

Staffrider

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MZALA



**The Stories of
MBULELO MZAMANE**

AMANDLA

A Novel by Miriam Tlali



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THE REVOLUTION OF THE AGED

my voice is the measure of my life
it cannot travel far now,
small mounds of earth already bead my open grave,
so come close
 lest you miss the dream.

grey hair has placed on my brow
the verdict of wisdom
and the skin-folds of age
bear tales wooled in the truth of proverbs:
if you cannot master the wind,
flow with it
letting know all the time that you are resisting.

that is how i have lived
quietly
swallowing both the fresh and foul
from the mouth of my masters;
yet i watched and listened.

i have listened too
to the condemnations of the young
who burned with scorn
 loaded with revolutionary maxims
 hot for quick results.

they did not know
that their anger
was born in the meekness
with which i whipped my self:
it is a blind progeny
that acts without indebtedness to the past.

listen now,
the dream:
i was playing music on my flute
when a man came and asked to see my flute
and i gave it to him,
but he took my flute and walked away.
i followed this man, asking for my flute;
he would not give it back to me.
how i planted vegetables in his garden!
 cooked his food!
how i cleaned his house!
how i washed his clothes
 and polished his shoes!
but he would not give me back my flute,
yet in my humiliation
i felt the growth of strength in me
for i had a goal
as firm as life is endless,
while he lived in the darkness of his wrong

now he has grown hollow from the grin of his cruelty
he hisses death through my flute
which has grown heavy, too heavy
for his withered hands,
and now i should smite him:
in my hand is the weapon of youth.

do not eat an unripe apple
its bitterness is a tingling knife.
suffer yourself to wait
and the ripeness will come
and the apple will fall down at your feet.

now is the time
 pluck the apple
and feed the future with its ripeness.

Njabulo Simakahle Ndebele

MR WHITE DISCOVERER

to cover your shame
you tied
my sunkissed breasts
tied
imprisoned
my swinging breasts
now
when
earthlight
merges into
my black body
then
phantom lover
you
come
unleash
my breasts
white feet
dancing
out of step
wrap
trap
my legs
im
moral
ity
acts
sucks
my milk
But
Mr Whitey
no blood
fevers
through my
untuned body
No more
no more
tonight's
last
moonkisses on breasts
tomorrow
my beads
tune
to sunkissed
swinging breasts

Mr White discoverer
cover
your shame

Amelia House

dear sir

you came to me
gun on hip
to ask me about
my political beliefs
mind your son
doesn't come to mine
bomb in pocket
to ask him
about his political beliefs
IT WILL BLOW HIM TO P I E C E S !

nkathazo kaMnyayiza

Voices from the Ghetto

Mrs T H, an office cleaner in Johannesburg, went to talk to Miriam Tlali about survival in the dark hours before THE FIRST TRAIN FROM FARADAY

Mrs T.H. has had two previous jobs as a cleaner. Now she's started a new one at Ranleigh House, working for BCS, one of the cleaning companies. She told Miriam Tlali that it was . . .

. . . the same old story. When we knock off at 2.30 a.m., we have to go. There's no mercy. Many people in many places have been assaulted, people who work at night, meeting with ducktails and tsotsis — many, many people. I don't know about Ranleigh House because we've only just started there. But in all the other places, we have been hearing of many of God's people who have been injured. Others we see passing near where we work on their way out, going to . . . we don't know where. Now, one asks oneself, just what happens to these people? We can't go to Park Station; we may not sleep on the benches. We may not sit in the waiting-rooms. We must stand outside. Even when there's a train on the platform, we may not board it. Now we wonder where we must go because in the locations at that time it is rough. Even then, where will you go at that time? Most of the time you are the only one in that neighbourhood where you stay. It is like that too in Ranleigh House.

At 2 a.m. what happens; do they come and sign you off?

Yes. Someone gives us the order to leave. We have a white woman supervisor. When we go, she comes and lets us off.

Now the cleaners; is it only women that they employ?

Yes. It's only women who are cleaners. Some come from Diepkloof; others from Naledi, from everywhere. The supervisor is also a woman. But she has a car, you see.

There are companies of cleaners. Many firms. These have different names. One is called National, another is BCS and so on. You work until a certain time. It matters not whether it's raining or icy cold, there's no shelter for us.



photo, Lesley Lawson

It is they who must provide shelter, isn't it?

Yes. How we get home, they are not bothered about. That is none of their concern. You must see what to do. Whether you are assaulted or not, is none of their business. At one time, I've forgotten what year it was, a cousin of mine was working at this Braamfontein 'thing'

(She raised her arms and pointed upwards with her palms clasped together).

Which thing? The Hertzog Tower?

Yes. The tower. She was just leaving that place, early, when she was molested. It was only after they learnt that she was seriously ill and in hospital with bad wounds that the whites there said: 'All right, you cleaners can wait on the premises until it is safe to go home.' Those are the difficulties under which we work during the night.

Now this cleaning you do. When do you do it — during their absence?

Yes. We clean after the office-workers have left. Only the 'securities' are present.

I thought it was the black male workers who do the cleaning.

No. It's we, the women, who do it.

When do you start?

Six.

How do you do it; do you use machines?

Yes. We use Hoovers.

Now, what happened to you once when you alighted from the bus?

When I got off the bus I met tsotsis. It was my usual practice to run very fast, as fast as I could, in the direction of where I live. On this occasion, by the time they caught up with me, I was

already near my house. The bus driver didn't stop at the official bus stop but instead, he used to drop me at the corner of the street where I live. They must have noticed that. They hid and waited at the house near the corner. One of them tried to reach for me and pull me towards them. Fortunately at that time I had armed myself with . . . you know, these spiked iron flower holders . . . *(I nodded)* . . . Yes, the steel ones. I had one of those, and I implanted it into his forearm *(She indicated the spot on her own arm.)* . . . and when he withdrew and yelled, 'Ichu-u-u!' I got the chance to run for safety. Then I realised that in spite of being clever, I'll get hurt seriously. It was after that incident that I decided to stay at Park Station . . . Outside. Then I used to take the first train from Faraday to Naledi and stay inside it. It would travel up and down, to and fro like that with me, until it was safe to get off at Nancefield and go home.

(We both laughed softly and shook our heads.)

We are laughing, but this matter is not amusing at all. It's very sad indeed.

Yes, but what can we do? Then you'd hear passengers say to me: 'Yōu'll get hurt in the trains here; going up and down alone, and a woman for that matter.' They were male passengers as usual at that time. Then I would answer: 'What can I do? I've got to try and save my life as I work. I have to work; I have no husband.'

What about children? Haven't you got a son to fetch you from the bus stop? But then he, too, could easily over sleep and not fetch you . . .

No; not that. He, too, can be assaulted while coming to fetch me. For



“We have to pay for the train and bus fares and also the meals we eat from the R34,00 per fortnight that we get ... There's not much we can do with that R34,00.”

photo, Ralph Ndawo

instance, there's another man whose name is Ngubeni. We attend the same church. He stays in Mofolo Village. His daughter works for a bakery. She goes to work late at night and knocks off at night. This poor man made it a point to take her to Ikwezi Station. Every night at 8.30 p.m. he fetches her from the station. One night, two months back, after he had taken her to the station ... you know it was very dark as it was winter ... on his way back, he met the 'boys'. There were eight. What did they do to him? If it were not for the fact that God gave him power ... then I don't know. With the stick he was carrying, he summoned all his courage and fought like mad. He fought for his life; for 'final'! When these boys realised that this old man had beaten them, one of them tripped him. That was when they got the chance to overpower him. They tripped him and dropped him onto the ground. But he fought them even as he was lying on the ground. One of them produced a knife and tried to stab him, but he had seen him already and he grabbed the knife. They then clubbed his head and he sustained serious head injuries. It all happened because he tried to save his daughter's life. There are many more people who have been stabbed or killed because they have to come from work too early or too late at night.

Obviously this kind of work has many risks. How much money are you paid for it?

BCS only pays us R34.00.

Per week?

No, every two weeks. We are holding on because ... What shall we do? We have children and grandchildren. We have to send them to school. How are we to feed them? There's not much we can do with that R34,00. We complain but it does not help. How much have we been 'crying'? It's long but (*she shrugs her shoulders*) how do we pay rent? The money only pays the rent and for a few bags of coal. We just go on. There's nothing we can do with it.

It's good you spoke about this.

It's no good keeping quiet. I've rea-

lised it. It's these people who speak lies, telling strangers to Soweto that we live very happily; we eat and drink, and there is nothing we lack. They are the ones who are sell-outs. They tell the whites all sorts of untruths about our lives here. You can see. Here in White City Jabavu, they paint the outside walls of the houses, the houses along the main roads, so that when the very 'big' ones come, they can deceive them and say: 'Can you see that? We are painting the houses for them. You can see that there's nothing they want that they don't get.' They only clean those houses along the roads instead of letting them come right inside and see the filth all around.

You know, I never thought of this matter of office-cleaning. At first, it used to be men who were doing the work, wasn't it? I was aware of nurses having to do night duty, but not cleaners. What has happened to the men who used to do it?

You know, the men and women who do the cleaning of the flats and so on do the work during the daytime. It is the offices which have to be cleaned at night because during the day, they are being used.

I see. What about your train and bus fares; do they pay for those?

No. We have to pay it from the R34,00 per fortnight that we get ... It's for the train and bus fares and also the meals we eat.

Mind you, even Carlton Centre, big as it is, the people who clean it also have to go out of there at that awkward time, in the night, at two o'clock. They have no shelter for the cleaners.

Just reckon how far Ranleigh House is from the station. At times we move there and come across 'ducktails'; white men looking for black prostitutes. They mistake us for street-walkers. They too are an additional menace. They drive along the streets next to the pavements, following us and making advances; enticing us to go into their cars. You never know what the real intention is. As soon as one disappears round the corner, another one appears. ■

Poetry

PASSION OF A MAN IN LOVE

he is a man of the bush
put there between love
and death
the son to a heart-ached mother
he likes to smile at photographers
(to prove he is alive and fit)
smiling as i do
when my gal says we belong to the
world

he is the man of the night
he walks in the dark
in ice-cold alleys
of man's freedom road
he does wish to be present
when mother calls us for supper
he is the man of the bush
put between dark and light
by passion
the passion of a man in love
in love
with mankind
P.S.
how many suppers do i enjoy
with my mind on the meal?

Senzo Malinga

from THE FORGED NEGATION

they
came at night
unending marathon
of nightmares

the moon pale substitute
for the blazing
torch

the babies
grow knowing
blind faith
won't bring
back
our gods

only
brave untrembling
warriors
will bring
back
our gods

Nkos'omzi Ngcukana

THE CANE IS SINGING

BY NARAIN AIYER

The cane is singing. All along it is singing: to the left, from where I am sitting in this train on my way to the big city to visit my children, to the rolling land where the sea begins, and to my right, into the interior where the sun sets. The cane is singing, but it is a sad refrain that the cane is singing.

They first landed on these shores in 1860. Some were eager to come. Others were eagerly brought. That is why the cane is singing now. The mills are grinding and the sugar is pouring down the chutes, the quotas are increasing and on its return from Durban this train will have many men from the Transkei in its many bellies, coming to this singing sugar-cane land. The chairman of the Board reports a net profit, after tax, of two comma five. Sweet melody to the shareholders. No shares for me, for my father and his father before him and my children and their children after them. For us only the bitter notes of this sad song, this soul-searing song that the cane is singing.

Some were indentured. Others were passenger immigrants. They came and they worked. Nay, they toiled and they slaved till their loin cloths were melted off their sweaty, swarthy backs. The holes in which they lived were their homes but there was ample space in the corners, if there were corners, to store master's ration of dholl, wood and coal. They awoke in the morning and raised their hands to the rising sun — the sun rose from the East. That is where they came from. Would they go back there? No, they must pick up the hoe, the sickle and the cane knife and go to the master's farm. They must cut and thrust and dig and trench and rake and plough and fetch and carry and bend and break so that the cane may grow and sing a sweet song for the master. Melodious: two comma five after tax.

Black they were and some were fair when they came. Complexioned by the blood of their forbears from different parts of their mother country but mostly from the South. But now they were blackened even more as the sun's rays flame-seared across their bended backs. The heat can be as intense here as it was there. So many laws, regulations, conditions. Amendments to laws, regulations, conditions. Interpreters. Thumb-prints. They just called the whole bloody thing 'GRIMIT'. And so many sirdirs to see that their backs were bended, men, women and children. Yes, children of the children of our mother



Illustration: Gamakhulu Diniso

land. And a hard time they had of it. But their spirit of the Upanishads and the Bhagvad Gitas and the Pooranas and the Shivas, and the Argunas and the Saraswanis prevailed. The invocations and the incantations.

The holy pilgrimages to holy shrines. And they remembered, too, the defeat of Ravana and they told their children the story of Rama and Sita. The rituals and the ragas of their ancient land they brought with them and they sang and danced in honour of their deities.

They taught their children never to forget the golden languages of their own cultures but with equal fervour they financially assisted the masters of their new country to teach their children the

three r's in the English language, that they might earn a living. So many 'Government-Aided Indian Schools'. And only the other day, someone said that they do more to preserve and promote the English language, the high ideals and the noble values of the English tradition, than their English-speaking compatriots themselves.

Gradually, so gradually, some men were taken off the fields and put into the mills. The women and the children toiled on in the fields. Designation — 'field workers'.

The water place was the meeting place. Communal taps, they called them. They met and they married. The lavatories were communal too. You sat

next to your neighbour in the lavatory – there are still such ones to this day – you saw his private parts and he yours, and you discussed the prospects of your son marrying his daughter. There was some talk about caste. You farted out the aches of yesterday's toil and he emptied his bowels and thought of going to collect rations from master to fill the bowel again. Such were the goings and comings of those times.

Their numbers grew. Their problems too. Some bought, others sold out. Some lived in the quarters provided for them, dingy holes with a few puny slits for ventilation, dunged floor, meagre rough furniture, brassware and the holy lamp, faithfully and regularly polished. Their problems – working conditions, their options if any, their housing, their wages, their right to buy, own and till a piece of land, their right to travel – received a wider and wider audience and they became a problem, the 'Indian Problem' for debate at national and international forums. A Mahatma was born on a station platform in Pietermaritzburg and years later 'The Indian Problem' was a perennial item on the United Nations Agenda.

As the train passes yet another sugar mill, I begin to think of the many young men and women from this particular industry who had gone on to the outside world, to new fields, to new pastures, to find for themselves new comforts and new glories.

From the sugar fields some went into the black mines further North. Others became known throughout the distant world as growers and exporters of bananas par excellence. Master and his Missus had a regular supply of the finest vegetables and fruit for the dinner table. Market gardeners. Pineapples. Tobacco. Some went fishing and master's piscatory tastes were nourished. A few tasted the sweetness of growing their own sugar on a piece of their own land.

Some went to work in factories of another kind – some worked on the railways, others on the roads. Many others went to work in the hotel to serve master with the fish, the pineapple and banana and the tomato and lettuce and lit his pipe for him and carried the portmanteau upstairs for missus. Ten shillings a month, then. Now one hundred rand. 'They also serve who stand and wait.' Others answered the call of Jan Christiaan Smuts to fight against Hitler and save democracy and those who returned were thanked by the Oubaas and given a bicycle to ride in their twilight years. May their souls rest in peace.

'Government-Aided Indian Schools.' With the passage of time, hundreds of them. Thousands of young men and women responded to the call of the

professions, commerce and industry. Into the wards as doctors, as nurses, as laboratory assistants. Into the training colleges and the universities. Teachers lawyers, clerks, factory hands, shop assistants. Transport and trade. Daunting odds. Priceless talent. The skilled and the semi-skilled. Doors open and doors shut. Many of them are now in different parts of the world, their true worth recognized, their human dignity respected. Sons of their land, Ons Suid Afrika! And now some of them are being recruited for the country's navy. 'Dulce et Decorum est pro patria mori'? Their fathers queue for jobs and a fortunate few are at the Ocean Terminal on their way to the land of their forbears – a holiday – a cherished dream come true. Into banking, insurance and the hotel industry. They make their mark. The Minister of Indian Affairs says at a public function they are a priceless asset, an integral part of the South African nation but must develop separately.

Garland please.

What do I think as the train rumbles on towards the big city and we pass this mill and that siding, this village and that sugar baron's estate. The rivers flow here as they do there. There the Ganges, the Indus, the Brahmaputra, the Godaveri and the Kaveri. Here the Tugela, the Umvoti, the Umgeni, the Umkomaas and the Umzimkulu. So much water has flown under the bridge.

That's what I think. And the cane goes on singing. A compassionate people. A religious people. A law abiding people. Infinite capacity for suffering; unquenchable thirst for knowledge; stoical acceptance of iniquities; done out of house and hearth; uprooted; broken homes, suicides; limited travel rights; limited jobs; cannot bring bride from land of their forbears; cannot enter this university, that theatre; cannot grow bananas – land required for housing: Chatsworth for Indians; no electricity for the people in that barracks in this sugar mill; no monetary assistance for widow of man that gave thirty seven years of his life to make the cane sing; no passport for that man who defends the highest ideals and the noblest virtues of Western Christian civilization; the temple and the market to make way for new roadways; from the city to Chatsworth to maintain our revered land, sacred and dignified separateness; do not visit your friend Khumalo in Umlazi without a permit and your friend Dirk in Vryheid without a permit, for the law respects your separateness; Tin Town and poverty on the banks of the Umgeni; overcrowding, malnutrition, shebeens and knifing in Chatsworth township.

The glossy magazine carries a picture of a beautiful house, a beautiful spouse.

The Minister of Economic Affairs says at a public function that as a community they are second to none when it comes to self help – Garland please!

The train rumbles on towards the big city and the cane sings on. Here and there I pick up a sweet note or two but most of the notes are sour, bitter. How lush and green is the cane, mile upon mile in this fertile land bordering the Indian Ocean. They worked there before the turn of the century, their grandchildren and great grandchildren still work there. Vast hectares of sweet green monument to their monumental efforts. Occasionally I pick up a word from the song which says 'voteless' and again a prickly 'voiceless'. My gnarled hands, my aching back; I feel the weight of it all on my shrinking shoulders, for in the furrow where the cane grows, ran the blood and the sweat of my forbears, my blood and sweat and the sweat and blood of my children.

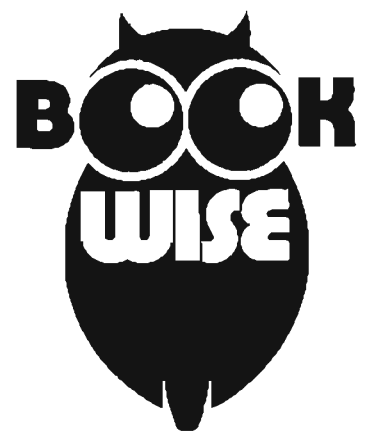
This morning's newspaper headline reads 'Sugar pact is worth R300 million to Republic.' I too should like to rejoice but I cannot, for the song of the sugar cane is a sad refrain for me.

Footnote:

'Sirdar' means a foreman or supervisor.

'Grimit' refers to Immigration laws and conditions attaching to the employment of Indian immigrants in the sugar belt of Natal.

Garlanding is a traditional Indian custom. Usually reserved for revered people of the high office, symbol of reverence and honour. ■



VISIT
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NOWHERE TO HIDE

Girl wake up,
The morning sun has caught us napping.
We came out here, sneaking to this place last night
To quench our desires — and it was wrong, we both
knew.

He was out of town, you said,
Visiting his old folks down in Giyane.
We could not go to your home
'Cause the curious eyes of your neighbourhood would
spy on us,

Neither could we go sneaking into my bungalow:
Jabu, Ntombi, Siphon and Zodwa would see us.
It is wrong, they all know.

Wake up girl,
The little birds are singing up in the trees,
The morning sun has caught us napping
And we have nowhere to hide.
The world is waiting outside.

Thabo Mooke

INFERNO

Please clarify to me
Am I not seeing miracles
What is all this about
The sophisticated highly strung babies
We the youth of this generation
Can set a volcano aflame

Where are those innocent days
of clay oxen and mud houses
The days of waltzing in rain
Playing games with trains

Could someone please help us
Are we not confused, misled
Blind wanderers without destination
We the generation of nuclear bombs
Know all beyond the sun
As if in control of the world
Everything impossible for us
Really this is heartbreaking

Must you be innocent bystanders
To witness us so confused
We, the irresponsible future leaders
As if we are intelligent enough

Guide us to righteousness
Take us back to our Africa
Away from Botsotsos
Back to our tradition
Away from skyscrapers
Far from temptations
Detentions
Volcanoes of the north
Unsteady moody climate of the south
Back to our Africa

Divorce not your tradition
Sell not your black soul
Cling to yourself
Be yourself
Accept changes wisely

Kedisaletse Mashishi

MALARIA FEVER

Mosquitos
Stinging
Helicopters
Using
Expensive
Fuel
My
Blood
Helicopters
Gun
Down
A Ten
Year
At
Meadowlands

You chose not to believe
I sting
When I told you I will
String

Bika

INITIATION

The barrel of responsibility is pointing at us
Let us go to the mountain
And sit down in bands
Singing of war and love

Apartheid

We will come back equal to you
To stone you
A stone for each reincarnation
You will never ever
Breathe again

Let us go to the bush

Bika

UNDER THE BRIDGE

Sandwiched between camouflaging
road bushes.
Radio glued to ears.
Eyes magnetically stuck on unaware
roaring engines passing.
He reads for trespassing traffic.
Book in hand he stops the overloaded
on the separate route to location.
Unlicensed pilot ticketed,
half-a-dozen migrants martially offloaded
to walk to Langa Township.
Walk to a portable home
half perched in Transkei —
A home swinging like a nest on a branch.
A home exposed to raids by cruel men and weather.
A home so temporary
that with a drop of ink
it can be drowned in exile.
A home where father has been cultivated
by white prerogatives into wild fruit
emerging only at season time.

Leonard Koza

He woke to a day without promises,
without hope, what could be called ...

A NORMAL DAY

A STORY BY KENNY T. HURTZ

He woke to a day that would have been better left unseen. The weather was bright and hot, the air still, the time 11:37 by the digital clock, that excellent machine that woke you with a shrill ring, or with soft music if desired. Or didn't wake you at all, if such was your choice, but left you to grow slowly conscious without persuasion, sick with sleep, eyes gummed and breath foul. And the clock, if not so instructed, would also make no fuss if you never woke again at all, would hum until its mechanism wore with age, or the electricity was cut off. Really, the understanding of the simple machine was amazing.

