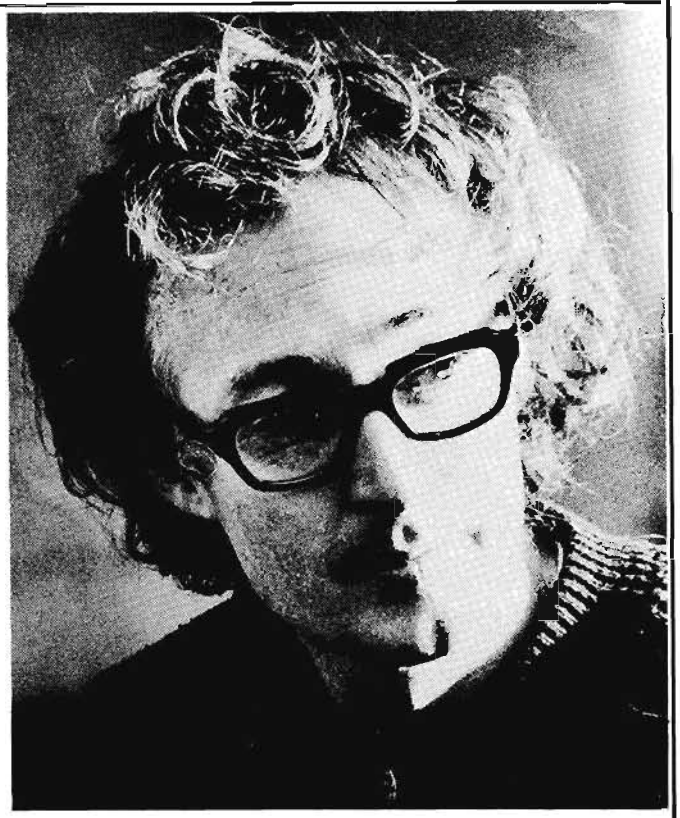
Looking through the Keyhole – by N. Chabani Manganyi, author of *Being Black in the World.*

Race and State in Capitalist Development – South Africa in Comparative Perspective by Stanley Greenberg.

A Peoples' History of South Africa – Volume One – 'Gold and Workers'. An illustrated history book which presents South African history from a new viewpoint.

Lahnee's Pleasure – A play by Ronnie Govender. The acclaimed comedy with a serious edge, performed hundreds of times, set in Mount Edgecombe, Natal.

'We Shall Sing for the Fatherland' and Other Plays by award-winning playwright, Zakes Mda.



THE EYE OF THE NEEDLE

RICHARD TURNER

'Turner revealed to a society caught in the defeating logic of oppression the shape and substance of life conceived in freedom and lived out through the enactment of rational choices.' (From the biographical *Introduction* by Tony Morphet)

This new South African edition includes a lengthy post-script, previously unpublished in South Africa, entitled *The Present As History*, in which Dr Turner examines the potentials for change in the South African situation.

A SEPARATE DEVELOPMENT

Christopher Hope

'Hope achieves the impossible' – *Rand Daily Mail*
'I have seldom read a funnier book' – *The Star*

BANNED IN SOUTH AFRICA

The Visitation — Ahmed Essop

A new first novel by the author of *The Hajji and Other Stories,* winner of the Olive Schreiner Award, 1979.

Chibaro — Charles van Onselen

'Charles van Onselen's highly readable, scholarly and outraged account of labour mobilisation and control, and worker response, in Rhodesian gold mines between 1900 and 1933. This is a brilliant first book by a talented labour historian.'

– Martin Legassick

STOP PRESS: FORCED LANDING (ED. MUTLOATSE) UNBANNED: ON SALE AGAIN: GET IT

MALOPOETS
the inside story

FEATURES: Malopoets · Katlehong Artists
Theatre of the Dispossessed · Another Glimpse of Slavery
Staffriders Speaking AND Poetry · Graphics · Photography