He woke also to a day without promise, without hope, what could be called a normal day, normal indeed, for most. The movements could be precisely plotted: Wake, dress, eat; go to work, work, eat; work some more; then go home, eat; and in the evening the desperate search for distraction would fill the hours before sleep, and the cycle would begin afresh the next day. This repeated from birth to death, with minor variations, for most. And men spent all their time bound into the circle, and that was called life. For most.

The blankets had become disarranged in the night, which was unusual, he did not as a rule sleep violently, and most mornings found the bed as neat as when it had been gratefully entered the previous night. Perhaps a nightmare? But he remembered nothing, and he felt rested, as if his sleep had been sound and still. Yet maybe it was not so, for who remembers the morning after, the terrors of the previous night? A movement of his legs sent the blankets, sheets and everything else sighing to the carpet. He sat up, now noticing that he had a violent headache, situated, so it felt, in the centre of his brain, a pinpoint focus of pain that pulsed quietly and rhythmically. He could hear, distantly beyond the muffling curtains, the insane twittering of mossies, what he believed were called Cape sparrows, this item of useless information having remained with him in spite of all; and why Cape, he was nowhere near the Cape? Without opening the curtains he stood up and slipped on a robe, the sole aim in his mind being the seeking out and finding of the morning newspaper with its daily

crossword puzzle, which he normally attempted over his first cup of coffee, and sometimes his second, although by then his room had normally been made up and he would return to its comfort, its calming neatness.

'... To clean it up! She refused! I can't...' The voice trailed off as he entered the bathroom, so painfully sterile, and closed the door. His mother's voice, strident and excited. Now what, he wondered. Had there been a fight, had some trivial crisis occurred? What the hell... the things some people find to occupy their time, it was pathetic. As far as he was concerned, the public raising of a voice could be considered positively indecent. After all (he thought sarcastically) what would the girl (she was about twenty-five, as near as he could guess) think? She had certainly been rather withdrawn since she had joined them some months ago, she went about her work with what appeared to be suppressed melancholy. Her name was Rosina, though Rosina who was anybody's guess. They were all called Rosina, that or Mary, it suddenly occurred to him. The high incidence of these names in their community must be beyond coincidence, or perhaps they were simply pseudonyms chosen to be appealing to white employers. And she can't do anything, his mother had told him once, she doesn't even cook! So what, nor did he...

He swallowed four aspirins without recourse to water. The toothpaste was finished. He scowled at the crumpled tube for a moment, as if to discover the reason, as if it could tell him. Half-heartedly he splashed water in his face, throwing most of it over his shoulder, dripping on the polished floor as he groped for a towel. Couldn't cook! Just imagine! The headache, locked in conflict with the aspirin, quickened its rhythm. '... expect me to do it?' said the voice as he stumbled from the bathroom with thoughts of hot coffee, and that too would have to be delayed, if the jar was not empty as well, until he had secured the paper and checked that his brother had not beaten him to the crossword, which sometimes happened and left his remaining day with a tint, albeit subtle, of incompleteness.

Somewhere in the house a door slammed. The cat on the landing re-

garded him with silent amusement. 'Hello, Jean, how've you been?' he said in a pitched falsetto, one part of his mind recoiling under the absurdity, another exulting in the sheer idiocy of the greeting. The cat broadened its smile, but otherwise ignored him.

In his mother's room she was inexplicably absent. He found the paper, the crossword half done, the scrawl belonging to his brother. The price one pays for sleeping late! He decided it didn't matter, scarcely convincing himself.

'Hi,' said his mother, coming into the room. And then almost as an afterthought, 'I've dismissed Rosina.' She sat down on the bed. Beyond the glass the rooftops gleamed in the sun, red, pink, grey. He could make out a garish bus sliding from its terminus and slipping into the angry stream. The cat glided through the door and flopped to the floor at his feet, rolling over onto her back. He stretched a foot to her. 'Hi,' he said, wondering at the suppleness of the cat, 'what happened?'

'I asked her to clean the dog's mess in the kitchen. It was my fault, I suppose, I fed them late, but do you know what she said?' He confirmed that he did not. Still gazing out of the window as though it might have killed him to move, he saw three birds bank together and land smoothly, one after another, in a tree of repulsive aspect in the next garden.

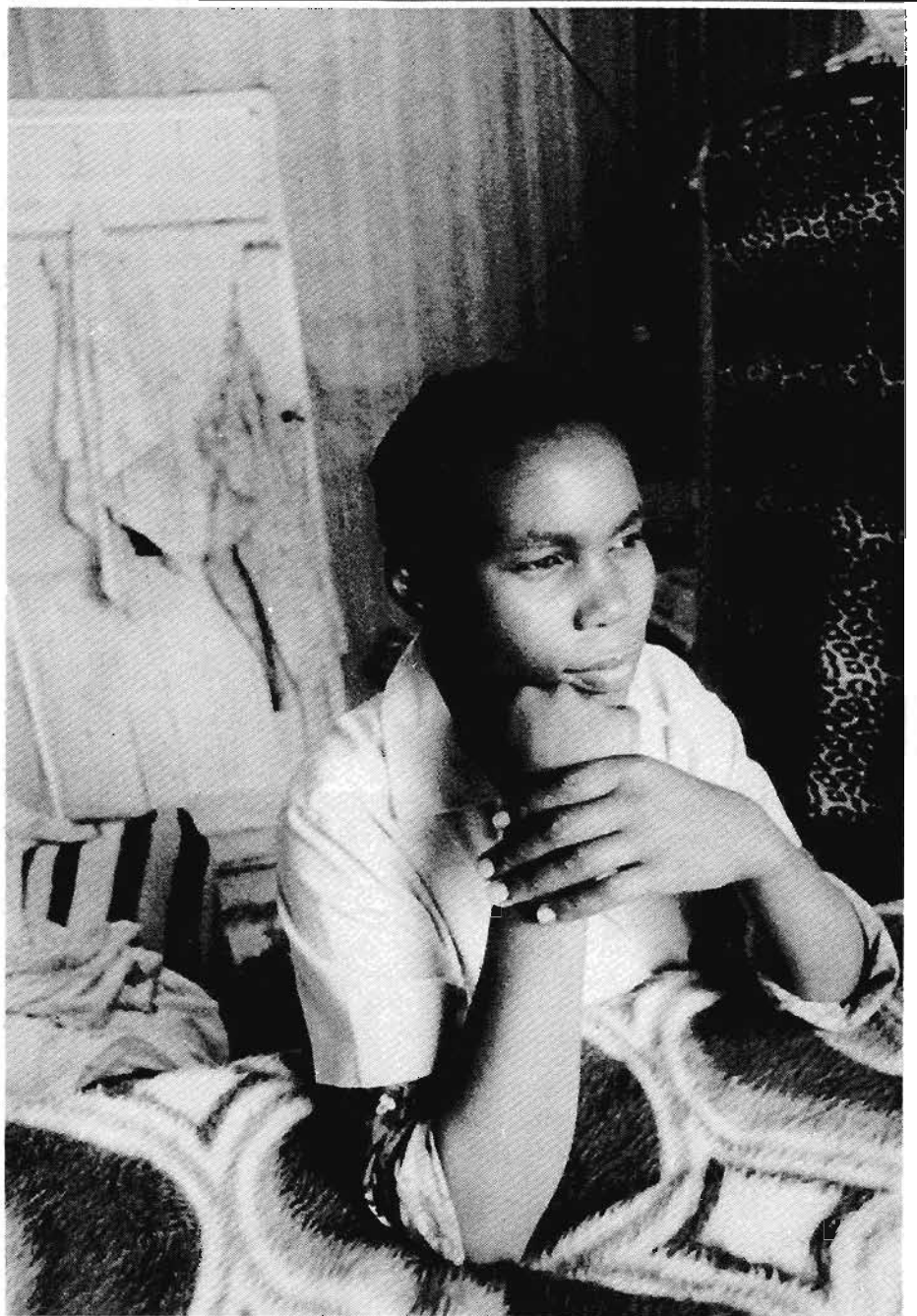
'She said, "I don't clean the dog's mess."' Perhaps his mother expected concordant outrage, but when none was forthcoming she added 'The cheek!'

He turned the page, reflecting: Who would make his bed today? and more, so she was gone, well, she had not been much good anyway, her loss would be easily enough tolerated. **KILLER STORMS BATTERED HOUSES**, read a headline. What, he wondered was a killer doing storming battered houses? The whole idea seemed preposterous. He could scarcely believe it. Perhaps they meant that killer storm had battered previously un battered houses, houses that were as neat and trim as his own before this battering took place. He felt that the effort needed to clear the problem up would have to be tremendous. He threw the newspaper at the cat, who stalked off indignantly. I hate making beds, he thought, what a bloody

mess. His mind clouded for a moment: What did it all have to do with him anyway? But he could feel that it did, in a manner as yet unclear, one that would shortly unfold to the form of its final consequence. 'So I told her she could leave,' said his mother, her tone slightly exasperated. He began to sweat lightly and shifted uncomfortably. His mother continued '... but I owe her three weeks pay, and she still has the two overalls I bought for her.' She took a plain envelope from the shelf behind her and handed it to him without a word, then turned and left the room. The cat gained the window sill in one smooth motion, and settled down on its stomach.

He picked up the paper and tried to concentrate. If that's seven down then eleven across must start with a j, and twenty-two with an s. It still made no sense. The envelope he had stuffed into his pocket, and now he took it out and counted the money. Dirty work again, specifically made for him, as usual. Bartered houses, battered houses. What a newspaper. What a world! The day had taken on an unpleasant metallic tang, everything was too hard, too brittle, as though the slightest wrong move would cause the entire future to shatter irreparably. The thought of moving appalled him, as did the thought of going back to bed. He felt hopelessly sandwiched between two equally unpleasant alternatives. He threw the newspaper down again in despair and, with a violent effort, made his way to the kitchen.

There the too-clean fittings gleamed balefully, throwing the shards of their reflections about the room wantonly, the scene again one of oppressive brightness and order. What would she do, he wondered as he filled the gleaming kettle, what would he, for that matter, do in the same position? Evicted on a moment's notice, if this really was eviction. Yes it was. But why had she been so sullen, he asked the rising steam and, now that he thought of it, why had she never spoken to him without he first speaking to her, and why then had her response always been flat, spoken in the voice of one fatalistically resigned to an awful, irrevocable fate? God! But perhaps that was going too far, after all, what did she have to complain about? Her lot was not too bad, it certainly could've been worse. She had her own room, food, clothing supplied, and light work to fill the daytime hours constructively, and the nights were her own, plus what amounted to plenty of free time. Christ, she even got paid for it! Funnily enough her situation was not so different from his own, he too had a room and food, and from the same people, and the difference was this, that he



photo, Bidy Crewe

received no payment for the work he did around the house, the small tasks that were all he seemed fit for since his rapid decline of a few months ago. Yes, upon final reflection what exactly was her problem? He himself would gladly have done what she refused to do, without even a thought of payment. He fought down a rising feeling of self-righteousness. After all, what exactly did she expect? And even...

A key sounded in the door and the girl came in quickly, shutting the door behind her, dressed no longer in her overalls but now in a smart skirt and blouse, red and yellow respectively, and high-heeled black shoes of delicate design. She turned hurriedly from the door and saw him standing at the cupboard, frozen in the act of reaching for a cup. The expression on her face did not change, but as their eyes met, the smartly dressed woman dissolved and

the attitude of urgency faded completely. Far away the barking of many dogs could be heard, the very hounds of hell themselves perhaps. She dropped her eyes instantly and her posture slumped slightly. Then she turned to the door and was silently gone, the sound of the latch locking before he quite realised what was happening.

For some reason he felt offended, even hurt that this had happened. And for some reason even less clear the kitchen suddenly seemed intolerable, as though it were an area that had been hurriedly evacuated after contamination by some malignant entity. He sensed that he was being absurd, over-sensitive at best, but why did he feel that it must be he who was the malignance, and that it was due to him that the room now held an air of blighted desolation?

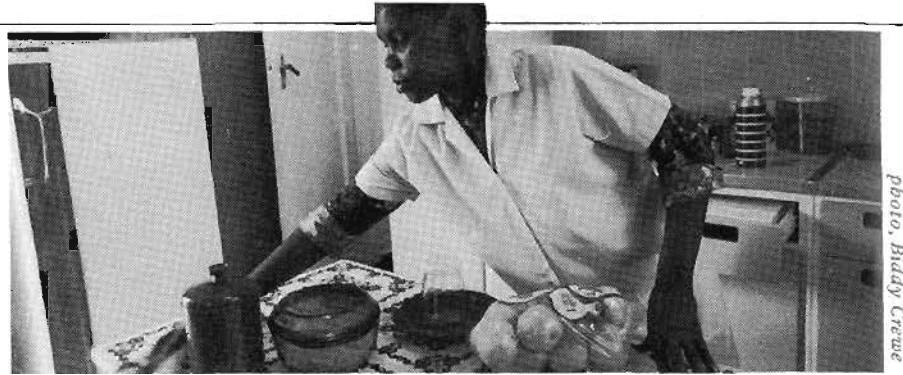
The coffee he sipped on his way up the stairs was too hot, far too hot, and

made by one who did things with such maniacal precision that there was no room for error. And when he entered his bedroom, the sight of the naked, rumpled bed and the caliginous illumination shocked him once more. Why did it look so unbearably squalid, so nauseating? He threw the curtains asunder in a frenzy, the coffee forgotten, and dressed rapidly, jeans, shirt, sandals.

Outside, as if by deliberate contrast, everything was razor-sharp, the blue of the sky was so blue that it scarcely seemed real, the green of the small suburban lawn blasted forth with almost tangible force, the house, glaring white in the sunlight, was actually painful to look at. The vividness of these impressions battered his senses brutally. He had stumbled, almost fallen down the stairs on his way here, and now he glanced back into the gloom of the open doorway, hoping perhaps for the strength to go back inside and forget about all this that he had suddenly come to. The headache thundered and roared inside him and he felt close to fainting, indeed he stretched out his hand and leaned against the wall, his breath rough and quick. After a moment he pulled himself together with what he considered a heroic effort, and walked in the direction of the servants' quarters, what had been called 'the back' for as long as he could remember.

'The back' was situated behind the garage, and a sort of alley led down to the three small rooms that the domestics called home. Home, he thought, for as long as it lasted, and who can really be held responsible for the incontinence of the family dog? Or was that an excuse? A vine had been allowed to grow unchecked along the right boundary of the narrow passage in which he now found himself, and choked off most of the little walking space. Above his head it curled wildly, as if in delight at its own freedom, completely engulfing what formed the boundary to the neighbours' own 'back'.

Turning left at the end of the alley he met a scene of such astounding ugliness that he physically recoiled: the same vine, pompous and tyrannical, covered almost everything in sight; its leaves, sickly green in the bright sunlight, had infested all but the most frequently used areas in the tiny courtyard, growing like a gangrenous slime over the small, disused coal-pit (since theirs had become a smokeless zone electric water heating had been installed), through discarded pieces of piping and lumber and the rotted skeleton of an old water tank, and emerging in rampant triumph through an enormous and inscrutable tangle of metal that lay at the far end of the space, against a crumbling brick wall. From one end of



photo, Biddy Crewse

the yard to the other stretched a destroyed washing line, one of its original four strands miraculously intact, the uprights deviating ridiculously from the perpendicular (and even here the hideous vine scaled upward to the sun). Brickwork showed where patches of plaster had fallen from the walls to the ground, which seemed in composition to be a sea of mud, where it was visible at all, and pools of dirty water reflected the sky with mirror-like competence. The smell hit him simultaneously, a sour mixture of humanity and wet coal and something else that he could not identify. The walls of the building that stood on his left were streaked with dirt and the gutters above hung sadly from their mountings, their once-yellow paint flaking in obscene curls. None of the windows were broken; this amazed him for a moment.

And then, from one of the three doorways that opened onto this awful yard, the girl emerged, and he was again struck by her neatness, which seemed absurdly out of place here. He wondered whether she would disappear again, but no, she stood on the threshold without moving.

'Rosina —' he took a step forward, narrowly avoiding a large puddle. She looked at him with the same empty expression that he remembered, an expression that could have belonged equally to one either profoundly shocked or extremely bored. '... The madam wants her keys and overalls, please.' He wanted to say 'I'm sorry', but he didn't. The words had become stuck somewhere. His voice sounded disembodied, as though someone behind him had spoken, and he had a fleeting impression that the entire building was somehow shifting.

The woman pointed, without speaking, into the room, where two neatly folded overalls lay on the truly naked bed, it had not even a mattress. Apart from this and two small packing boxes, the room was bare. She handed him a small keyring (Errols Datsun, Phone 23-4965) with three keys, then turned and dragged the boxes from the dim room. When she had done this she closed the door and the Yale lock clicked shut. He began to feel intensely uncomfortable, as though it were he who was at fault, as though it were be-

hind him that the door had closed, for the last time.

'The madam owes you some money,' he said stupidly. He couldn't understand what he was doing there anymore.

'Yes,' she said. He saw the sadness in her eyes as she glanced up.

'Do you know how much?' he asked.

'No.'

'Here.' He thrust the envelope at her and she timidly took it and pocketed it without counting, standing small and alone before him, eyes downcast. A feeling of immense sadness suddenly seized him, constricting his throat and flinging to the winds the logic that had helped him endure all up to now. The girl had seen the inside of that room for the last time, and the pathos of the scene was now stamped with an awful seal of finality. And still she stood there, as though awaiting his permission to move, to think, to live.

At once he felt the desire to run, to get away, far away, anywhere. A faint buzzing began in his ears. No, it was an aeroplane, a distant silver speck. He turned on his heel and walked off swiftly, through the tangled passage and into the house, his house, his for as long as he desired.

From his bedroom window he looked down and saw a small figure, laden with two boxes, her entire worldly possessions, dragging her way up the drive towards the street where, as far as he could see only emptiness awaited her. He watched her slow encumbered walk to the gates, the final boundaries, with a feeling of immense desolation and almost anguish. The whole affair seemed to him dreadful and unnecessary, and what had been gained anyway? And what lost...? And then, with a final backward glance, she was gone, not only from the house and his sight but also from the consciousness of those who could do without her, who wanted no part of her, those for whom life went on with barely a skip in the continuity.

He gazed from the window long after she had gone, seeing nothing, then turned back to the room. The unmade bed awaited him, and the cat now snuggled into the disarray of last night's sheets. Faintly now, far away (or was it after all in his head?) he heard the wild barking of a thousand dogs. ■

'My Dear Madam...'

by Nokugcina Sigwili

The full text of this story will be published next year in 'Reconstruction', edited by Mthobisi Mutloaise.



On 24 February 1980 I was employed as a domestic servant. I had to start work at 7.30 a.m. which meant that I had to wake up at 5 a.m. every day to catch the bus. We agreed that I would work a five day week. My madam was an English woman who lived in a small house by herself. Her children were in England and she was divorced from her husband. She sounded very excited about having me as her servant. I could see this because she was constantly on the phone, telling her friends about her 'new girl'. She told them: 'This one is exceptional because she can speak English without any problems and she is very clean and moreover, polite!'

Within a week I had met most of her friends because they could not resist the temptation to come and see this exceptional 'new girl'. Of course I could not blame them: my madam was rather exaggerating things. All the same I did not want to disappoint her by misbehaving. I was very polite and each time her friends came in I would quickly ask them if they would like tea or coffee — before she could get a chance to do so. As I had expected, this won me appreciation from her friends.

The first two weeks with my madam were very happy ones. We were always talking about this and that in the world, about our likes and dislikes. Sometimes she would tell me about her previous girls, who could not behave themselves.

'What did they do?' I asked.

'They would steal my clothes, my money and even pinch my powdered soap.'

'Mh, that was bad of them.'

'Yes, yes, that's true. I remember one girl stole my bra, a memento from one friend of mine.'

I said, 'She must have been a fat girl that one,' and she replied: 'Yes she was and very cheeky too.'

I could not help liking her because she was somewhat childish, but our friendship did not last long.

The thing started one day when I was making coffee for two of her men friends. My madam came in and told me that I should call those two guys 'Baas'!

I was caught off guard this time. 'What! You must be joking!' These words escaped my lips before I could

think of preserving my 'title'. I was simply baffled.

What now, my dear madam was at a loss for words. She simply frowned at me. It was hard to believe that these words had come from her exceptionally good girl who always said: 'Yes Madam.' These guys I had to call 'Baas' were more or less my own age and they started laughing, asking her why I had to call them 'Baas' instead of using their own names. My madam decided we should drop the subject there.

When everybody was gone and we were left alone she sent me to a hardware nearby to buy some Bostik for her shoes. I was not served when my turn came.

'Can I have Bostik glue, please!' I said this several times without any attention being paid to me. 'Bostik please.'

'I want a big broom to sweep outside, have you got one?' one lady said, and she was served immediately. They made it a point that every white was served before they half-heartedly asked me: 'What do you want?'

'Bostik,' I said.

'What for?' he asked — as if he did not know.

'For shoes.' I was annoyed at such a question. This was after a long time of impatient waiting.

When I got back I told my madam that I would appreciate it if she went to that hardware herself if she wanted anything. 'I think they will serve you quickly,' I went on.

'Why?' she asked.

'You are white and it is one of the rules of that hardware to serve whites

first, no matter who came first,' I explained.

'Who said that?' she wanted to know.

'Their reaction did.'

'You must forget that you are black and life will not be so difficult.' She said this smiling and went on before I could even say anything: 'Maybe the way out is to call them "Baas".'

This word again! Things were turning sour for me. This word was becoming a nightmare or rather a 'daymare' because this all happened during the day.

'I am very sorry if that is the case, because I never call anybody "Baas" whether he is white, red or yellow.'

'I am warning you about your behaviour, my girl. You must be careful about what you are saying, I am telling you. South Africa is not a very lovely country for a black person if you do not learn to be respectful.'

I did not ask her what respect meant but I was soon to find out.

Do you know what happened the following morning? A handful of her friends came round to talk to me!

'About what?' I wanted to know and the answer I got was, 'Just about life in general.'

I felt honoured. I was about to sit and talk to the 'witmense' about life in general!

'How old are you?' One good looking and tall lady started the talk about life in general.

'I am twenty-one.'

'Where do you stay?' Walk-Tall went on.

'In Alexandra,' I said.

'Do you like it there?' This came from one stout guy with a beard; the

hair on his head was shiny black and so was his beard, except that it was bushy.

'Yes, I do like it there,' I said.

'How do you find your madam?' Mr Black Beard went on.

'I think she is kind,' I said.

(At that moment my madam was visiting the loo.)

'And she thinks you are a good girl,' he smiled.

'I'm glad.' I sort of blushed. I was not very sure where this interrogation was leading.

'She tells me you are interested in journalism,' an elderly lady said smiling.

'That's true.' I smiled too, not because I felt like smiling but because everyone in the lounge wore a smile.

'How would you feel if you could become a famous journalist?' she went on.

'I don't know.'

This called for a good laugh from everyone in the house. Some had to dry their eyes, which were laughing too. Walk-tall was the first to recover because she did not laugh much. Apparently she was the kind of person who would like to keep her teeth inside if it were not for her upper lip that was short and acted against her. She was collected and her face was expressionless when she asked me this question:

'How do you feel about politics?'

My! The change in the talk about life in general was noticeable, to me in particular . . .

'Where were you during the 1976 students' riot?'

'Would you rather the blacks ruled this country?'

What a lot of questions! I did not know which one to consider first, so I decided, 'I do not know much about politics,' was the right answer.

Then Granny said, 'Do you know anything about the Azapo?'

'I know the name of the organisation and that's all,' I replied. I was not pleased at all. We were not talking freely. I was being interrogated and that made me feel bad, because I was not very sure about how to tackle this and I was getting restless.

'What do you think of Mugabe?' came another bullet from Black Beard. This put everybody on the alert, searching for something in my face.

'I do not understand' — and I meant just that.

'I mean, do you think he is suitable for his position?' explained Black Beard, but I was more surprised than before.

'Yes, do you think otherwise?'

Granny had something to say before he could answer me: 'I think he is going to make people starve to death! All he wants to do is get rich, famous and happy with his family.' She said this with her chin high in the air.

One man, who had been quiet all along, had something to say too: 'He enjoys sitting down and talking nonsense on the television.' He wore a mocking smile on his face.

'Making many promises he will never fulfill,' Black Beard put in.

'Black South Africans think he is great,' said Walk-tall, and they all burst out laughing.

'You people are still going to suffer.' This one was directed at me by Granny, who went on to say: 'People who want to help you, people who understand the situation in this country, you call "sell-outs".'

'Yes, this is strange,' said Walk-Tall. 'These words "sell-out" and "puppet" are in the air and they are directed at the wrong people.'

'You never know how these people see things,' added Black Beard.

My madam had been very quiet, she had been nodding her head in agreement and laughing. Now she decided to say something: 'It is not a matter of seeing things, they are just narrow-minded . . .'

Up to now they had been talking among themselves, not to me, but I had a question and so I voiced it: 'Who are these people who are wrongly called sell-outs and puppets?'

I was answered almost immediately by Walk-Tall: 'Gatsha Buthelezi, Matanzima . . .'

My madam felt she had not finished and so she helped her: 'Mangope.'

'Sebe.' So the quiet guy had a name in mind too. 'I do not know much about Mphephu, but he is not a bad guy either,' he said. 'Do you also think they are "sell-outs"?''

Before I could say anything, Black Beard came to my aid: 'That is obvious, all girls of her age think so.'

But I still had something to say: 'I happen to have lived in the Transkei which means that I know more about the conditions there than you do.'

'We do not have to stay there to know how happy people are there.'

That was my madam.

'It is so unfortunate for Matanzima, who does his best just for them, that they do not see things his way,' said Walk-Tall. 'It is always the case, the black people do not know who their true leaders are.'

'Because they are narrow-minded, their minds are just like this,' said my madam, using her forefingers to show how narrow our minds are. 'All they want is communism!' she went on.

'That's one thing I hate!' Granny said nervously.

'I don't care what they do with themselves. The moment they bring communists into this country we won't have the smallest worry. We'll just fly back to Europe,' the quiet man said and

I could see that he really did not care.

Walk-Tall felt he had not finished his speech and she did the job for him: 'We will leave them crying for our return just like the people in Mozambique.'

'They are too narrow-minded to see that — just bloody stupid,' my madam agreed.

'These people do not know how to live in the first place,' Granny retorted and this made me feel kind of mischievous so I said, 'Maybe they will know how to live in the second place.'

Some were amused and some were annoyed at such a foolish comment.

'This girl of yours couldn't live in Ireland nor in Switzerland.'

'She could not afford to go there anyway.'

I sat there looking from speaker to speaker and smiling from time to time. I was not given a chance to say anything and so I just pushed my speech in anywhere when I felt like it.

'How are things up there?' I asked Black Beard.

'In Ireland? Dear God! Things are just fine there . . . I mean everybody respects each other. People are kind and sensible. It's not like this mad country.'

'That's true, people are mad in this country, I'm telling you.' That was Granny. 'I remember at my home, we would leave the windows wide open and no one would come in to steal our things,' she went on.

And this made my madam remember something too.

'That's true, look at what Tshaka and other fools like him did to the people.'

'That's true, look at what Hitler and other fools like him did to the people.' I simply had to say this, even if my opinion was not asked for. The effect was tremendous.

'This girl is mad. By God she is!' the quiet guy shouted, standing up and sitting down again almost immediately.

He was not the quiet guy anymore. I later learned that he was German.

'I'm sorry, I did not mean to be mad.' I had to make my apologies; seeing the cloudy expression on his face.

'My dear girl, if I were you I would thank God that I had lovely clothes like these and a necklace like the one you have on.'

(My madam had no overall for me so I was working in my own clothes).

'Her belly is full and there is a roof over her head, that's all that counts,' Granny said, and Black Beard felt that I didn't know life yet — that I had never suffered.

'Yes, she cannot believe it when I say I came from a very poor family. I remember once when we lived on potatoes day in and day out for a whole

Continued on page 14

Poor Business for the Artist

By Nangirayi Majo

Tembo sat down beside his visitor who was going through his pictures with a surprised look.

'I didn't expect you to succeed to this extent. Is there a white behind this?' Godfrey asked, tapping on one of the pictures. 'You should be getting somewhere at least.'

Tembo snorted, 'This is this country and you don't get anywhere.'

'Why?' Godfrey was surprised. 'You have got your brushes and paint — and loads of talent. What else do you want?'

Tembo did not answer. He went to a chest of drawers and brought back some copper engravings which he laid out on the table.

'These are fantastic! Did you do these too?' Godfrey was wide eyed.

Tembo did not answer him. He felt a little sorry for his friend. He thought him a little too naive — or pitifully misinformed. Godfrey had just come back home from six years' exile overseas.

'I told you nothing has changed,' Tembo tried to explain to him, knowing it was useless. 'Don't take in everything the papers tell you.'

'Come on. You must be making loads of money with this kind of work.' Godfrey thought Tembo was unforgivably belittling his own talent. 'How much is this one?'

'That's an order the boss gave me to do this weekend. Some rich tourist wants it on Wednesday. I'll probably get \$60 commission on it.'

'You must be joking! How much are they paying you per month?'

Tembo thought of going into detail, to give his friend the true picture, but how could he do it to someone who had come back full of hopes about the changes for the better that he had read about miles and miles away from home, dreaming of *dovi* and *sadza*? How could he explain to him that most of the time he had not even a cent in his pocket? That he didn't even have a savings account? The little he earned he spent on beer. That was his only source of happiness, he told himself, and as for the material things — he would just forget that.

'Thirty dollars per week is what's mine,' he finally said.

'For — this, this —?'

'I can't force you to believe me.'

Godfrey looked at his friend for some time, his head in his hands, then he straightened up and said, 'Look, why don't you drop the job and do your own thing? I see no reason why you should work yourself to pieces for somebody else's belly.'

'Give me the money and the market,' Tembo said sarcastically.

Godfrey seemed to digest this. He was beginning to understand. He said, 'But there are some blacks who are living in quite a style. Where do they get the money from? They can't be all that fortunate if what you are saying is true.'

'In hard times like these people become prostitutes.'

'Come on — they can't all be crooks.'

Tembo looked at Godfrey sadly. 'You have been away a long time. I can't even begin to tell you how many things have taken place.'

'Things like what?'

'There are more slums now than when you left.'

'But there are also rich blacks living in once-white-only houses. Have you tried selling your work to them?'

'And listen to them telling me to find a better job? Some

don't even know how to look at a picture. Money is for living — property and big names, not art.'

Godfrey looked at his friend gravely. When he spoke his voice was low. 'There are many people I know — acquaintances, schoolmates — influential people who really think your work is great. They tell me the only trouble with you is pride. I hear that you have even turned down some orders they gave you.'

'Lies,' Tembo said weakly.

He stood up and went to the window. What Godfrey had said was partly true. There were some patronising blacks who had approached him for portraits or other such sentimental things and he had told them he had no time. How could he tell Godfrey that what these people wanted wasn't his paintings but big names for themselves? Something to show off to their white friends over Sunday teas and sundowners? They were afraid to be embarrassed by their white friends who really knew what art was all about. Wasn't it strange that those blacks who now praised him for his work had been introduced to it by some whites who lived miles and worlds away from them?

However badly he needed money, Tembo felt he had some rights to his own self. He would do what he wanted in his own way. He knew they knew he was great and he would do his best to keep them aware of it. It gave him a beautiful feeling inside, although most of the time he felt bad when less artistic friends of his exchanged their works for Mustangs, Alfa Romeos, Datsuns and posh houses in the suburbs. Even those he had taught to put brush to canvas simply took what they wanted from him, learned a few tricks, sold two or three portraits of some big politician, then bought a car and a TV set, became screaming successes overnight — and left him.

He liked it least when he felt like a cheap, fraudulent fame-monger, blaming his failure on the situation of the country, stealing little artefacts behind his boss's back and selling them in the beerhalls and the streets for a mug of beer. And he would feel even worse when all the beer had been drunk and he would start telling his drunken friends what a great artist he was.

'And I know another great weakness of yours.' Godfrey stood beside him at the window. He didn't wait for Tembo to ask him what he meant. 'Drink. Nothing comes to anyone on a platter and I might as well tell you right now, as a friend, that if you don't pull yourself together, do some honest work and stop feeling all-important, self-pitying and ignored, you might yet do something people will remember you by.'

Tembo didn't answer.

'Look, Tembo. Do me a favour. Just let me have one or two of your paintings. I have some friends overseas who might be interested to know that you exist.'

Tembo took a long time to answer. When he did, he was still looking out of the window. 'They won't sell.'

'Never mind whether they will sell or not. Just leave that to me.' Godfrey was quiet for some time. 'Will you do that for me?'

'If you insist.'

'Good.'

When Godfrey left, Tembo thought about a painting he was doing. It had taken him over a month now but he couldn't get it right. He looked at it for a long time. He wanted it to carry a lot of things, this face of his grandmother; all the things that he had felt and she had felt and all those people who mattered to him had felt. But he couldn't

get it right; it eluded him. He forced his mind back to the painting each time he found it, drinking a bottle of kachasu or undressing a woman or telling some vote-monger for some political party to go to hell. He gritted his teeth and brought it back when he found it, wandering in some overseas cities he didn't know, telling the native whites that he didn't need their help while wishing they would buy up all his paintings.

All through the remaining hours of that afternoon until duskfall he fought hard to clear the crowds off the avenues of his mind, trying hard to leave it deserted, empty, so that whatever would finally come would not be of his own making. It was hard, but when he went to bed at eight, after turning the painting to the wall, he knew it was half complete and the tears that filled his eyes were not for anything that he desired in life nor of anything that he regretted. ■

My
Dear
Madam



Continued from page 12

month, when my father fell sick.' That was my madam, her eyes distant. I suppose she could even see herself in those sad days and this made everybody look back into their childhood.

'I also came from a poor family. My cousins would give me their clothes if they did not like them anymore. I never wore anything from the shop.' That was Granny, looking really sad.

'Yesterday she said she would never call anybody Baas,' my poor madam said helplessly.

'Why do I have to call anybody Baas?' I wanted to know.

'To show respect to those superior to you,' Granny said indignantly.

I laughed lightly and this annoyed everybody in the house.

'These blacks have too much to say, I'm afraid,' Black Beard said.

'You called me for a talk on life in general, not for a lecture on how a black servant should behave.' My tone, as I said this, was very rude and I regretted it, but, unfortunately, I could not swallow my words.

It was just before 11 a.m. when they decided to leave. Surely they had no more interest in me. I was not a good girl at all. I had not even started with my work at that time of the day, so I had to make it snappy, because my madam was going out for lunch. ■

Art and Society

Committed Art — Where is it ?

By Joyce Ozynski and Andy Mason

In September this year an exhibition of 'committed art' organised by *Staffrider* was cancelled on the grounds that there was not enough work submitted which met the criteria of relevance and commitment.

The decision was a difficult one for the selection committee to make — more than 120 works had been received from artists and students around the country, but only a small proportion of these works (20 — 30) were found suitable. Reproductions of five of the works chosen are exhibited over the next three pages.

The committee finally concluded that it would be fairer to the artists to postpone the exhibition until a cohesive and purposeful exhibition could be presented to the public. To exhibit so few works, or to exhibit a larger collection which failed to express the theme of 'committed art', would invite the public to dismiss the validity of committed and relevant art, and might add fuel to the argument that only 'art for art's sake' is 'real art'.

No doubt there must be more committed art being produced in South Africa than was submitted to the exhibition. But this art is submerged beneath the surface of our culture.

For this art to be made visible, a much less centralised and more collective project is necessary. Such an exhibition should be initiated and organised by a grouping of artists themselves rather than by an outside body such as a committee.

Harassment by the authorities may be another factor which discouraged artists from submitting work of a directly political nature.

However, it may be that such an exhibition is premature in the present context of art in South Africa. It is clear that there is no artist's movement equivalent to the writer's movement. Artists appear to work very much in isolation from each other and from their communities.

In our society the artist is subject to many constraints. The same social and political factors which awaken the artist's sense of commitment are those which conspire against his producing committed art.

'The same social and political factors which awaken the artist's sense of commitment conspire against his producing committed art.'

Committed art seeks *intentionally* to engage itself in a challenging and critical way with the social and political realities of its time and place. It does more than simply *reflect* the society which gives rise to it; it expresses a social or political message.

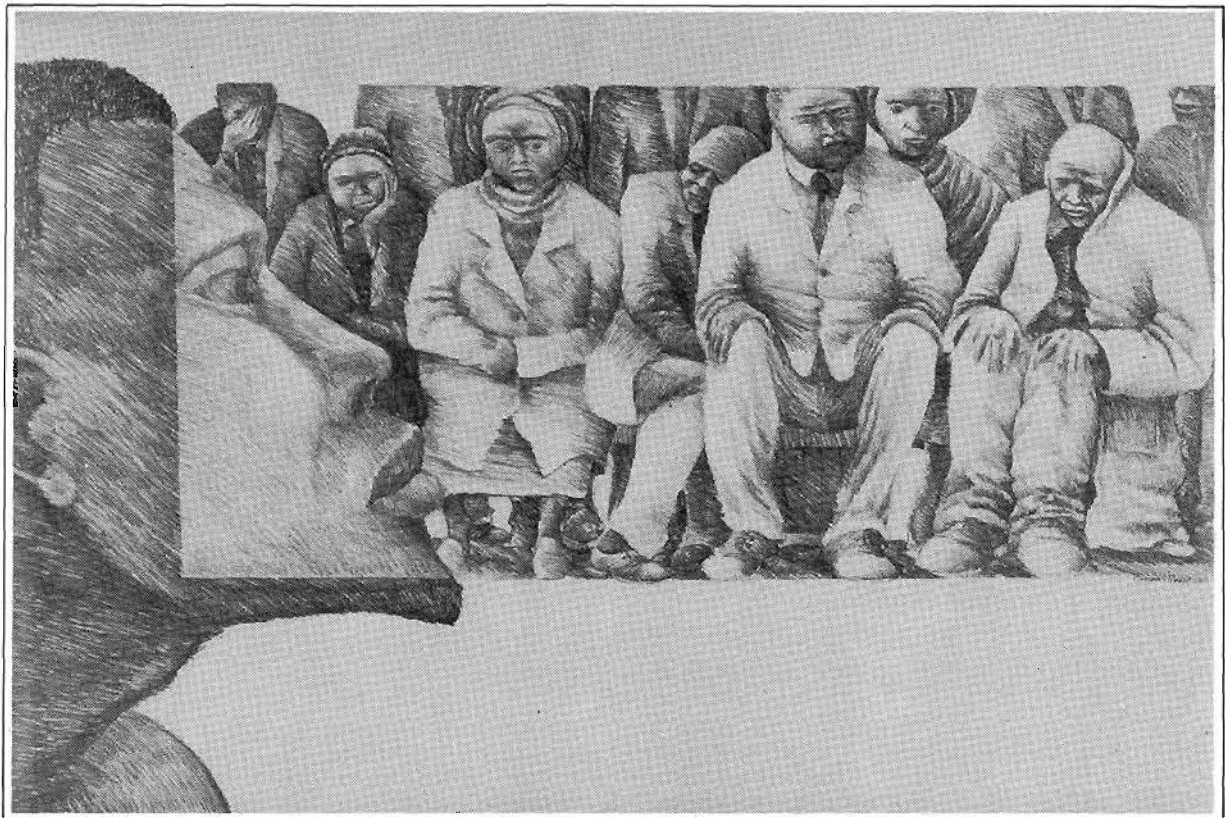
In a society such as ours, where direct political expression is prohibited by an intransigent regime, artistic expression can take on a very necessary and positive function — to express the experiences and aspirations of an oppressed community.

When speaking of committed art, there is a tendency for some people to imagine that the subject matter of the work is more important than the integrity, care and inspiration with which the work is executed. It is assumed that the *formal* qualities of the work are irrelevant so long as the *content* shows a political commitment.

This is not the case. Form and content are never easy to separate in any work of art. The meaning of a work of art is built up out of the articulation between form and content. Two examples of work selected may help to illuminate the discussion:

'Dancing Starvation Away' by Radinyeka Mosaka is not a sophisticated work in terms of Western stylistic modes. But within its own framework, it is formally coherent and clearly expresses its meaning. Paul Sibisi's work, 'Unrest II' draws much more fully on the resources of Western Art. It is, in fact, the formal qualities which strike the viewer first — colour, pattern, line. Only after these aesthetic elements have been absorbed does the subject matter of the picture become apparent, causing a shock of recognition.

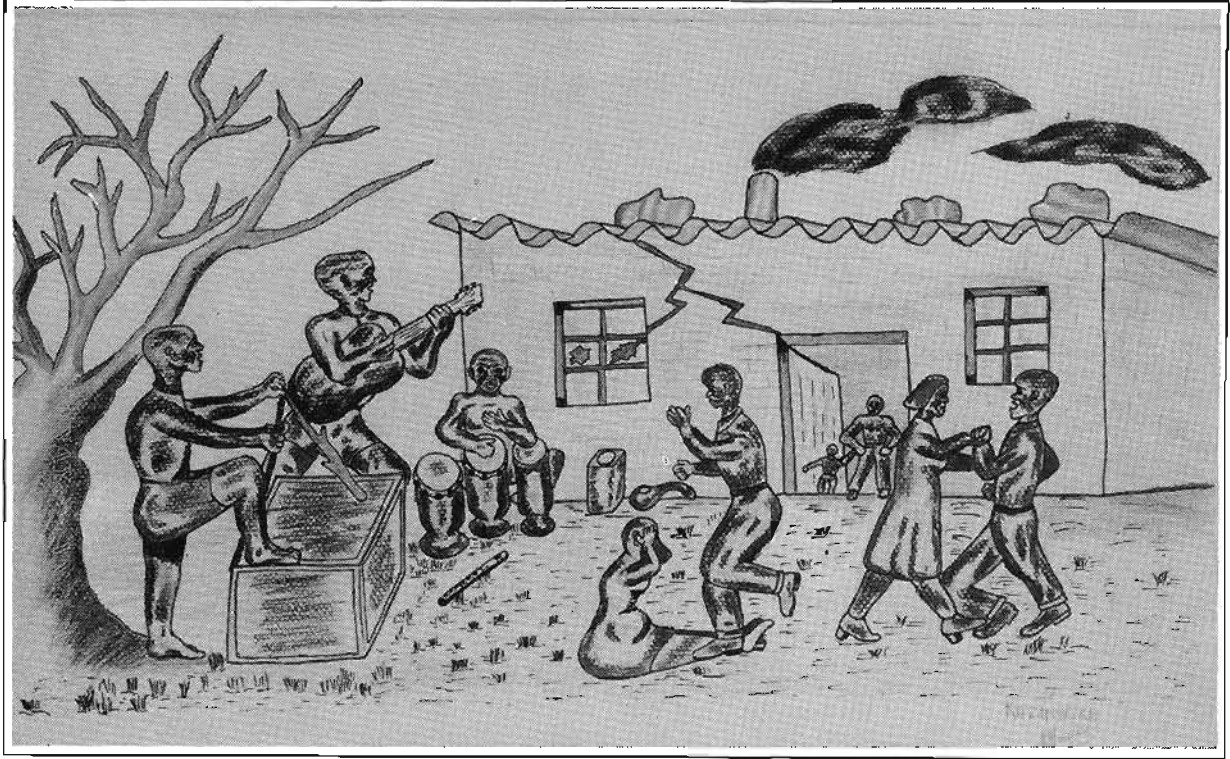
In both of these works there is a unity of form and content; neither work falls into the trap of empty formalism on the one hand, or sloganizing on the other.



Goodman Mabote, Untitled, Drawing



Shadrack Hlalele, Untitled, Lino-cut



Radinyeka Mosaka, 'Dancing Starvation Away', Drawing



Mphathi Gocini, 'African Wedding', Lino-cut



Paul Sibisi, 'Unrest II' (colour)

SOUTH AFRICAN PARALLEL

Squeezing the trigger, cold gold
eases through the lobe
and dangles like a tear
impaled on a young cheek.
The ears are punctured
for the sake of vanity.

In Elsie's River, where winds
heap Cape dust on dust
in desolate places,
two mothers had their children
pierced, in the name
of peace and sanity.

Shari Robinson

BALLAD OF BERNARD FORTUIN

Elsie's River in the afternoon:
Kids throwing stones, car windows splinter
In Halt Road, where the mob grows,
Lame and blind governors, cause of the fury,
Sit, eating beefsteak in Parliament House,
While cold sunlight strikes on the hard stones —
Clenched hard, hate-hard, white hate . . .
Bernard Fortuin, sent to buy bread;
His mother waits, and waits;
And jungle green, brown outfits of policemen,
Brown to be inconspicuous — in Elsie's River . . .
A Blue Kombi receives the onslaught,
Black stones batter its body;
It spits death
And Bernard Fortuin receives the poison . . .
Crowd kept back — blood liquid from his throat
'Laat die donner Vrek,' says a cop.
Mother waits for the son and the bread.
And the snake recoils,
Waits for the next
Bernard Fortuin.

Steve Jacobs

IN MEMORIAM — BERNARD FORTUIN

SHOOT TO KILL

(In memoriam Bernard Fortuin - 28 May 1980)

They killed you, poor boy,
Before you could speak,
Gunned you down
Would not listen
Before they fired
And left you to sink.
No aid allowed, poor boy,
No aid allowed,
Instead loud curses in taal
For a mother's soft arms
To give you rest.

They killed you, poor boy,
Before you could shout,
Gunned you down
Would not hear
Before their fire
Took you for night.
No aid allowed, poor boy.
For those felled
Like trees,
Instead loud curses in taal
For a mother's grief.

They killed you, poor boy,
Before you could speak,
Before you could shout,
Before you could scream.
They blew your life
And cursed in taal.

To what end,
Fifteen years old,
Have you been spent?
To what end
Has your being gone,
From us been sent?
To what end
Has your blood been spilt?
To what end
Is buried a nation's guilt?

A mother's tears,
A people's grief,
A nation's conscience:

We lay flowers
This June day
Break petals
And wonder
Why things are so
Beneath *our* sun,
Forever changed,
Poor boy,
By you.

D. John Simon

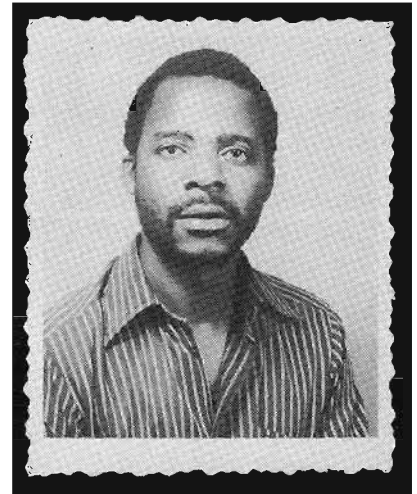
(Written 31 May 1980, 'Republic' Day,
Lansdowne, Cape Town)

Zimbabwe Writers

Two interviews by Jaki Seroke

Armed struggle in Zimbabwe began in 1966. The climate of repression during the next fourteen years did not encourage the growth of the literary arts. In that period some writers succumbed to censorship, others took the road of direct political involvement. There were also those who persevered and continued to write.

On a recent trip to Zimbabwe we discussed the writers' struggle with two Zimbabweans, and also with research workers at the National University who are concentrating on the history and continuity of Southern African writing. Throughout our discussions the emphasis was on the solidarity of writers working in the Southern cone of the continent.



“We were brought up in A Literary Desert”

We grew up in a literary desert. There was not much to read about ourselves, historically speaking, and everything we clung to was from 'down south'. We read writers like Thomas Mokoju Mofolo, Ezekiel Mphahlele, Alex La Guma and so on at the time when we were at high school. These were the writers who communicated best with us. At this stage, by the way, I performed very poorly in my formal scholarly endeavours.

I took an interest in writing, putting out a few poems here and there. Writing soon overtook my studies. Looking around at my school-mates, I saw that no-one was satisfied with conventional reading which did not really relate to our immediate experience.

I knew little about Zimbabwean literature until I came across Ndabaningi Sithole's *The Polygamist*. He had also written *African Nationalism*. Lawrence Vambe had written *An Ill-fated People*. These books were factual and could not be measured in the creative sphere. The censors banned them at first sight. I grew worried, because at that stage one could not single out one novel proper by a Zimbabwean which was enjoyable.

There is a tendency among many young writers to fall for poetry. Apparently they think it is easier. Until Ordinary Level at school, poetry is taken very naively. The things that come out of this naive source are not really poetry as such.

It is a bit hard to say what Zimbabwe literature will be like now that we are independent. After so much human loss and suffering, we are most probably facing the theme of reconstruction. The damage done to human minds has to be taken care of.

I think that writing, at any time and in any place, should look into the problems a society is facing. It should dig down into other people's private affairs — trying to find the meaning of our communal experiences.

We have come to realise that any writing in time of war is affected by the confusion of such a situation. Our writings carry within themselves a certain related feeling. There is a tendency to try and play down what you are putting across.

Charles Mungoshi is based in Harare. His novel *Waiting for the Rain* (Heinemann's African Writers Series) won the 1976 Rhodesian PEN Prize and his Shona play has recently been published in Salisbury. He is currently employed on the editorial staff of the Literature Bureau.

Most of the time you feel you haven't really come out with what's happening.

We never had a creative magazine in which we could pour out our feelings. Most commercial magazines were terribly retrogressive: accepting only 'love' stories. So, our works were stifled in a way. Most of us rejected the temptation to write such things. For honesty's sake, you had to write and 'snug' your manuscript away safely somewhere.

Not until towards the end of last year when Zimbabwe Artists and Writers Association was formed did writers come together. Under the old government it was difficult to group together as artists. Unfortunately ZAWA disintegrated after it was formed. As was the norm, those who held office were not even writers.

In this country there has been a kind of complacency among black artists. It has been really difficult to come together as artists. I think this is one of the reasons why most writers resorted to a political platform pure and simple.

In 1969 we formed a Drama Society which I chaired for three years. The problems we faced then are still around today. We worked with frustrated school-leavers who were starry-eyed and thought of making a big name for themselves in the theatre. But once they had learnt that the dirt road has many twists and turns in store, they shied away. We played to near-empty houses. Following this, our actors did not attend rehearsals. The group would disintegrate. Lack of finance and ramshackle venues was the last straw.

On the other hand, white theatre was thriving and exploiting this situation.

But we still have some playwrights who write in Shona and isiNdebele. Thompson Tshodzo is the most prominent. Most of the productions are in the format of township musicals.

I was once called upon to tighten up the plot of a commercially-inclined play for an established theatre company. The problem with these musicals is that in most cases the lyrics do not follow the pattern of the content.



Charles Rukuni works as a foreign correspondent and is also attached to a black weekly newspaper, *Moto* — owned by Mambo Press. His short story 'Who started the War?' was published in *Forced Landing*.

Relevant theatre could not emerge and boldly be part of current culture. The situation was meant to squeeze out any form of popular creativity.

We wrote basically about social problems. There was a marked tendency among writers to shy away from political issues. Most of the publishing outlets were government-run. At the Literature Bureau where I am working it was unpopular to write against the government. Many of the black writers resorted to things like traditional life — witchcraft, broken family life, old society versus modern lifestyle. In a sense, traditional writing became the norm.

I published a sixty-page collection of short stories entitled *Coming of the Dry Season*. Some of these stories I had written while still at high school. The book was published in 1972 and was later banned in 1974. Four years after the banning, the censors decided to lift the ban.

Every two years the Rhodesian censorship board used to review bans on creative literature, apart from works which circulated as underground writings. If the reasons no longer applied the book would be unbanned.

So, in my case a big argument arose between a leading academic and his English Literature staff and the Censors. He was Irish and knew a lot about that country's protest literature. He made the point that the book was not even in the tradition of protest literature. His major point was that there is a difference between literature and propaganda. Though not articulate enough, the book did at least pinpoint where some of the problems lay.

Among the reasons for the banning was this: a character witnesses a harrowing scene where somebody is knocked down by a car. Some blacks converge and ask the eye-witness who's done it. Without wasting time he says, 'That boer over there.'

Because of that line, the censors thought the book would cause racial friction.

Professor McLachlan at the Zimbabwe University and other people at the teaching colleges came out boiling against the censors. Funnily enough, it was two years after the book was published that they first noticed it. In fact someone bumped into it while doing a thesis on Zimbabwe/Rhodesia literature since 1900. This was how they first noticed *Coming of the Dry Season*. The book was published by Oxford University Press — their branch in Nairobi, Kenya. Casual readers were also in the dark about it until Professor McLachlan decided to set it for his first year students.■

“We are up against Colonial Hangovers”

We are up against 'colonial' hangovers. The free flow of creative activity was checked when we were a subjected people. Relevant drama does not attract much interest from show lovers. It complicates matters. If, for instance, your play is dramatized at a hall next to a cinema, even if you advertise it as a free show, people will flock into the cinema. I'm not saying that films wouldn't have a large following anyway, of course. They would, even when what we had on the screen was first censored by the Publications Board in Johannesburg and then the local censors, here. Films distributed by Ster-Kinekor arrived here 'third-hand'.

The Literature Bureau under the aegis of the government used to keep manuscripts for, say, three years before deciding anything. Most of the writers were discouraged. The Bureau was interested only in Shona and Ndebele writings. Most of the contributors were prominent people who had received their education in British countries. For them writing was only a show and they felt obliged to pass on their acquired knowledge. An ordinary person might have had more to say, but lacked the necessary expertise.

Peasants in the rural areas received more political education. They endured hostilities from both the white army and the black reactionaries. But they fought back, and came to know their history far better than any of us here in the cities. They fought to abolish the Tribal Trust Lands. They had finger-tip contact with *vakomana*. They came to know a lot about the liberation struggle. They were better off than blacks who went to work at 8.30 a.m., had a big lunch, knocked off at 5.00 p.m. and after that went to a pub. Then the same thing the following day, forever.

Did Rhodesian P.E.N. help?

The Rhodesian P.E.N. did not create opportunities for new writers. Instead they acknowledged works which were already published: be it in the country or abroad. In their literary contests, the judges seemed prejudiced in favour of works which were not banned in Zimbabwe then. They also seemed to me to be influenced by what was currently doing well on the book market.

Were the writers able to find a way of getting their works published?

Not many came out. There was a problem from the financial aspect. I don't know what happened to an art association which was meant to take a constructive line on this issue. Most people preferred to stand by without reacting while the national leaders were still in prison. You should have seen the way university students reacted when they read about the resurgence of writing by blacks in your own country.

Then there was censorship, too. The result is that writers like Dambuzo Marechera of *The House of Hunger* fame are not even known in their own country. They are established 'outside' rather than 'inside'. Internally, there are a few like Patrick Chakaipa who are most popular. Thompson Tshodzo is well-known as a Shona playwright. Their works get aired on the radio — sponsored by business concerns like the Colgate-Palmolive firm.

Cultural resistance under the Rhodesian regime was in a passive phase. The trash that was put out during those days is still with us.■

THE DYING GROUND . . .

The elephants came
and brought with them
a crookery of God
and brotherhood,
took our verdant land
with gunpowder and psalms
and proclaimed a covenant
in his name.

Today, the fetters bite deeper
cruelty is resolute,
genocide defined.

Beyond Azania,
black children eat manhood
from bloody pots
and freedom is sown
with the seeds of valiant men
The harvest is bitter for the settlers and now,
the last exodus gathers frenzy.

The trail points Southward
to the last outpost
(a haven to their whiteness).

And like elephants,
sensing the final hour
they hurry to the sacred sand
(our conquered land)

But let them come
O let the white elephants draw near!

What would be their refuge
Will yet become
Their Dying Ground . . .

786/Monnapule Lebakeng

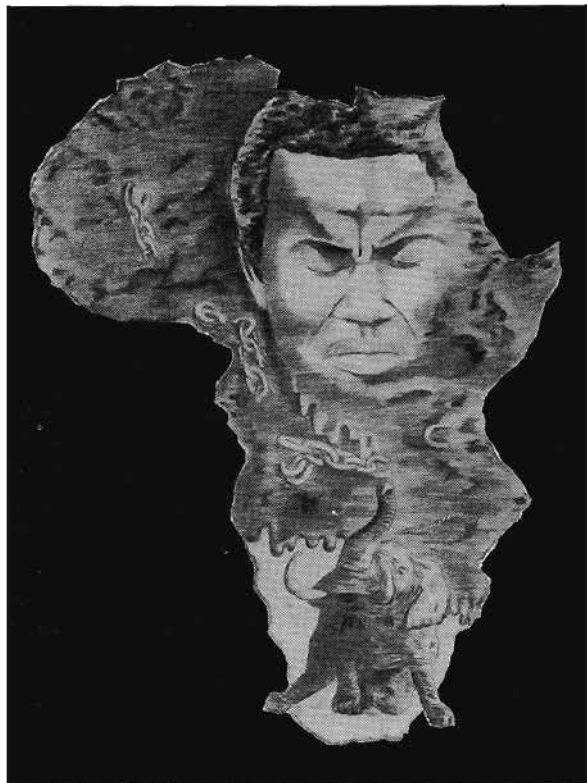
(It is known that elephants, when sensing that death is near, walk for thousands of miles to a special 'dying ground' where they lay themselves down without food or drink until they die . . .)

AT WAR WITH THE PREACHERMAN

My armful of goat skins
Captures the eyes of the preacherman;
I meet him on the shop verandah.
He tells me I have to change
my evil ways;
I go home curising,
Declaring war against the preacherman.

Later he comes to my place
Accuses me of deflecting people
from the right way to Heaven;
I in turn call on my gods
To deliver their godly anger
upon this insolent preacherman;
For I do not live
That I may go to Heaven,
But that I may have supper tonight.

Senzo Malinga



Illustration, Mgorosi Motshumi

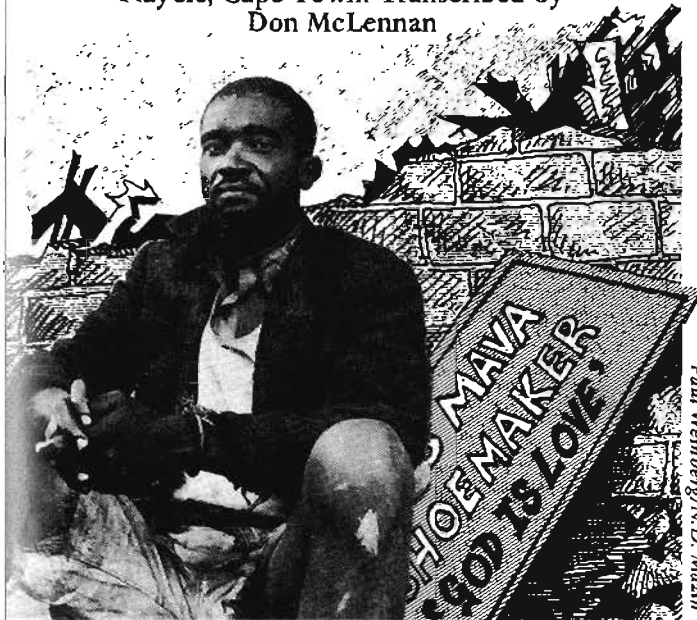
TRIP TO BOTSWANA

i had a taste
of freedom
the first cautious sip
causing
an unexperienced delight of
senses
my soul outpaced the girded
wings
transporting me from forced
confinement
my soul welcomed my
arrival
it stilled my trembling
flesh
as a woman and man embraced
though their colours were in
contrast
no hostile hand ripped them
apart
love blossoming on their
faces
my eyes became an eager
spectator
to the manifestations of
freedom
where within my captivity i was
denied
filled with the fruit of
freedom
my return holds no
fear
of the horror of my
slaughterhouse

James Matthews

Job Mava

A workshop production by The Ikwezi Players, Cape Town. Transcribed by Don McLennan



The scene is set in the shell of Job Mava's house which was burned to the ground four days ago. It's night time, and very cold – mid-winter. All around is ash and the charred remains of the house and shop. There are two wooden boxes, and a log centre on which Job is sitting. On one of the boxes is a storm lantern, casting a feeble light.

Leaning against a broken wall is the wooden sign which hung above Job's shop: JOB MAVA – SHOEMAKER – GOD IS LOVE. At the moment we see only the reverse side of the sign. Next to the sign is a charred shaving mirror.

For three days and nights Job has been sitting here in the ashes of his burned down house. He stands up, walks up and down beating his arms against the cold.

(Enter NOAMEN. She carries a mug of hot coffee and a blanket. She approaches JOB cautiously, uncertain of her reception.)

NOAMEN: Job. My husband. It's me. Noamen.

JOB: I thought you had left me.

NOAMEN: Aai, my husband. Why do you talk like that? *(She puts the coffee and blanket next to him.)* I have brought you some coffee and a blanket. *(JOB nods, but does not take them. NOAMEN shivers from the cold. She looks at her husband sitting amid the desolation of their house.)* It's so cold out here. Why don't you come in to my mother's house? *(JOB does not answer.)* You know you are making a fool of me, don't you? And you are making a fool of yourself. I have never seen a man behave like this before, never here in Fingo Village. For three days and three nights you sit here in the ashes. And what does it help? People think you are mad. And I feel so ashamed.

JOB: You feel ashamed of me? I feel ashamed of God! Let people think what they like.

NOAMEN: Aai.

JOB: Why aren't you asleep?

NOAMEN: I went to bed but I couldn't sleep. I had a bad dream. So I couldn't sleep any more.

JOB: You had a bad dream?

NOAMEN: Yes.

JOB: You women are all the same. You blame everything on dreams!

NOAMEN: Aai. You think dreams do not tell the truth?

JOB: No. I don't.

NOAMEN: I dreamed about my home at Cala, when I was a little girl. We went down to the river to get water and they left me behind. It was dark before my father found me.

JOB: And then?

NOAMEN: He picked me up in his arms and carried me home. He had a lantern.

JOB: So? Is that a dream or are you making it up?

NOAMEN: If I was strong enough I would pick you up in my arms and carry you home.

JOB: Then you would carry home rubbish. God is testing me.

NOAMEN: Aai. When is it going to stop?

JOB: When I get an answer.

NOAMEN: Come back with me to my mother's house, Job. I am also suffering, you know.

JOB: Yes. He is trying us out. But I am his faithful servant. Yes Tixo! You may kick me, beat me, burn me. I must take it like a man. *(JOB turns to NOAMEN.)* I am a man, eh?

NOAMEN: Of course.

JOB: Then Tixo must answer me as a man.

NOAMEN: Drink the coffee, Job. Put the blanket around your shoulders.

JOB: I do not feel cold. I am burning inside. And I will not eat or drink until God has given me an answer.

NOAMEN: *(She takes Faith for Daily Living out of her pocket and reads to him.)* Reverend Mabandla gave me this book to read. Listen Job. This is what it says for today: 'Whatever is happening to you at this moment. place your confidence in God and express thanks that, despite outward appearances, He is still working out His purpose for your life . . . Defy the appearances . . . you are in control.'

JOB: Give me that book.

NOAMEN: What?

JOB: Give me that book. *(He takes it, reads it quickly, and throws it violently into the wings.)* God has done this thing to me, and this book tells me I must kneel down and say, 'Thank you, God. Thank you. Beat me again. Beat me again. Thank you. Kick me again. Thank you.' What do you think I am? If God has done this to me I want to know why. And I am waiting here until I get an answer. Tixo! Do you hear? I am waiting for you to explain yourself.

NOAMEN: Not so loud, Job. Tixo cannot answer you. You must be mad.

JOB: If Tixo doesn't answer me, he is mad, not me. I am Job Mava, a human being. You cannot push human beings around like this. I was a big man, and Tixo has taken everything away from me because he wants me to be rubbish. He wants me to go on living when he has given me all this pain. *He is mad, not me.*

NOAMEN: Aai. Don't say that, Job.

JOB: I will say just what I think. Tixo is behaving like a policeman. He is torturing me to make me confess crimes I did not commit. You see – just now he will kill me, and he will tell everybody that I committed suicide.

NOAMEN: What about *me*?

JOB: What *about* you?

NOAMEN: It was my house too. They were also my two sons.

JOB: *(Pacing up and down, looking for the answer.)* Aai, Noamen. Listen. My grandfather used to tell me about hunting leopards in the mountains. You did not take women there.

NOAMEN: Is God a leopard that you must hunt him?

JOB: Yes.

NOAMEN: And you are hunting to kill?

JOB: If he doesn't answer me I'll kill him with my own two hands.

NOAMEN: If you kill him, how can he answer you?

JOB: Don't ask stupid questions!

NOAMEN: Aai. You are mad.

JOB: Get out! Get out! (*JOB hits her, she runs out. Having got rid of NOAMEN, he walks up and down, looking at the sky. Agitatedly, he talks half to himself, half to the audience.*) Look at the stars. What does it mean, eh? All those little fires up there in the dark? Let's see. Southern Cross. Orion. Zachobe. You know what everybody wants me to say, don't you? They want me to say, 'Blessed be the Lord.' Ha! (*He walks about gesturing, bugging himself.*) Blessed be the Lord of Rubbish!

Job returns to the ashes. He looks at the coffee and the blanket but doesn't touch either. He sits in the ashes, rocking to and fro, singing a bunting song.

Enter REVEREND MABANDLA. He is head of Job's church, an important, shrewd, worldly man. He has grown fat on the cream of religion, yet he has warmth and sympathy. He wears an overcoat and scarf. He does not like the cold. At first MABANDLA looks at JOB, but JOB ignores him. Then he walks around him to try to get his attention. Finally he sits on the box, next to JOB.

MABANDLA: Aah! Job, my son! You are still grieving. Why won't you let us help you? (*No reply from JOB*) Do you know what time it is? After midnight. Your wife came and got me out of bed. She was crying. Why do you sit here in the cold? It's freezing. Do you know there is already ice on my water bucket?

(*MABANDLA is conscious he is getting nowhere with JOB.*)

Aai, Job! You know me! Reverend Mabandla. I know you are sore at heart. But you must speak out about what is worrying you. There is no other way to be happy.

JOB: Happiness is for the pigs!

MABANDLA: Of course, of course. But if you do not come inside you will catch your death of cold. Here, put this round your shoulders. (*He puts the blanket round JOB's shoulders, but JOB shakes it off angrily.*)

JOB: Don't make me laugh!

MABANDLA: Look, Job. I know you. You have been in my church for many years. I know you believe God helps those that help themselves. So do I. But sometimes we need help to help ourselves.

JOB: Are you speaking to a man or a child?

MABANDLA: A man, Job.

JOB: Then you too, speak like a man.

MABANDLA: All right. I will. You remember your Bible? Remember those three men, Shadrak, Meshak and Abednego who were put into the fiery furnace? What saved them, Job? What stopped them from being burned to ashes? Their faith, Job, only their faith.

JOB: Their faith in what?

MABANDLA: In God, Job.

JOB: Which God? Tixo or Qhamata?

MABANDLA: Tixo.

JOB: You don't answer me properly. In the old days we believed in Qhamata. Then it was Mtsikano who said to us, 'Take the white man's Bible. Take his God. But do not take his money.'

MABANDLA: That's true. That's how it was. He was a prophet.

JOB: Then he told lies. Because we took the white man's God and we have been in trouble ever since. Tixo was called a god of love, but he was brought to us with guns and spears.

MABANDLA: No. You are wrong. He came with the missionaries.

JOB: I am right. The missionaries just softened us up before the guns arrived. The missionaries made it easier for the whites to beat us. Our God was Qhamata.

MABANDLA: What are you saying, Job? Have you lost your faith in Tixo?

JOB: Open your ears. I am burning in my own fiery furnace, here, here!

MABANDLA: But you are still alive.

JOB: Eoaagh! What do you think I am doing? If Tixo wants me to suffer, that's his business, is it? I am his rubbish. His servant. He does with me just what he wants. I curse Tixo for making me suffer.

MABANDLA: Aai, aai. You are very bitter. Here, drink this coffee.

JOB: Don't make me laugh!

MABANDLA: Well, if you don't want it I will drink it myself. I feel the cold, even if you don't, Job. I was fast asleep, you know.

JOB: I'm not stopping you. Go back to your bed.

MABANDLA: You should drink this coffee. It will help you. (*JOB turns his shoulder in disgust. MABANDLA drinks the coffee with pleasure, and thinks.*) Job, you know perfectly well your children are in heaven.

JOB: (*quietly*) Eei, mfundis. Do you know? Do you know?

MABANDLA: You are my blood, Job. I have your suffering. I know. I believe it. The Bible tells us that.

JOB: Can the Bible bring my house and my children back to me?

MABANDLA: (*Standing up, rubbing his hands, getting steamed up*) Job! Listen to me! I know what you are suffering. I buried your sons, didn't I? I helped put them back into the ground. I know what you are feeling. And I also know that you are a good man. (*JOB gets up, offended, muttering under his breath. Moves about like a caged leopard.*) No! Don't get offended just because I speak the truth. You are a good man. You have helped many people and you have asked no favours. And now you are in trouble. But you must think of this before you can get anywhere — you must *smell it out* inside yourself — that nobody who is truly innocent ever perished.

JOB: How can you say that to me?

MABANDLA: Don't get angry, Job. Anger will get you nowhere. Look at the stars. All of them, God made them! Can a man be greater than God? God does marvellous things, Job. He give us rain and makes our food grow. He sends us the sun, bright and warm and life-giving.

JOB: No, mfundisi. You talk. You love talking.

MABANDLA: Well, if you want me to go. I was only trying to help.

JOB: You do not answer my question.

MABANDLA: What question?

JOB: Look. Here is a stone. (*He finds one in the rubbish.*) I am not like this. You cannot destroy this stone. But I am weak as water, yet God has filled me up with pain. Why doesn't he just let me die? He could finish me off like you kill a fly, and I would be glad.

MABANDLA: When a man does wrong, then he is destroyed.

JOB: What wrong had my children done? If they *were* bad that is no reason for killing them. And don't say there was some secret sin they had. I have known worse people than them, much worse, and God let them die of old age in their beds.

MABANDLA: What do you mean?

JOB: That I have done no wrong. I have not offended God. Yet I am being tortured alive.

MABANDLA: Aai, you are far gone.

JOB: I will go further.

MABANDLA: I came out of pity for you and your wife. Why won't you listen to my words of comfort?

JOB: Are you a man, or a mouth without a body, that you speak empty words from the Bible?

MABANDLA: I am a man.

JOB: You have a wife?

MABANDLA: You know that perfectly well.

JOB: And children?

MABANDLA: Anyone would think you had never met me before.

JOB: And anyone would think this was the first time you had ever met Job Mava. Why does God think I am necessary for his creation? I am rubbish! Shit!

MABANDLA: (*Very angry*) Enough is enough, Job. Have you gone mad? I am a man of God, and I am telling you that if you had not sinned . . .

JOB: (*Growls angrily.*)

MABANDLA: If you were innocent . . .

JOB: Get out! Get out! (*Exit REVEREND MABANDLA, trying to keep his dignity.*) He comes here to torture me. He drinks my coffee, then he tells me I have sinned. Aai, good people. How have I sinned? 'Your children are in heaven.' My children are decomposing, rotting in the ground. It's not they who are alive but me.

(*JOB proceeds to dig around among the ashes. Finally, he produces a burned and blackened mirror. He takes the mirror and sits down.*) A mirror. My shaving mirror. Beginning of every day. Up, down, across. I was looking at myself every day and I didn't see myself. It looks like my life — burned black. Full of shadows. A burned mirror like the face of God. Laughing at me. You know he is laughing at me. Listen! Do you hear it? There! By Egazini. A donkey. Yes. A donkey, braying. God is laughing like a donkey.

JOB imitates the ee-aae of a donkey. He laughs at himself. Suddenly he is aware of physical pain in his body. His laughter turns to anguish, to his own howls of grief. He becomes a sort of human donkey in his misery. The absurd bellowing finally turns into weeping. He finishes by collapsing into the ashes. Trembling with pain, JOB unfolds the blanket, pulls it over himself, and lies down, moaning. After a while he is silent. Enter ZIZAMELE, with a small lamp. He is a petty thief, and a bottle and bone collector, dressed in shabby clothes, and carrying a sack. He looks cautiously around him, carrying the sack over his shoulder. He starts prodding, pushing and turning over the ashes. First he finds JOB's mirror, examines it, puts it in his sack. Then he bags some of the tins. Then he goes to the blanket and gently tugs it off, revealing JOB underneath.

ZIZAMELE: (*Getting a fright*) Oh! Hey, sorry! I didn't know you were hiding under there. Sorry. (*Hastily, he puts it back. But overcome by curiosity, he pulls it off JOB's head again.*) Hey! Who are you? What's wrong with you? (*ZIZAMELE, seeing JOB is a sick man, spots the cup and picks it up, examines it with pleasure, drinks the coffee and puts the cup into his sack.*) I'll take this too. You don't mind? It's not yours is it? I'm just making a living. While everyone sleeps I make a living.

JOB: Who are you?

ZIZAMELE: Me, I'm Zizamele. Where did you steal that blanket?

JOB: I live here. This is my house.

ZIZAMELE: (*Looking at the remains*) Yes. I see that, of course.

JOB: This is my place.

ZIZAMELE: Aah. Your place. That's a bit different. You should see my place. Municipal Rubbish Dump. Ja. That's where I live. A lot more rubbish and ashes than this one. Where I stay there are whole mountains of rubbish, you know. Mountains. And the treasures you find, I'm telling you.

JOB: Is your rubbish heap better than mine?

ZIZAMELE: My friend, there is no comparison. It's huge. And there is much more variety. I've been looking around here. But I haven't found much, I'm afraid. Are you new to the business? I haven't seen you before.

JOB: Yes.

ZIZAMELE: Well. You live and learn.

JOB: Do you?

ZIZAMELE: You live. And if you don't learn, what good are you?

JOB: You are asking me that?

ZIZAMELE: Why should you live and not learn? I have learned a lot in my time. I would never choose a place like this. It's too small. Not enough intake of rubbish. Tell me. Why did you choose this place?

JOB: I didn't choose it.

ZIZAMELE: You mean someone gave it to you?

JOB: Yes. It was my house.

ZIZAMELE: This?

JOB: My house, shop, everything.

ZIZAMELE: Burned to the ground?

JOB: Everything.

ZIZAMELE: Better to be like me, my friend. I don't own anything.

JOB: Nothing?

ZIZAMELE: Nothing. Anything I need I get it from the rubbish dump. Nobody wants to take it away from me because it's rubbish. Did you say this was your shop?

JOB: Yes.

ZIZAMELE: You sell food?

JOB: I was a shoemaker.

ZIZAMELE: Aai. A shoemaker. And everything was burned to the ground!

JOB: See for yourself.

ZIZAMELE: Tyhini Tixo. Weren't you insured?

JOB: No. I trusted to luck.

ZIZAMELE: You are very foolish.

JOB: You say so?

ZIZAMELE: If you were insured, you would have got it all back.

JOB: Aai, aai, aai.

ZIZAMELE: (*Helping JOB get the blanket back onto his shoulders and to sit up.*) You look like a sick man to me. Where is your wife?

JOB: She has left me here.

ZIZAMELE: Ow, shame. And your friends?

JOB: I have no friends. Only people who want to give me advice.

ZIZAMELE: Well, you look as if you need lots of that. You're in the wrong place, for a start. It's too open here. At least the Municipal Rubbish Dump burns at night. It keeps you warm.

JOB: I am not cold.

ZIZAMELE: You don't look in the best of health. What's your fighting weight?

JOB: Fighting? My bones ache. I cannot even lie down without agony. But you see, God has said I must suffer. I have lost my shop, my two sons, and now he tells me I must pack up my life and move to Committee's Drift.

ZIZAMELE: Committee's Drift? Where is that?

JOB: Twenty-two miles away.

ZIZAMELE: Is it a town?

JOB: A town! There is nothing there. A big brown river and bare earth. We will have to make everything.

ZIZAMELE: There is no municipal rubbish dump there?

JOB: No.

ZIZAMELE: Then I'm not moving, boy. Not until they make a dump.

JOB: You have no choice, friend. They will drive you out.

ZIZAMELE: Then what are you worried about? We are all in the same mess. We will all be there together.

JOB: How can you be so happy?

ZIZAMELE: If they tell us to go, let us go, then. Do it and smile — that's my motto. It's the best way. Whites and blacks separate, live their own lives. It's better that way. I wouldn't like to have white people with me at the rubbish dump — they are too bossy.

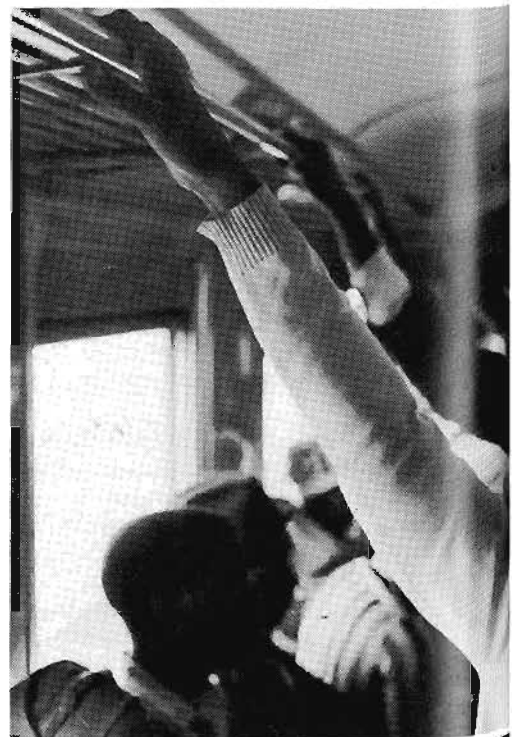
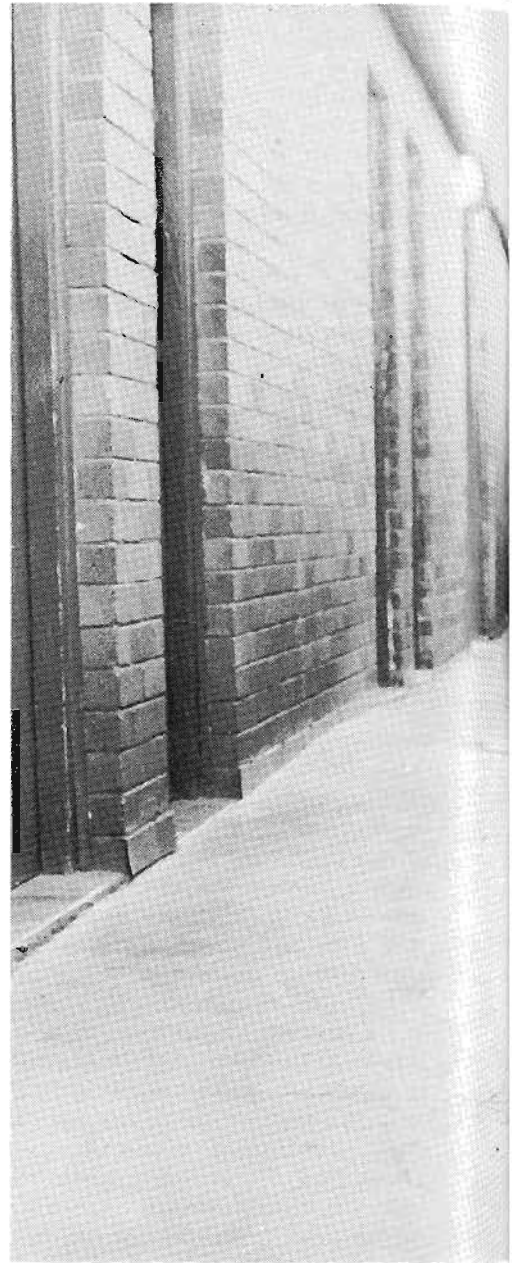
JOB: Have you also come to give me advice.

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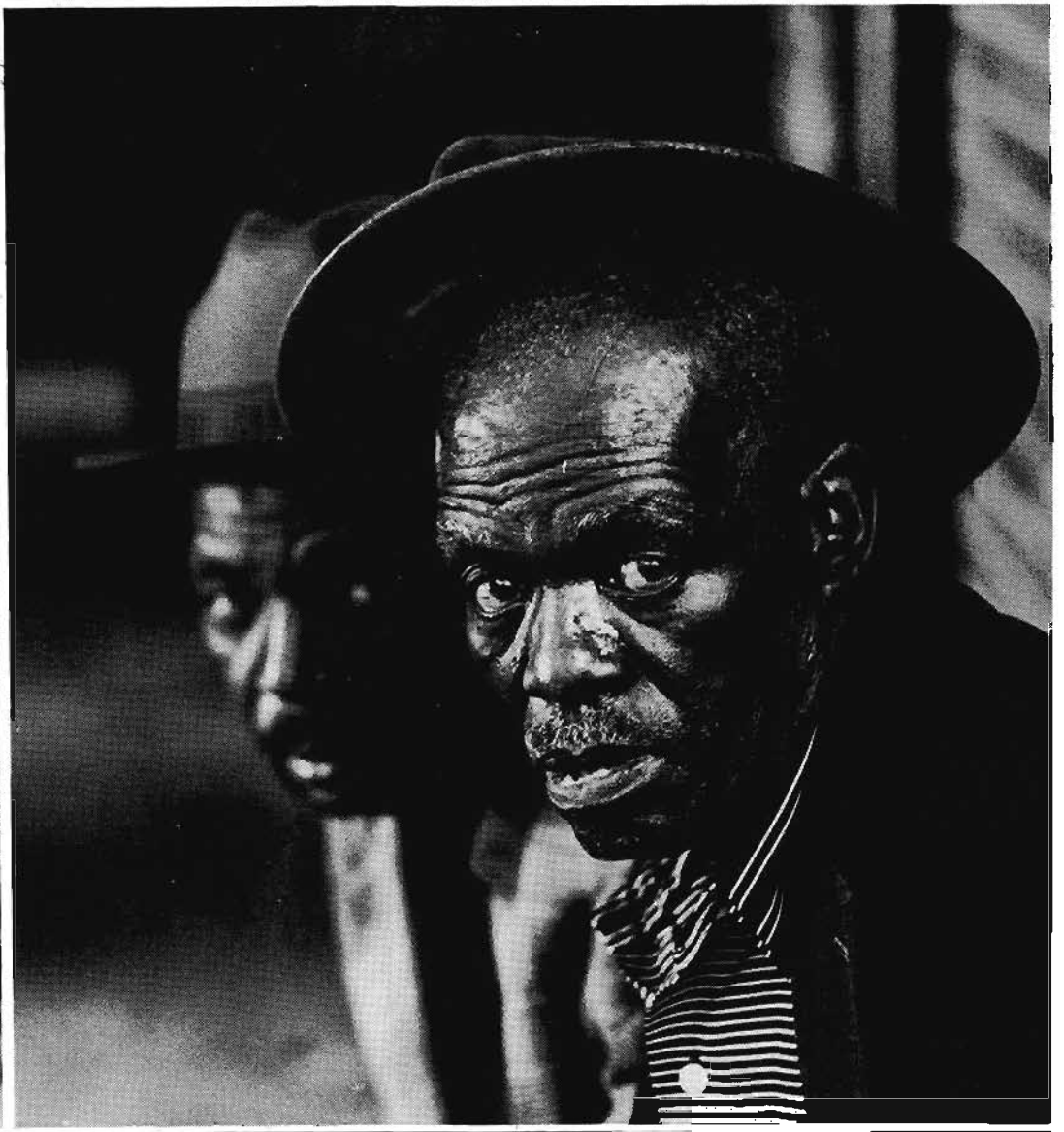
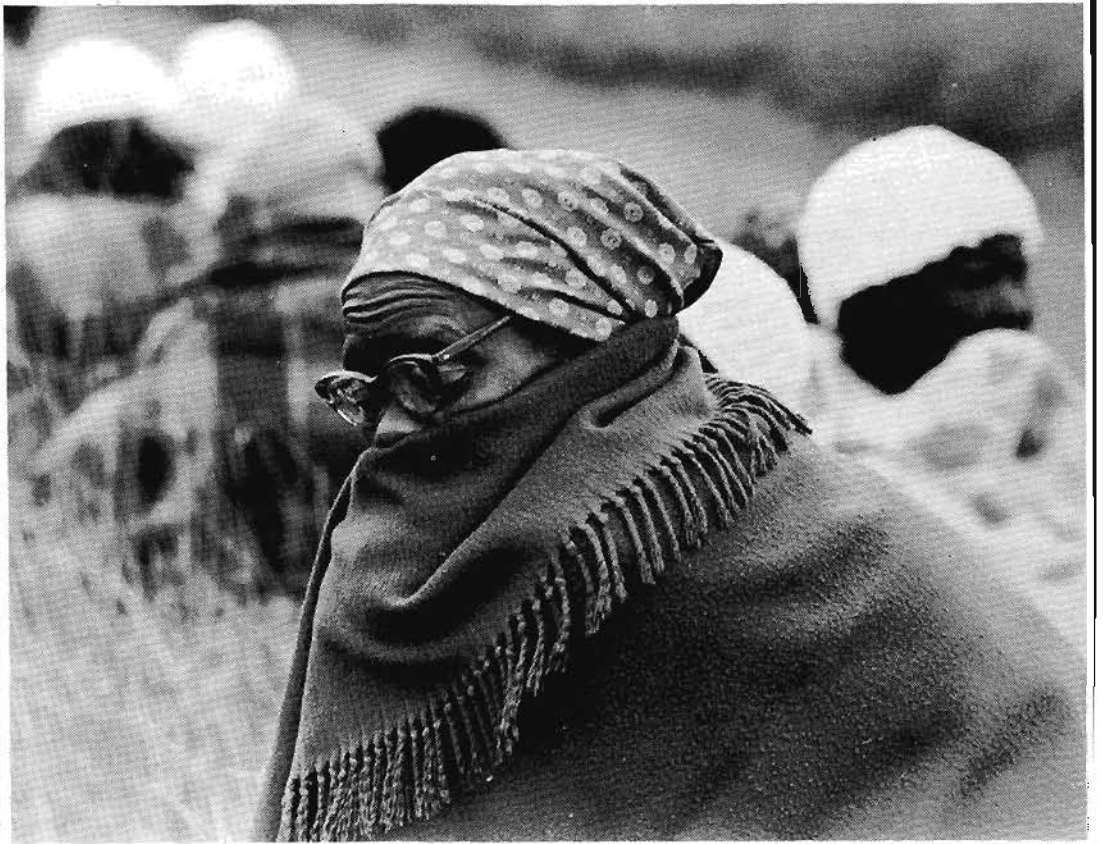
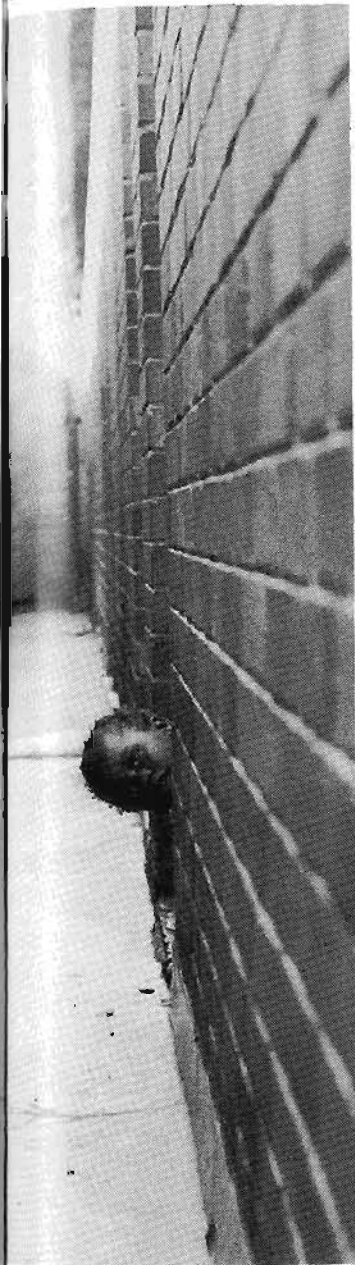
S'BALI'S PEOPLE

Ralph 'S'Bali' Ndawo, visual poet of the dispossessed, died tragically in a motor accident in September 1980. Ralph's photographs document with compassion and understanding the experiences of an oppressed people. We mourn the loss of this artist, a staunch staffrider from the beginning, whose images have been a feature of this magazine ever since the first issue.

A staffrider gone, long before his creative life should have ended, but his pictures will remain as a chronicle of the society he left behind.



Tribute to Ralph Ndawo



JOB MAVA

Continued from page 23

ZIZAMELE: I got nothing else to give you. No, wait. A piece of bread. (*Job refuses it.*) Hey. If you have friends, why don't you get inside a house. It's too cold out here. You know the puddles of water in the road have turned to ice?

JOB: I don't feel the cold.

ZIZAMELE: Either you are telling a lie or you are super-human.

JOB: I am sub-human. God made me out of clay, like those men there in the kloof who make bricks out of clay. He poured me out like milk and curdled me like cheese. It was God who gave me life — not me.

ZIZAMELE: I can't argue with that.

JOB: Yet when I am evil, it is *my* fault. If I am good it is God's work. I am not supposed to lift up my head.

ZIZAMELE: For a sick man you are a big talker.

JOB: You know where we are. Look up there. Can you see it? They call it Dead Horse Kloof, Brick Maker's Kloof. It is a valley of ashes. It is a human farm where ashes grow, and with a big effort turn into ash-grey men and women who move about in the sticky black dust. You have seen it. I know. At sunset when the sun is very low and orange you have seen the place filled with smoke. Then the sun goes down and it starts to get cold. Yes, you know, my brother. You know what I am talking about. I'm talking about people, people whose houses are the same as the rubbish they throw out on the rubbish heap.

ZIZAMELE: Hey! I tell you! You know old Mrs Dywili. She lives there. She walks with her bare feet in the cold stinking water to cut lilies. And when she's got a big bunch she ties them with grass and walks from door to door of the white people's houses. She doesn't know that the white people think that lilies are unlucky. They think they are flowers of death. So they don't like to buy — even for two cents a bunch.

JOB: I have been sitting here for three days and three nights. Outside. Every night I see the stars and the moon. And it's cold. There must be snow on the mountains. But I don't feel the cold. I don't feel anything anymore. Why? Because, I'm just like burning rubbish. You know when you go up there to the Municipal Rubbish Dump at night you can see it burning. Small red fires. That's me.

I am Fingo Village Municipal Rubbish Dump, burning at night. So, I'm not cold. I am rubbish. God thinks I'm Rubbish. God is right! I am rubbish! You remember the sign over my door: JOB MAVA. SHOEMAKER. GOD IS LOVE. You see what is left? Someone pulled it down. This is all that is left of my house and my shoemaker's shop. You see, I was a big man. And now, what do you think? God wants me to suffer. I will tell you.

I think it was Saturday — but the day doesn't matter. My two sons went for the day to Port Alfred. They wanted to swim and to play on the sand, just like all the children. They were gone all day. My wife and I were eating our food at the table. There's a knock at the door. 'Come in.' In comes a policeman. I know him. 'Molweni.' 'Come in. Sit down.' 'No. It's better I stand up.' 'What's wrong?' 'I've got some heavy news for you.' 'Well, tell it, man. Tell it! Is it for both of us?' 'Yes. It's for both of you. Your children are dead!' 'What? No. No. You don't mean that. How can they be dead? They have gone to Port Alfred.' 'Aai. Then I must tell you. You know the road to Port Alfred, ne? Blaaukrantz Pass. They were driving very fast. But the sun was in their eyes. Suddenly they were turning a sharp corner and the car just twisted off the road. Through the fence and down, down, into the valley. Turning, turning, turning. Crash! The car is smashed flat like a jam tin. And your sons are dead. They were drunk!'

Aai! Aai! Aai! I, Job Mava, was a big man. I had two sons and now they are dead.

We went to the funeral. (*He and Zizamele act out the Funeral. Zizamele carries the shop sign. They sing together a processional hymn as they walk to the grave-yard.*) Reverend Mabandla, who is the head of our church, stood by the graves. Two graves, two coffins. 'My brothers and sisters,' he said. 'It is not easy to understand why God takes away the lives of two young men, and leaves the parents childless in their old age. The ways of God are a mystery. We do not understand. But one thing we can be sure of — God does it for a purpose, to teach us something. Our brother Job Mava has written above his shop GOD IS LOVE. It is surely true. These things are sent to try us, to test us. 'Though he slay me, yet will I believe in him.' Believe, brother, believe in God's love.'

ZIZAMELE: Amen!

JOB: But I ask you: If God loves me, why does he kill my sons? Both my children at once. If *you* want to prove your love to me, do you do it by hurting me? Ow. Aai. Aai. Tixo! I tried to believe. Yes. I tried. I'm a man. What else must I do? My children were buried, so I began my work again. I don't want to work, but I must eat. My wife must also eat. Then one day comes a knock at my door. 'Come in,' I say. There comes another man in a uniform. 'Job Mava?' he asks. 'Yes, sir.' 'I have a letter for you.' 'A letter for me? Why doesn't it come to the post office? Is it a special letter?' 'Yes,' he says. 'It's a special letter.' 'What does it say?' 'Read it!' So I read it:

'Job Mava, 37 D Street, Fingo Village, Grahamstown. Notice is hereby given you that your plot (Number 277R) and dwelling are subject to ordinance number (x, y, z) and that this area is to be rezoned as a coloured area. You may accept the municipal valuation of your property at R200, or arrange to sell it before July 1974. You are required to expedite these arrangements. Yours, etc., etc.' 'What does it mean?' I said. 'It means,' he said, 'that you must go to Committee's Drift.' 'Why should I want to go there? This is my ground.' 'No,' he said. 'It's not yours any longer.' 'Wait, my brother. Do you know how I got this ground?' 'No,' he said. 'And I don't care.' 'Let me tell you, then. A long time ago, when the whites first came here, with their guns and their Bibles, the only people they couldn't beat were the amaXhosa. Every week, every month they were fighting. They needed help badly. Who did they get? the amaMfengu. You help us, and we'll help you. We were also having trouble with the amaXhosa. Right. So along comes Makana. They stand at the top of the hill, there. All the impis lined up. Makana tells them: 'We are going to clear out all this white rubbish and sweep it into the sea.' So, he says, 'Charge!' And they charge down on the Fort, there. And who is in the Fort? Whites and us Fingos — leading guns. Throwing spears. Eaagh! Egazini! The Field of Blood. We killed our own brothers. And then, what happened next? Queen Victoria was pleased. She didn't come herself to thank us. No. But she sent an important messenger, with lots of pieces of paper for us to sign. 'You helped me, I will help you. Sign here, and this land is yours for ever and ever. Amen.'

ZIZAMELE: Amen!

JOB: And now you are taking it away. Queen Victoria is dead, my friend. The big mother is gone. Nobody cares for us any more. This time *we* are the rubbish, and this time we'll be dumped 22 miles away, where the white people cannot smell us. Aaw. Tixo. What do you want from me? God is love. God is love.

ZIZAMELE: Amen!

JOB: Do you know what this is? Ashes. Why? This is my house. Three days ago I went to town to buy shoemaker's twine and nails. I went to that shop in Bathurst Street where they sell these things. It was late, and I was tired, so I walked

slowly.

My wife, Noamen, was at home, cooking our samp and beans on the primus stove. She pumped it up and left it. Then she took a bucket to fetch water from the tap down the road. She didn't hear anything. But the stove exploded. Hot paraffin everywhere! In no time the house was burning. But she didn't see, because the door was closed. It was cold, you see. So when she came back she opened the door and, fwaagh! 'Fire! Fire!' she cried. 'Aaw. Tyhini Tixo. My neighbours! Help! Fire! Kuyatsha! Kuyatsha!' They all came rushing to help her with buckets of water. 'Call the fire engine.' 'How?' Don't ask. Just go. We will throw on water. 'Yes, my friend. But how? You know that the nearest tap is fifty yards away from my house.'

When I came home, the whole house was burned to the ground. Everything was burned — clothes, money, leather, all the people's shoes, my furniture, my bed, all my leather, and most of my tools. The only thing that wasn't burned down was this. Somebody pulled it down from the stoep where it was hanging. My name, JOB MAVA. SHOEMAKER, GOD IS LOVE. Now, what must I do with this? I have lost everything now — my children, my house, all my worldly goods, and my rights to live on my own piece of land. And God is love! Is it my fault? What have I done? If you know, my brother, please tell me, because I don't know. Is it my fault? God is Queen Victoria — he gives one day, and the next he takes away. But why me, God? Why me? If you have taken away everything, why don't you let me die as well? (*JOB sits down on his tree stump.*)

ZIZAMELE: He's not here. Or here. Or here. For a sick man you are a big talker. But you ask riddles. You know you ask an impossible question, and then you get a guts ache because you cannot answer it. What do you expect? Did you ever know anyone who found God by searching for Him? (*He takes the lamp and examines JOB's house.*)

I never found God in the municipal rubbish dump, and I'm telling you I have looked very hard. Nobody ever finds God. He is like the wind — you cannot hold him in your hands. You and me, we are just like this lamp of yours. (*He blows it out.*) We die just like that. And nobody can light us again.

JOB: Aai. That is the problem. That is the problem.

ZIZAMELE: Sorry. I made it dark again. Here. I'll light it.

JOB: If we knew anything, it will die with us.

ZIZAMELE: You're so sure?

JOB: Sure.

ZIZAMELE: I remember once I was preparing my supper at my place, at the municipal rubbish dump. And I looked down there, to town. And what do you think I saw, eh? A huge rubbish heap, right in the middle of the town. I was sure it's just my imagination, because you never find a rubbish heap, right in the middle of town, in a non-black area. You see, those non-blacks don't like rubbish even if it is their own. And there it was, a huge pile. white and shining in the middle of town.

Of course I was curious, so I picked up my sack. I never knew my old feet can make fifteen miles an hour, but they did that day, down Raglan Road. And imagine my surprise when I got there and I see it's not rubbish at all but a circus at the Market Place. Heil! Rubbish, circus, anything. I must get something out of it. So I started looking for anything I could pick up — bottles here, a bit of chocolate there, a beautiful piece of writing paper. Then I thought, 'Zizamele. You must have a look inside the big tent too.' So without thinking I took the beggar's way in and crawled under the canvas. Aai. That was bad timing. You know where I found myself? Right in the corridor where the people go into the ring. And boy, when I walked out into that ring you should have heard the ovation from the audience. You would think I was Cassius Clay himself entering the ring. Man, and I was just beginning to feel like Cassius Clay when I felt a red hot

iron across my back. It was not an iron. It was that sjambok they use on the tigers. The ring master was having a go at my back and the damned audience were laughing like hell and clapping.

I ducked under the ring master and tried to get out under the canvas again. Then a hard boot greeted me right between the eyes. Lights out. Next thing I remember I was lying outside the big tent looking up at the stars.

JOB: But you didn't learn anything.

ZIZAMELE: Wrong! I learned two things: one, keep and use what you've got; two, don't look for something you don't know.

JOB: But I would like one of those big search lights.

ZIZAMELE: What's that?

JOB: Don't you know those big lights up there at the army camp? They shine them into the sky at night.

ZIZAMELE: What would you do?

JOB: Search and search.

ZIZAMELE: Ha! But what's the use of a light to a blind man?

JOB: Huh?

ZIZAMELE: You can have the best light in the world, but if you are blind what's the use of it?

JOB: Ei. I never thought of that.

ZIZAMELE: You like that idea?

JOB: It's a good one.

ZIZAMELE: Keep it. I haven't anything else to give you.

JOB: Why should you give me anything? You know I was a big man, eh? When I went to meetings even the old men would become quiet and listen to me speak. When I was around, no young man would dare to open his mouth: Ncwango?

ZIZAMELE: Me too. I am also a big man. In the municipal rubbish dump the rats always listen when I speak to them. They are very good listeners. 'Rats,' I say. 'You people know nothing about the world. Where do you think all this comes from, this beautiful rubbish that you live in? You just take it for granted. But you are wrong. It is a gift from the angels, from God himself.' Do you know what the rats say to that?

JOB: What?

ZIZAMELE: (*He squeaks, and shows how a rat rubs his whiskers with his front feet.*) Ja S'truc. They always listen to me when I talk to them.

JOB: You talk to rats?

ZIZAMELE: What do you think? There are people there to talk to? Old women looking for coal, children hunting for scraps of food. They don't stop to talk. They are too busy hunting.

JOB: So you talk to the rats?

ZIZAMELE: There's nothing wrong with rats. They are good listeners. And something else — they never answer you back.

JOB: So, what are you trying to tell me?

ZIZAMELE: Ssh! Somebody coming. Maybe police. (*He hides backstage behind the broken wall.*)

Enter NOAMEN. It has been a difficult decision for her to come back. The meaning of it becomes clear later on. She has brought her own blanket. She and JOB exchange looks, then she sits down near him, in the ashes. But she sits so that he cannot see her face.

JOB: (*Whispering*) Noamen?

JOB remains puzzled by NOAMEN's silence. ZIZAMELE comes cautiously out of his hiding place. He looks at NOAMEN, and then moves next to JOB.

ZIZAMELE: A visitor?

JOB: Noamen.

ZIZAMELE: Noamen?

JOB: My wife.

ZIZAMELE: Aah! You got a wife too! You are a very lucky man. Why doesn't she say anything? Is she afraid of you?

JOB: No.

ZIZAMELE: She must be a good wife — she sits so quiet.

JOB: What do you know about a wife?

ZIZAMELE: Nothing. I never had one. But I've seen lots of wives. All they do is talk, talk, talk. *(He imitates a shrew.)* 'Oh, my husband. Why do you come home so late? Did you bring the money? And do you want food, now? How can you expect me to have food for you if you come home so late? Go and make your own food.'

JOB: That's not a wife. That is torture.

ZIZAMELE: Is your wife like that?

JOB: No.

ZIZAMELE: You want to be alone together?

JOB: No.

ZIZAMELE: Then introduce us.

JOB: Noamen. Zizamele.

ZIZAMELE: Aai. Is that all you can say? Funny manners you people have. Come to think of it, a funny marriage too — a man and his wife sitting in the ashes, saying nothing to each other. You are as bad as two white people. You know white people don't talk to each other. They think it's rude. When you see them in buses or cafes they are always sitting there like statues with their hands folded. You are not whites, eh?

JOB: I am Job Mava. This is my wife, Noamen.

ZIZAMELE: Aai, aai. Be careful. You will exhaust yourself talking so much.

Enter REVEREND MABANDLA, cautious, shame-faced. He carries a thermos flask and some cups. He coughs, not sure whether he is welcome or not.

ZIZAMELE: Ei. What now? We are going to have a picnic.

MABANDLA: *(Sees ZIZAMELE)* Who is that?

ZIZAMELE: Zizamele. Who are you?

MABANDLA: I am the Reverend Mabandla. *(He turns to JOB.)* Job, I have come to apologise. I went home and was going to go to bed, but I felt very angry. You were right — and I was too sensitive about my dignity. Also I was tormented by the image of you sitting out here, all alone. But worse than that . . . I was selfish enough to drink your cup of coffee. That was too bad. So I have come to apologise, and I have brought a thermos flask of hot coffee. May I sit down?

ZIZAMELE: Yes, mfundisi. *(He brings him a box.)*

MABANDLA: Job. Have you changed your mind? At least you are wearing the blanket now.

ZIZAMELE: He's a sick man.

MABANDLA: Of course. But the sickness is in here. *(Touches his heart.)*

ZIZAMELE: Oh. I see. You think he is . . . *(Hand on heart.)*

MABANDLA: Yes.

ZIZAMELE: Hey. Mr Shoemaker. You know what?

JOB: What?

ZIZAMELE: He thinks you are . . . *(Taps his forehead, and opens his mouth.)*

JOB: We are all mad.

ZIZAMELE: That's not fair. One of us is sane.

JOB: And who is to blame?

ZIZAMELE: Who is to blame?

JOB: That's what I asked.

ZIZAMELE: Ask the mfundisi.

JOB: I tell you what is the work of his church. Something goes wrong, you admit you are guilty, you repent, the church says Amen. You go out a new man. Reverend Mabandla has taken the burden off your neck.

MABANDLA: Aai, Job. But what is wrong with that? That is the job of the church.

JOB: *(Standing up, wrapped in his blanket)* What's wrong with it? Well, I'll tell you. God is not necessary. You can explain it all without God. Look. *(He places the lamp on top of the box.)* There is God. That lamp. He is watching. God sees my children die, my house burn down, he sees me

chased off my land. What happens? Nothing. *(JOB blows the lamp.)* Now. Start again. There is nobody there. No God. No nothing. My children die, my house is still burned down, and I am still chased off my land. It happens whether God is there or not. So if God is there, what is he doing about it?

ZIZAMELE: *(Relighting the lamp)* Aai. Why do you keep blowing it out. A man like you doesn't enjoy the darkness.

MABANDLA: *(To JOB)* Do you believe that?

JOB: Of course.

MABANDLA: But God is not like that. He is not a lamp that you can put on top of a box. Nobody knows how to say what is God.

JOB: Hei. You tell me that, now?

MABANDLA: I never said I knew. I have never seen God.

JOB: You have never seen him, yet you are sure he exists.

MABANDLA: I am sure.

ZIZAMELE: Aai. You people are very good talkers. I never get nice talk like this where I live.

MABANDLA: You like to talk about such things?

ZIZAMELE: Yes. Very much.

MABANDLA: Well. That's good. Did you go to school?

ZIZAMELE: Never.

MABANDLA: And you talk like an umfundisi.

ZIZAMELE: Everybody talks the same way. The only difference is that some people talk pure rubbish, others leave something that you can use afterwards.

MABANDLA: Oh. You are a wise man.

ZIZAMELE: If I was, I wouldn't be digging rubbish. But listen. I've got an idea. Mr Shoemaker is wrong.

JOB: Wrong?

ZIZAMELE: Of course. Look here. *(He points to the lamp on the box.)* You said *this* was God. You are wrong. This is not God. This is *you*. And everything else is darkness. Right?

JOB: Go on.

ZIZAMELE: How much can you see?

JOB: I can see you, my wife, the Rev. Mabandla.

ZIZAMELE: And beyond that?

JOB: The fence. My gate. The road.

ZIZAMELE: And then?

JOB: Nothing. It is dark. There's no street lights.

ZIZAMELE: But you remember?

JOB: *(Consciously creating the geography).* Egazini. Lobengula. Dead Horse Kloof.

ZIZAMELE: Then?

JOB: Mountains. Rivers. Port Alfred. Sand. The sea.

ZIZAMELE: Then?

JOB: I don't know where it stops.

ZIZAMELE: Is the sea deep?

JOB: Very deep.

ZIZAMELE: You can't see down?

JOB: No.

ZIZAMELE: Look up. What can you see?

JOB: Some clouds, black sky, and stars.

ZIZAMELE: What stars?

JOB: Southern Cross. Orion, Zachobe.

ZIZAMELE: Ekhe. And beyond that?

JOB: Nothing. How can I see that far?

ZIZAMELE: Ja, you understand. You are this little light on a box. You see to here. *(He walks round the box in a narrow circle.)* But you can't see out there. *(Walks into the audience.)*

JOB: No.

ZIZAMELE: You see? That's what I mean.

JOB: What?

ZIZAMELE: You think you are a wise man, but like everybody else, you know nothing.

JOB: Ei. Did we give birth to ourselves? Did we make the earth?

ZIZAMELE: Are you asking me?

JOB: How can we know anything like that?

ZIZAMELE: That's what I'm asking you. You are the one who is making all the noise.

MABANDLA: What's your answer, Job?

JOB: I don't know. I don't know anything.

MABANDLA: Nothing? Aai, that is a change. (*Laughs*).

JOB: Are you still here to lecture me on my sons?

MABANDLA: No. I came to confess my own. Have some coffee.

He pours the coffee into three cups. The offer excludes ZIZAMELE. He goes to his sack, and shamefacedly produces the mug he stole earlier on.

ZIZAMELE: Yes. I took it. I'm sorry. I didn't know you wanted it.

JOB: Keep it.

MABANDLA: You also want some coffee?

ZIZAMELE: Aah, mfundisi. I think you understand the human stomach. (*He drinks it.*) Ei, it's good. (*Even JOB reluctantly drinks his coffee.*) It's good, isn't it? You make good coffee, mfundisi. You know what? I got some bread in here. Anyone like a piece of bread? (*Takes it from his sack. Reluctantly, they each take a piece, and eat. As they eat and drink, the feeling among them changes. They seem to feel more confident of themselves.*)

JOB: My wife. You sit there, and say nothing.

MABANDLA: Does she have to speak? She sits next to you in the ashes. It says more than words.

ZIZAMELE: Yes. Teach him, mfundisi. He is a big talker, but he is also a bit thick-headed.

MABANDLA: How is it that a rubbish hunter knows more than we do?

ZIZAMELE: I use my head. I see things properly.

MABANDLA: Yes?

ZIZAMELE: Yes! What other choice have you got? What else can you do but live your life?

MABANDLA: Ei! You should be doing my job.

ZIZAMELE: Am I right?

MABANDLA: Ewe! The man who says all life is shit needs a good wash.

ZIZAMELE: That's it! That's it!

JOB: And that's me?

MABANDLA: If you say so.

JOB: No. Tell me.

MABANDLA: Aai, Job. You will know what you will know.

JOB: (*Bitterly*) Ag!

There is an uncomfortable silence. Nobody seems to know what to do next. ZIZAMELE breaks the silence. He begins by making his story funny, but soon realises his tone is wrong.

ZIZAMELE: Sometimes, when you are digging in the rubbish, looking for bottles, you have to dig very deep. You are just fishing around, and suddenly your hook touches something, and you pull. You never know what you are going to find. So you pull. And you see a hand or a foot. And you pull more, and out it all comes.

MABANDLA: What?

ZIZAMELE: You pull out a small baby.

MABANDLA: Aai.

ZIZAMELE: You think I am lying? People even throw their babies onto the rubbish heap. Little ones, with solemn faces and sad mouths, their heads and bodies covered with ashes.

MABANDLA: Aai. Typhini Tixo.

ZIZAMELE: Someone has just thrown it away. A whole life. Someone who could be a man or a woman and say to you, 'I'm your friend'.

MABANDLA: Aai. Aai.

ZIZAMELE: I'm telling you the truth.

MABANDLA: Yes. I've heard it. But why do you tell us things like that?

JOB: You. (*Touching MABANDLA*) I know who you are. You were burned alive in the fiery furnace. I cannot help

you, my friend. You are burned to ashes.

MABANDLA: (*Shaking his head*) Aai, aai, aai. Job. You are far gone.

JOB: (*To ZIZAMELE*) How do you feel?

ZIZAMELE: Cold. Hungry.

JOB: Then you feel like a man.

MABANDLA: I don't understand you.

JOB: Aah. That's it. That's it.

ZIZAMELE: This cold wind. You know what it means?

JOB: No!

ZIZAMELE: It means very soon we shall have the sun. Then my toes will feel warm again. (*JOB, sitting on his stump, begins to make shoes, much absorbed in his work.*) I'd better pack up. I've got a long day ahead of me.

MABANDLA: Don't go now. You have been a great comfort to Job tonight.

ZIZAMELE: I don't know what to say. The rats will feel lonely without me.

MABANDLA: Well. You know where I live. Any time you need help, come and see me.

ZIZAMELE: I don't know what to say.

JOB: Say nothing then.

ZIZAMELE: What's he doing?

MABANDLA: Making a pair of shoes.

ZIZAMELE: Shame.

JOB: There you are. Come here, my friend. Come here and sit down. Let's see how they fit you. (*He mimes putting a pair of shoes on Zizamele's feet*) Yes. I knew you would remember me. I remember that pair of shoes I made for you. You wanted a strong pair to grip your ankles because of your job — standing all day. How do they feel?

ZIZAMELE: Wonderful. I never had such a good pair before.

JOB: This time, when you walk you will not feel the stones cutting into your feet.

ZIZAMELE: I was only walking home.

JOB: I know. It's a long way home, isn't it?

ZIZAMELE: (*At a loss, fumbling with his bag.*) Well. If you don't need me, I'll just make my way off. So long. Don't forget this. (*Picks up the sign.*)

MABANDLA: This?

ZIZAMELE: What does it say?

MABANDLA: Job Mava. Shoemaker. God is love.

ZIZAMELE: Is that what it says?

MABANDLA: That's what it says. Come, Job. Let's go home.

Exeunt all but ZIZAMELE. He seems lonely, for a moment, but turns to the audience, talking himself and them into a better mood.

ZIZAMELE: Well. I'm alone again. But that's all right by me. We are born alone, and we all die alone. I am used to it. You see, I have had a good night. I got a mirror, a cup, and two free cups of coffee, and some interesting conversation. That's something, heh?

When they get home tonight they will ask themselves, 'Who is that man Zizamele?' The religious ones will say, 'Oh. He is an angel who appeared out of the darkness.' (*Laughs*) You know — I don't think Job won his argument with God. Why not? Because he was only talking to himself, all the time, really. He just could not stand the idea of suffering. Well, who can? We all suffer, don't we? And did he learn anything? Maybe he learned that it's better to be alive than to be dead. Better to work, eat, sleep and have friends than to lie down there in the old rubbish dump of the earth.

The sun will come up soon. They say the coldest time is always just before dawn. Well, suppose I'd better be going. Oh, by the way, if ever you go to the Municipal rubbish dump, don't forget. Look out for me.

Waves goodbye. Exit.

End.

FOR VUYISILE MDLELENI AND OTHERS

I can hear you brother
just like the chilly breeze
whizzing through the crevice
just above my pillow

I can hear you brother
though your tenor was
thrown into a freezer
I can hear your voice
from the ice
transcending the chill
On the ashes of your efforts
rises energies not cupped in words

Paul Vilakazi

'TO THE CAVES, TO THE SWAMPS'

Go to the Caves
and seek in the darkness
where the sun once shone

Go to the Swamps
and seek in the depths
for truths
which once stood high

Speak to the Baobab
for he can teach you
of a time
when children played

Go to your Mother's breast
and drink of the life
that was to be you
but died
when first you ate from the hand
of the white man

Seek also in the deepest recesses
of your brother's liberated Spirit,
for your brother has arrived

from the Caves
where in the darkness
he saw what lay concealed
and grew thereby

from the Swamps
where from the mud
he retrieved what lay hidden
and grew by it

from the Baobab
on whose wrinkled bark
he read the tale
of a people once free
and he learnt thereby

from his Mother's breast
where once again
he drank of the life
that was to be him
and he grew thereby

he is now Himself
his Spirit is now free.

Farouk Stemmet

EYES

I remember your eyes
when they spoke of me,
of my race, of my god,
of the way I danced.

They were not your eyes
but the eyes of years gone by,
shaped by sights of images
too big to see,
and left alone . . .
in the dark.

Those eyes, archaic,
of years gone by,
had to be plucked,
and in the unwanted sockets,
I put
mine in yours,
yours in mine.

I remember my eyes now,
when they spoke of you
of your race, of your god,
of the way you danced.

Kriben Pillay

PIETY

There was a time when
I did not drink wine,
for wine was the blood
of my brother

there was a time
I had forsaken flesh,
for flesh was the substance
of my soul,

now as I watch
the farmer plough and seed,
and reap with his hands
the young anaemic corn

I shall give up breathing,
for abstinence
is the sum of my virtue.

Achmed Dangor

MY REGISTRASIE NOMMER

Ek moet dit nooit vergeet nie.
Die boek van my registrasie nommer;
Waarsonder ek is 'n kar
sonder 'n registrasie nommer.

Dit 'sê' waarvandan ek is;
Waar ek werk
definieer en klasifiseer my.
Dit noem my dit en dat.
Verpligtend plak ek dit aan my agterwereld
soos 'n kar se registrasie nommer.

My registrasie nommer;
Wat ek teen my sin draw.
'n Produk van my baas se wet
Wie se woord ek is bang om te oortreë
Dus vergeet ek nooit my registrasie nommer nie.

Nakedi Phosa

IN THE SUN

An extract from a novel

by Mongane Serote

illustrated by Mpikayipheli

The sun, its rays clinging to the trees, the branches and leaves, was rising up, over Jukskei river. The sky was yellow where the sun was peeping, and becoming silver as the rays moved and moved, spreading further into the vast sky. The sky is an empty hole? That is disappointing! I walked on. Somewhere a dog was barking, dogs were barking. I thought they may be chasing a horse, a donkey or a cow. I could also hear drums and whistles. I walked on, down Vasco da Gama Street; past 17th Avenue. The heat of the sun hit me straight on the forehead. An old lady wearing a sombrero which almost obscured her view passed, carrying a spade and a bucket. Her legs carried her as if they were creaking. She was bent forward, miraculously managing not to crash down on her face. Slowly she trod on, and this took her away on her journey, away from the dead.

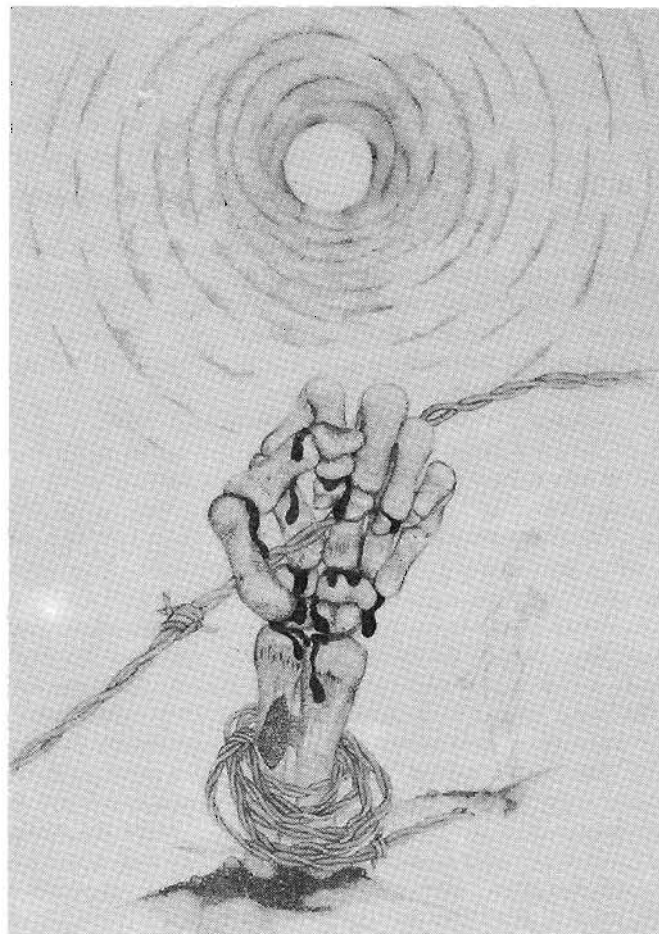
I went through the gate. Ah, if graves could talk! There they were, spread throughout this vast field, their number-plates sticking up in the air, as if they were hands waving bye-bye. The tombstones looked like miniature sky-scrapers. Some tombstones said something about wealth, others were ordinary, and some graves had no tombstones at all. Birds were singing. A cow mooed. Cars roared. But, the silence was stubborn. It stuck in the air, looming over the heaps of soil and those who could still walk. Somewhere in an empty patch, a car without wheels, if we still call it a car, had turned colourless: its seats were ashes, smoke still rose from somewhere around its bowels. The car stood there, proclaiming its death too. As I approached it, I realised it was that year's Valiant. They took what they wanted from it, and left it there. The owner, probably white, will talk to the dead about it. I went along the road.

There are always many people, children, women, men, families, widows, widowers, all of them busy, busy with the graves, silent, weeding, putting fresh flowers into vases, many people, scattered throughout the cemetery, early on a Sunday morning. The silence here is graceful. The silence sounds like the song of the birds, of the trees, of the wind; something about the silence of this place suggests, makes one suspect that God, or maybe the dead, are looking at one, listening to one, about to talk to one, just about to do it — but they never do. Women, some in fresh black mourning clothes; all of us, for some reason, wearing casual clothes — men trying to walk straight, holding spades and rakes; children, forever children, now and then playing, now having to follow the elders, now being scolded; families, holding to each other by freshening the graves of their beloved, weeding the sides of the graves; a hymn, a desperate prayer, whispers, the wind, the silence of the dead.

I was sitting on the grave of my grandfather. I fought the thought that nagged me, which wanted to know whether he heard me when I asked about Fix; and also, when I told him that I was getting tired of going to the shebeen; and that I wouldn't go to church. I fought this thought. I will fight it forever. By coming here, every Sunday, I will fight it; I know he is listening, and asking whether I was willing to change. That is where the trouble started — was I willing to change?

I stood up to go.

I was washing my hands near the gate, when I saw him.



The water wet my trousers. I thought shit, people will think I peed on my trousers. Where had I seen this old man? He was walking slowly towards the gate. His backside swung left-right-left-right, and now and then he stood to look at the field of tombstones and number plates. It was as I got closer that I recognised him.

'I see you, Father,' I said.

'Yes.' He stopped and looked at me. He was breathing heavily. His eyes were fixed on me, searching. His hat, flipped over to the back of his head, revealed white, white hair, which in turn joined the white, white beard. His eyes were wet and grey. They sure revealed how weary he was. I could not tell whether he was frowning or whether those were permanent old-age folds on his face. He kept staring at me, in silence, then he looked away.

'You boys have no sense,' he said. He looked away and with his stick pointed at the car, which was still smoking.

'Why don't you throw that thing in the street? We want to rest here, not to be burdened with your foolishness. Look at that!' He looked at me.

'Huh?' I was still trying to search for something to say.

'They burn the grass when they clean the rest place, and then you come and throw stolen cars here? What a curse!' He began to walk. I walked next to him, slowly. He stopped.

'You see that tall tombstone?'

'Yes,' I said.

'Nkabinde is resting there.' He began to walk again. 'You know Nkabinde? He used to own a shop near Eighth Avenue, he died last year, they say he had bad lungs or something. He had a big funeral. Yes, he was a good man, a man of the people.' He stopped to take a look again. 'I never used to understand why he said we should buy properties from the old ladies and from anyone else who wanted to sell theirs. You know, I used to think he was greedy, but no, he had a head. If we did that time, these Boers would not have taken our place so easily, like they have. Look at all that!' He pointed with his stick towards Alexandra. For some reason or another, every time I looked at Alexandra from

the graveyard, it looked like a graveyard.

'Every time I look at all that, my heart bleeds. It breaks. We worked very hard to build this place.' He stopped walking and looked at me.

'Whose child are you?'

'Molope.'

'Molope at 11th up the street?'

'Yes father,' I said. He began to walk, now and then looking at me. He was silent for a long time. Then . . .

'How are you living man?'

'Alright,' I said shrugging my shoulders.

'Where is your father?'

'He is there.'

'How is his health?'

'He is living.'

'Your mother?'

'She is living too.'

'That is good to hear. I am still living too, but age is telling now, we are going.'

'Yes, I hear you father.'

'Have you heard anything about your brother?'

'No.'

'Nothing?'

He sighed 'Nothing.'

'This is Mokonyama's property,' he said, pointing at the yard where many men were sitting outside in the sun. He stopped to look at the yard. 'Looks like he has sold it,' he said.

'I think so, because those are the men of the hostel.'

'We can't get water to drink from there anymore,' he said.

'Ya, we have been defeated.'

He stopped to look again. 'I hear you. You say your father is still alive?'

'Yes, he is still going on.'

'He is still going on, eh?' he laughed.

'Yes, your father is a good man. We used to drink our brandy together. We used to talk for a long time with him, and then go away to sleep. He is a good man.' He stopped to take a look at another yard. His face, folded as it was, curious as it was, still glimmered with something which seemed to get out from the eyes and spread throughout the face. He murmured something to himself and started walking again.

'Ja, I hear you. I had gone to visit the old lady,' he said. 'I took her flowers. You know, she used to love roses. We have beautiful roses in the garden, I took her some.' The sun was blazing, almost as if to roast our scalps. Sweat ran down the old man's face — the tired, weary, old face; the strong, defiant, fear-stricken face, glittering now and then with a bright smile and soon becoming a sad shadow, eyes cold like marble.

'So they are still holding your brother?'

'Yes,' I said.

‘Every time I looked at Alexandra from the graveyard, it looked like a graveyard.’

'It will be some time before we hear anything. How is your mother taking it?'

'Well . . .'

'Ja, I know, I know, when I came back, the old lady was weary. She was tired. It was only the heart which kept her, her body had long given in, she was tired. Two weeks after I came back, when they brought my banning order, she died.' He was breathing heavily, he stopped to wipe his face and to take a breath. 'Man, those men are fighting, yes, they are fighting,' he said and suddenly he looked very, very old. I thought any time I was going to see tears flowing down his face. His eyes grazed the earth, where there were tins, broken bottles, bricks, dirty water running freely on the street; from where dust rose up to the sky, taking along with it bits and pieces of paper. Something was smelling. I knew what it was, a dead dog or cat lying somewhere in the donga. The children, as usual, were playing, swearing, running across the street, chasing a ball or each other — and like the children of all places which are like Alexandra, they watched while running, on the look-out for speeding cars.

When I looked back, I saw the steep hill which we had climbed at that slow pace, stopping to ponder, at times almost beginning to cry, laughing, walking on, thinking about the past, the future. He unbuttoned his shirt, right to the stomach: a snow-white vest showed. I wondered who washed for him. Yes, maybe his daughter Thula. I had not seen her for a long, long time then. Maybe the last time I saw her was when I was still at school. She had a friend, Noni. She and Thula, then young, innocent, if ever there is such a thing in a place like Alexandra, were close friends. It was difficult to see one without the other. I got used to them both when I went to see Noni. It was with some longing that I thought of Noni and the things we used to do.

'Ja, those were really bad days, but then we were good men too,' the old man said. 'I stayed in jail for thirteen months, all alone in my cell. But then, it is a goat only which screams when it is in trouble.' He stopped again to look at another yard. He murmured something to himself, and then looking at me he said, 'Son, your brother is in great trouble, he must be a man to be able to

meet the demands of that place, they will break him, many were broken there, young men, their heads were broken forever. Children should not play there.'

'What happens there?' I became curious.

'No, leave that alone, leave it alone, I will tell you all that some day.' He sneezed. 'I am going to have a cold,' he said. 'Ja, your brother is in trouble, he must be a man. Tell your father I will come and see him, tell him if my legs allow me, I will come and see him soon, tell him that.'

'I will.'

'You know Thula?'

'Yes, she was my class mate.'

'Yes, yes, she is a mother now,' he said and looked at me. 'But I cannot understand you boys, you love the meat with hair, but you don't realise that that thing makes people who eat, who cry, who get sick. When that comes you run away!' He had a mischievous smile on his face, then he laughed. 'How old are you?'

'I am thirty.'

He took a careful look at me.

'You even have a little beard,' he said and laughed. 'No, you are a grown-up now, Molope has men now, he has worked, he has grown-up men.' He raised his stick to greet someone.

'Hey, where are you?'

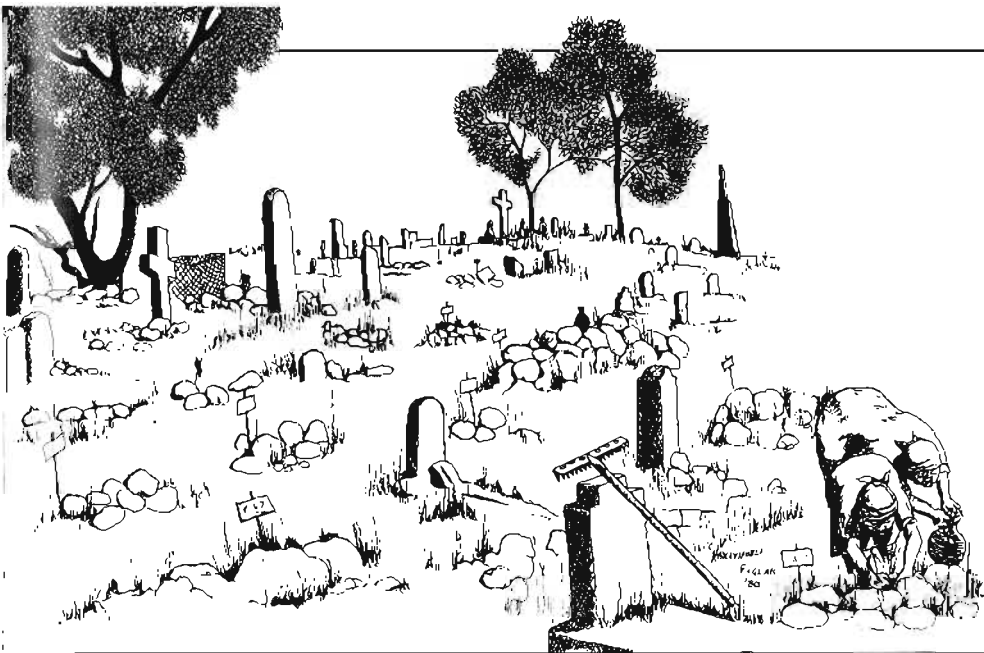
'We are here!'

'The sun, hey, the sun.' He pointed to the heavens with his stick and began to walk again. 'You know,' he said, 'I can't understand that man, he is in love with the church,' he laughed. 'Your father loves the church too, but your father is a man. That one, he has been made a woman by the church.' I let out a groan; I meant it to be laughter. He looked at me.

'Boy, don't laugh at your elders,' he said, trying to look serious, suppressing laughter. He stopped. 'Oh, they are building a bridge there?' He sighed. 'Why did I not see it when I was going to the place of rest, I must have been dreaming, or is it old age?'

I said nothing.

'They are building bridges, hostels, beerhalls in our place, without even asking us.' He was talking to himself. 'To be defeated is a very painful thing,' he said. His face was bright, he was like a farmer looking at his crops. 'But, you know, when you defeat someone and while he is lying on the ground, you continue to beat him, it just shows you are not a man. Men don't fight like that. That is fear. And I don't blame them, they must fear, they don't know us, you see, where they come from, when they fight, they burn everything up. You must have read about Hitler. He wiped villages and villages out, that is the way



they fight,' he said, wiping his forehead. 'Hitler put people in an oven, hundreds and hundreds of people and cooked them up, you would have thought he was going to eat them, but no, he threw them away. How can a man fight like that?' He laughed lightly. 'That is why I don't respect their god. We talked a lot about that with your father, he knows me on that one.' He began to walk again in silence. He seemed to be deep in thought. I could hear his struggling footsteps, dragging, slowly slowly, but also, something about them said a lot about strength, or the will to go on and on, no matter how hard things were.

Someone's voice was flying in the sky, singing about potatoes, how they were fresh, how mothers needed them, because their children needed them, the meat needed his fresh fresh potatoes to make a tasty stew. Now and then dogs barked at him. Now and then you could hear children singing his song, about potatoes, oranges, carrots, beet-roots, about the Sunday which meant that you should have good food because it is the only day you are with your family, why not cook them something good. Good food makes children happy, makes them lick their fingers.

We came near the horse-drawn cart. The old man stopped. He was looking at the huge, healthy-looking horses, with bright, happy eyes. Then he began to touch the vegetables on the cart.

'Hey, Machipisa, I see you man!'

'Our old man, Zola, where are you?'

'I am here my old man. The sun and work. That is all.'

'That is right, a man must work. Otherwise your family dies. I like your vegetables, they look fresh.'

'You know, you must know old man, I try hard,' Machipisa said.

'I think I must buy some,' the old man Zola said, looking at me.

'Yes,' I said. He bought cabbage, carrots, potatoes, onions and oranges.

'Chew this,' he said, and gave me a huge orange. 'It must be sweet, oranges are good for your health.' I took it and thanked him. We started walking again. At the corner of Fifteenth and John Brandt, the old man stopped, looked at me and said I should give my father his greetings, he had to turn there. I shook his hand, again thanked him for the orange and asked him to give my greetings to Thula and her daughter. I saw the old man Zola walk away, slowly, carrying the bag of vegetables and his jacket. He began to lean on his stick. His gait was weary indeed, perhaps defeated. Slowly he went away, and I went away, thinking, I must see him some day.

I walked up John Brandt Street. I got home. My baby was still not home yet. I put on John Coltrane. I lit the primus stove and put the kettle on. I made up the bed.

My brother came to see me. His eyes told me where he had been. He sat down on the chair and said he wanted coffee.

'Is that Coltrane?'

'Ja,' I said. He began to sing along with Coltrane, tapping his shoe and clapping hands. His head was bowed, as the branch of a tree, loaded with fruit. He began to murmur something to himself. Then he continued to sing with the record again.

'Ja, all this means that I am a coward,' he said at last. I said nothing. I knew now what was on his mind.

The storm. His eyes were bloodshot, his hair unkempt, and something in his face said he was angry. A twist on the forehead, or was it a combination of the eyes, the twist, and the words that kept leaping out of his lips.

'When last were you home?'

'Must be a week now,' I said.

'I am from there now,' he said, 'Mama says they came and asked about Fix.'

'What?'

'All sorts of things,' he said. He was silent, sipping his coffee, unsteady on his chair, murmuring.

'When did they come?'

'On Wednesday and on Friday.'

'Did they say where Fix is?'

'No, no one is allowed to see him or know where he is.'

'You know, I was talking about Fix with old man Zola today, when I came back from the graveyard.'

'I have not been to the graveyard for a long time now,' he said. 'What did the old man say?'

'No, he asked me if we had heard where Fix is.'

'Maybe they killed him, my brother, they killed him, otherwise why are they so secretive about him? Why? They killed him. You see, I knew what Fix was doing. I knew, and I told him he was foolish to think he could get away with it, but then, he knows better. What better things does he know? Now, look where he is . . . look what is happening to my mother!' He spread his arms.

'Bra Ndo . . .'

'Bra Ndo, Bra Ndo, you are next, don't you bastards listen?' He looked at me, with his red eyes, and the twist on his forehead which he must have got from my father. 'Bra Ndo, shit Bra Ndo, and quit your shit, don't say Bra Ndo, say Ndo, what matters? Nothing!' I could hear voices of women and men and children singing a hymn, they were clapping hands to the accompaniment of a drum which beat on and on, in a thick, slow, monotonous sound.

'Play Dollar Brand,' Ndo said. 'If Fix knew so much as he wanted to make us believe, why could he not know that is where he would end? The security police have a wide, efficient information network, did he know this?'

'What's the point of talking like that?'

'Shut up!'

'No, I want to know, what is the point? You forget about him or we try to help him. Your talking like that won't help,' I said. I said to hell with everything now, I knew this was coming, so, let it be. He stared at me.

'You are my younger brother,' he said, still staring at me.

'So what?'

'So shut up!'

'I am not going to sit here and listen to you talking that type of nonsense. Fix is my brother too!'

He stared at me, looking hurt.

'Is he not my brother?'

'I did not say that . . . watch it, you are spilling your coffee,' I said.

'Fuck it!' He threw the cup on the floor and it went shattering across the room. He stood up and left the room.

I could hear him talking to someone

outside. I could not hear the words. But I knew that he was still talking about Fix, about me, he was still angry. I thought of his wife. Wherever she may be now, she was expecting it, she was expecting him to come home, angry, full of shit. Somehow, she had learnt to live with it, or maybe, she was still trying to find alternatives. That frightens me, for I have often wondered what she will do the day she gets tired, the day she decides she has had enough. Many a time, so many times, she has come to my door, finished, having travelled deep into despair, tears in her eyes, her face struck with a desperate pain, a pain so desperate, even the tears refused to swallow it. She would be there at the door, her baby held closely in her arms, it would be clinging to its mother as if afraid to fall, its eyes shot out, like they were about to burst. Its mother, Ausi-Pule, what is it, strength? Despair? Love? What is it? Ausi-Pule would sit there on the chair, her boy on her lap suckling, and she, in terrible calmness would relate what had happened. Sometimes tears began to flow, sometimes she would stare straight at me, as if to say, now you know what your brother is about, what do you say?

Ah, what could I say? I loved Ausi-Pule, I loved my brother, all I wished was that they live together like they thought they could. But, even as this ran through my mind, I knew it was unreal. I knew that her life was a terrible, brutal pain. She must have felt, many a time, trapped by this thing called marriage. She must have, many a time, regretted ever meeting Ndo; must have, many a time, felt herself wander into one day, when she would be single again. But what was it that made her endure, that made her think that there was, after all, still hope? I knew by now, every time she heard that word, it was like she was skinless, her nerves scrapped. Her eyes, which could shoot defiance, anger, love and hatred straight into your heart with one stare, said it; they said how weary she was, how bewildered, and how she was at the verge of anything, be it to kill, or to make love until it hurts, or to pour methylated spirits over her body, set herself alight and laugh at you. It could be done.

It could be done, so her eyes said, and Alexandra, in ever so many ways, never hesitates to show one how it could be done. Her face, which all the time registered her experience, and sometimes seemed indifferent, had frowns that ran deep into her flesh, and right there on whatever it is we have come to call a face you could feel her listening, carefully, watching, always ready for self-protection.

Ausi-Pule had a beautiful body.

When she was happy, the way she carried it, with her legs, which almost bulged outward, and her firm shoulders, and her face, which, while clinging to its bewilderment, let go a smile, through the eyes, and her bright white teeth, it was as if she was going through a teasing dance. She walked... and her firm shoulders were like a teasing dance. She walked upright, flashing her smile, her eyes bright and running, perhaps mischievously, also at times so innocent, you felt like being very protective. That was the time, when I knew she enjoyed cooking for us, looking after the children, wanting us to rest, dominating everything as she moved from the stove, to the table, to the other rooms, talking to the children, and to us, mocking and teasing about what had happened. Then, it was amazing how she would be mother to all of us, the children, us, the house, be a sister to me, and to her husband be a wife. All the time, he would be saying, 'Mama you don't mind me playing Dollar Brand?' and Ausi-Pule, 'No, I love him too, I could go on and on with him.' Dollar would stalk the house, bombard it, rise high and high, go low and low, in that journey which Dollar takes, sometimes as an ant moving, moving on and on, climbing on thin grass as if it were a huge fallen tree trunk, moving back and forwards as if seeking something, which he himself does not know, moving on and on, at times like a tiger, agile, beautiful, ferocious, stalking, knowing, planning and ready for the final attack. Yes, Dollar would dominate the silence and my brother now and then, in his quiet way would talk to his wife, to his child, to me, saying how futile it was to be himself, to be a man, to love, saying sometimes everything is so beautiful it frightens. Sometimes I would read poetry to them. I would feel them as we moved together, Ausi-Pule holding her son by the hand, trying to keep him quiet as he demanded attention. She would kiss him, lift him up, hold him to her bosom, and suddenly we would all be aware again of Dollar, pacing, paving all sorts of things, and when the record ended, it would be like the house was sighing.

This happened on many occasions. Sometimes it made us sleep well, through many treacherous nights. Sometimes it caused us trouble, for we tossed and tossed in the bed, and in the morning, when we met again, the trouble would still be written on our faces. Sometimes it was just too hard to listen to Dollar. There would be no nerve, no courage to even suggest that we start to listen. Everything would be like a load, pressing down. Every word that our lips formed would be like a force pushing everything away from us.

It was when I heard Ndo talk outside that I wondered about Ausi-Pule. He was gone now. It was painful to try and picture what was happening wherever he was now. The coffee, and the shattering of china, still held me hostage. Fix. I wondered where he was as all this was happening. I wondered. I began to clean the floor, and the smell of coffee came to my nostrils, and the shattering sound ran through my ears. I wondered where Fix was. Where Ndo was, where my mother, my father, were. I decided I was not going to tell Lily anything about what had happened. She needed rest.

Strange. But it is true. I have been in this house, room, for four years now, and I have done many many things in here. I have broken cups with coffee myself. I have fought, wept, got furiously angry, right in this room, so many many times. I have lived in this room, my house, but suddenly, as I moved in it, cleaning the floor, washing the dishes, cleaning the stove, I began to find out that I was a stranger in it. It had taken me a long time to know where to put things, like cups and dishes, it took me a long time to make up the bed.

When I finished cleaning the house — what was it — I felt exhausted. Suddenly, Nina Simone's voice became a hammer, pounding and pounding on my head, shoulders, pounding and pounding me to pulp. I dared not listen to it, I dared not lie down to rest, the walls of the room began to stalk at me, to crowd me, I knew that I must try to get some rest, but there was no way I could come round to doing it.

I was in the street. The Sunday afternoon street. Alexandra makes its peculiar Sunday mornings, afternoons and nights. The sun, the smell of food, music; the women, in their brand new Sunday skirts — something about the way they walk, they smile, they are loud when they talk or laugh — the women, lovers, mothers, sisters of some people, hug the sun, the light, in their gestures; and walk, with their bibles, and their children, some dragging their men with them; and make a Sunday afternoon. There is a Sunday noise in Alexandra. It purrs and buzzes in the air, in the sun, in the wind, in the eyes of men, in the bodies of the women, it purrs and purrs and purrs.

A funeral procession went by. Lovers, hand in hand, walked the streets, like the children of this place. Men sat under the trees, drinking, talking and laughing. Music. Drums. A trumpet in the distance. A song, sung by a group of men and women of the church. Selborne Street, the Alexandra

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EAST/WEST

A Story by Ahmed Essop Illustrated by N.D. Mazin

Borg was an official at the security police headquarters at Rosevale near Lenasia. He was a tall slender man with a face that seemed to be modelled from weathered rock. His ascetic appearance, his soft measured way of speaking, his urbane manners — he never questioned anyone without offering a chair — distinguished him from the other officials who stood upon no ceremony when interrogating suspects. In the course of his investigations he tried to get the information he needed as humanely as possible, and only when he failed was he forced to turn the suspect over to the others whose sadistic zealotry required constant gratification.

The building occupied by the security police was a former nunnery. An entrance porch, guarded by a huge oak, led into flanking corridors and rooms and to a courtyard where flowers edged the level rectangular lawn. Many years ago the Good Shepherd's Convent, as it was known, had been the home of nuns and novitiates; here they had walked among rose gardens, listened to the sound of the church bell, sung hymns, fingered their rosaries. Now, at times and in this very place, the screams of the tortured might have reminded a well-read listener of the doomed inhabitants of Dante's Inferno. It was at these times that the irony of the change of ownership came to disturb Borg and made him a little sad and reflective.

One day Borg went to Lenasia to question Ranjit, a former school teacher. At one time Ranjit had taught with Richard Lake who had recently been arrested and imprisoned for blowing up an electricity pylon. Personal details of everyone Richard Lake had come into contact with were required, and Borg had been instructed by his senior, Colonel van Dijk, to go and get the information.

When he rang the doorbell Ranjit's sister Maya came to the door. She was a plump, dusky woman with amber-coloured eyes. She was dressed in a red floral sari that exposed much of her ample waist. The red dot on her forehead matched the flashing ruby in her nose-ring.

'May I speak to Ranjit?'

'He is at Tolstoy Farm where Gandhi lived.'

'Where's that?'

'Near Lawley Station.'

'I must speak to Ranjit.'

'Why?'

'Nothing serious really. I have something to discuss with him,' Borg said as courteously as possible, not wishing to unsettle Maya whose colourful presence radiated warmth. 'I will go there.'

'He may not speak to you. He may be meditating.'

'Then I will come this evening. Please tell me how to get there.'

She walked with him to the gate and gave him directions.

Once Borg had passed over the flat terrain on which Lenasia is situated, crossed the railway line, driven over a brick-paved road that skirted huge smoking chimneys and brick-kilns, he reached a wooded area beyond which lay a low range of hills. A rusty zinc plate on a gate told him that he was at Tolstoy Farm.

He left his car at the gate, tramped over long grass and reached the steps of the house that led to an L-shaped veranda. He paused for a moment and looked at some gaunt peach trees and some old unpruned rose bushes. He knocked at the door but no one opened it. He looked through a window, saw several rugs and cushions spread on the floor, an oriental musical instrument, and a brightly painted portrait of Gandhi above a Victorian fire-place. He walked to the back of the house and entering a small veranda knocked at a door. No one opened it. He saw several enormous pepper trees on his left and he walked towards them. And then he saw him. Wearing a saffron-coloured robe he was seated under a tree in the classic yoga meditation posture. For a moment Borg felt that he should not disturb Ranjit, but he had his work to accomplish. He went closer, stood in front of Ranjit and said, 'I am from the security police headquarters, I need some information.' Ranjit did not respond to the words. Borg looked into Ranjit's eyes; they had a vacant mesmerised look that yet strangely seemed to be perceptive of him. And then Borg became aware of a state of silence that he could only have described as heard silence. He seemed to hear it not aurally but within an inner spiritual dimension. He began to feel a sense of transgression in coming there. He decided to leave.

As he reached the house he heard a voice calling, 'Sir, wait please,' and turning around saw Ranjit coming towards him. He was a tall man with a muscular copper-brown body. His clean-shaven head and face gave him the serene,



gentle look of temple statuary. 'Sir,' he said, 'I was in meditation. There are not many visitors who come to Tolstoy Farm during the week. I am so glad you have come. Is it your great interest in Gandhi that has brought you here? You know it was here that the great man lived and carried out his experiment in communal living. Hence the name Tolstoy Farm.' Ranjit opened the door of the house. 'Come in, come in. Of course, this house provided shelter for the families of men who were involved in the great and noble struggle to attain human equality by offering passive resistance, preferring to go to jail rather than being humiliated.' They entered the room Borg had looked into earlier. It was a large room and besides what he had seen already there was a bookshelf in the corner. 'You know,' (Ranjit's speech seemed to Borg like an endless, gently flowing stream) 'it was here that the great man had his residence — the farm belonged to his friend Kallenbach — and from here that he pursued his noble struggle. Tell me, sir, what is your name? . . . Borg, perhaps you have come here because your karmic destiny has led you to this beautiful place. O please excuse me, let me get you a chair.' He went into an adjoining room and brought one. 'Sit down while I talk to you. But first let me play a melody on the sitar for you.'

Ranjit sat down on a carpet and took the sitar in his hand. He struck the strings of the instrument gently with his fingers and out of it floated a melody that was a beautiful blend of lyricism and melancholy. Then he continued talking.

'People who come to Tolstoy Farm eventually come to appreciate that the entire universe is a manifestation of the divine Creator and that those who see the world in terms of different races,

proceed to prey on so-called inferiors, and only succeed in making their own intellectual, moral and spiritual development very difficult. I am sure you know something about Gandhi?'

'Very little,' Borg confessed.

'Then I think you should begin with Gandhi's book about his experiences in this country.' He went to the bookshelf and came back with a copy. 'I am sure you will find the book very inspiring. After that you can go on to the Gita, Upanishads . . .'

That was how Borg came to be initiated into the world of Hinduism. He became a familiar figure at seminars and meditation sessions. He listened to visiting yogis from India and spent much of his time in philosophic discussions with Ranjit. He continued working at Rosevale, though he tried to keep away from the premises as much as possible, for he could not enter without feeling a sense of guilt. The former nunnery's conversion into a headquarters for the security police began to take on a profound symbolic significance: it attested to a flawed civilization.

Borg thought of resigning from his work, but before he could do so he was summoned to appear before Colonel van Dijk. A bloated, pale-skinned man with short curly blond hair and beady blue eyes, van Dijk was usually dressed in a safari-type white suit which gave him the appearance of a hospital orderly.

'I have received information,' the Colonel said stiffly from behind his large desk, 'that you are spending a great deal of your time with a religious group in the Indian area of Lenasia. Now this may seem to you a perfectly harmless activity, but to Security any person who mixes socially or in any other way with people of a different race is suspect. You should know that. Therefore, taking the interest of the safety of the state into consideration, it has been decided to transfer you to Cape Town. I am sure,' the Colonel concluded, 'that you will not suffer any inconvenience. After all, you're a bachelor.'

'For some time now I have been thinking of resigning,' Borg said calmly.

'Resigning?' the Colonel asked, a nuance of anger in his voice.

'Yes. The direction of my life has changed.'

'And throw away your future in Security?'

'Yes.'

'Impossible! And what of your allegiance to the state?'

'My allegiance is to the supreme reality Brahman.'

The Colonel laughed a little, mockingly.

'Come, Borg, you can't tell me that you are taking all that, whatever that

Brahman thing is, seriously?'

'I think Security is taking it seriously. If not, why the transfer?'

'A good point. But remember, Security even takes Security seriously.' The Colonel chuckled.

Borg understood the veiled threat.

'I shall hand in my resignation today.'

'You are at liberty to do so,' the Colonel said, rising from his chair. 'But remember my business is to secure the safety of the state and if anyone, even my dearest friend, does anything to threaten it, I shall have no hesitation in locking him up. And you know what that means. No lawyer, magistrate, member of parliament, or Brahman will be able to free you.'

'Thank you, Colonel,' Borg said and left the office.

That evening Borg told Ranjit and Maya of his resignation and what the Colonel had said to him.

'Good,' Ranjit said, 'you have untied a knot. In the house of cruelty, no one can find spiritual liberation.'

'I am worried about the threat,' Maya said. 'And can he stop you from coming to visit us and taking part in our activities?'

'I think he is going to try,' Borg answered.

'Then we shall oppose him with truth,' Ranjit said with determination.

'And what work will you do now, Borg?' Maya asked.

'Oh don't worry about what work Borg will do,' Ranjit said. 'There is so much to do in every incarnation. He can help me at Tolstoy Farm so that we can transform the place into a memorial to the Mahatma.'

'Yes,' Borg agreed. 'I shall be happy to help.'

'I am beginning to feel,' Ranjit said, 'you have come to us to fulfil some purpose.'

Borg now spent most of his time in Lenasia, only returning at night to the York Hotel in downtown Johannesburg to sleep. Besides undertaking, with Ranjit, the Tolstoy Farm project (various wealthy individuals were approached and they offered assistance), he furthered his knowledge of yoga, practised austerities and even learnt to play the sitar. He found Hinduism and the yoga way of life to be essentially free from self-righteousness, authoritarianism, dogmatism, and without a primitive eschatology based on the conception of sin and the fall of man. It placed moral and spiritual responsibility on the individual alone rather than on messiahs and saviours. In time Borg came to perceive that the flaw at the heart of Judaic-Christian civilization was its self-righteous claim to absolute truth and

that this deception constantly led to brutal manifestations of various forms of authoritarianism and to the estrangement between reason and action.

After several months Borg received a message that the Colonel wished to speak to him. He went immediately in his car.

'I am afraid,' the Colonel said to him, after asking him to be seated in a chair, 'that your activities are causing grave concern to Security.'

'Concern?'

'Yes, you are interfering with the Indian people.'

'Explain that to me, please.'

'They have their own group area according to state policy. What do you want there every day?'

'I am a Hindu.'

'What! How can a Christian be a Hindu? I have never heard anything so absurd.' The Colonel laughed derisively. 'Listen to me, Borg. Let me speak to you in plain terms. You are challenging the laws of the state by going to Lenasia daily and associating with people of another race.'

'There is no specific law that prevents me from going there, nor a law that says that I cannot change my religion.'

'Don't tell me what I know, Borg,' the Colonel said with menace. 'As far as I am concerned, you are interfering with people of another race.'

'If you wish to interpret my presence in Lenasia in that way you may do so, Colonel van Dijk,' Borg answered.

'Don't you dictate to me,' the Colonel said angrily. 'There is one other thing. You are a vagrant with no visible means of support. Where do you get money from to live?'

'I don't need any money at present,' Borg said serenely.

'You are defying me,' the Colonel shouted. 'You will soon regret it. Go!'

Borg rose from his chair and left the office.

After taking his vows of renunciation, Borg went on with his life in a quiet dignified way. He now wore a saffron robe, allowed his walnut-coloured hair to grow long, and on his forehead drew the emblem — mark of the ascetic — two parallel vertical lines in charcoal. He gave up living at the York Hotel and stayed at Tolstoy Farm. It was not long before a posse of security police officers arrived in an American car and arrested him. He was taken to Rosevale.

Colonel van Dijk, who had been stoking the fires of his fury at Borg's challenge to his authority by pacing the floor of his office, stopped suddenly when the captive was brought in. He was shocked by the long-haired, out-

landish appearance of the man — his saffron robe, his sandals, the beads around his neck and strange mark on his forehead, all contrasting strongly with the stiff light-blue uniforms of the officers. For a moment he believed he was seeing an illusion. A sense of profound fear filled him, his larynx tightened and he could only manage to say in a soft voice, 'Sit down, Borg.'

And then the Colonel did not know what to do. The four men who had arrested Borg left the room quickly without waiting to be dismissed. The Colonel looked at Borg as though he expected to be addressed. Borg remained silent. The Colonel began to feel that if he did not leave the office he would be impaled by the look in Borg's grey eyes. He turned and hurried out of the office. He ran into the next-door room, asked an official to leave as he wished to make a private telephone call, and then with brisk, nervous fingers spun the dial.

'Brigadier Becket, please. It's very urgent.'

He waited for the call to be put through and then said, 'Listen Brigadier, this is van Dijk speaking. Borg is now in my office and I don't know . . .'

'Lock the man up!' Brigadier Becket shouted.

'Please listen, how can I lock a man up who does not look like a man.'

'What, Colonel? Is your eye-sight failing you?'

'I don't know how to explain, but he is in a sort of dress . . .'

'Listen to me, Colonel. If Security is afraid of the way in which a man dresses, then we might as well close Rosevale and everybody can go home. I say lock the man up immediately.'

'But he is wearing a sort of long yellow . . . orange dress.'

'A man in a dress? He must be mad. Then why arrest him?'

'On your orders . . .'

'Listen, Colonel, I think there is something wrong with you. You informed me that you wanted Borg arrested for being a traitor and a threat to the security of the state. I think I will speak to the Honourable Minister about getting a psychiatrist stationed at Rosevale.' Brigadier Becket put the telephone down.

The Colonel returned despondently to his office, hoping that Borg had taken the opportunity to escape. But he was still there, sitting very serenely in his chair. The Colonel sat down in his chair.

'I am afraid, Borg,' the Colonel said apologetically, 'I have to do something I am very reluctant to do. You know that orders cannot be stopped by an official of lower rank. I was forced by the Brigadier to send for you.'



'You have to do your duty,' Borg said. 'The Lord Krishna in the Gita tells Arjuna the warrior to perform his duty during battle.'

The Colonel picked up the telephone and summoned the quartet of officers who had arrested Borg. They came within a few minutes and saluted.

'Krishna says that you must perform your duty,' the Colonel said, looking at Borg.

The officers looked at each other and then at the Colonel.

'Why don't you carry out your duty?' the Colonel asked sharply.

'Sir, you said Krishna said we must perform our duty,' one of them said.

'I didn't say that, stupid! Borg said that. Why don't you carry out your responsibilities?'

'Sir,' Borg addressed the Colonel, 'for your information my name is Yogi Satyananda.'

'Please carry out your responsibilities,' the Colonel said to the officers, looking even more disturbed as though Borg's words were a potent imprecation against him.

The officers were mystified. They had been asked to bring Borg to the Colonel and they had done so. Their duty ended there. Now the Colonel was talking about responsibilities.

'What responsibilities, sir?' one of them asked.

'Fools! You went to . . . Why don't you take him to his room?'

'His room sir?' another officer asked.

'Don't you understand . . . there where people are kept until they are tried?'

In order to assist the Colonel, Borg rose and saying, 'I know where the cells are,' walked out of the room, followed by the officers.

The Colonel was sweating. He did not want to take on the responsibility of having Borg locked up. The man had changed, changed utterly. One never knew what forces he could invoke to harm him. He had informed Brigadier Becket of his intention to have Borg arrested and he had approved. Therefore ultimate responsibility lay with him.

The telephone rang. It was the Brigadier.

'Colonel, what information did you get from Borg about political activities in Lenasia?'

'Nothing, sir.'

'Nothing? What is happening to Rosevale? Don't you fellows know how to get them to say what you want them to say? What have you done to Borg?'

'He is locked up, I think, according to your instructions.'

'My instructions?'

'Brigadier . . .'

'Listen, Colonel. As soon as you get Borg to say what you want him to say, let me know.'

The Colonel put the telephone down, but it rang almost immediately.

'This is the *Morning Star*. We have received information that Yogi Satyananda has been arrested. Is this true?'

'No . . . he is not under arrest, but has been allowed to rest in a room.'

'Until when?'

'Well . . . till tonight perhaps.'

'Can you give us any reason for his detention?'

'He is not in detention and I am not obliged to give any reason.'

'Is he held under the State Security Act?'

The Colonel put the telephone down angrily and began pacing his office.

In the afternoon an orderly brought a newspaper to the Colonel's office. Thick black headlines lashed his eyes like vipers: Yogi Satyananda Arrested. Huge Demonstration Planned in Lenasia. The Colonel tore the newspaper and flung it into the litter basket.

'Lies! lies! The man is not under arrest!' he shouted.

Several officials from nearby rooms came rushing in.

'What is the matter, sir?' they all asked.

'Nothing!' he shouted. 'Stay in your rooms until I call you.'

They rushed out, but a messenger came in, out of breath.

'Sir, a procession of demonstrators is on its way here. It is led by a man in a saffron robe.'

'How did he get out?'

The messenger took a step back.

'Who, sir?'

'The man in the robe.'

'Get out from where, sir?'

'Get out of this building?' the Colonel screamed.

The messenger ran out of the office.

There was going to be trouble now, the Colonel knew. He had sensed that as soon as Borg had come into his office. He was now leading a demonstration to Rosevale. But how had he managed to get out of his cell and return to Lenasia? The Colonel was afraid to think. Eastern

people were capable of performing strange magic and perhaps they had taught Borg. Some of their holy men (he had heard or read somewhere) could perform supernatural feats such as being buried alive and resurrected after several days. There were others who instead of going to a mountain called it to come to them. Perhaps they had taught Borg to become invisible and he had walked out of his cell. And what would he tell the Brigadier if he discovered the man had escaped? He had already accused Rosevale of inefficiency and threatened to close it.

There was a loud noise outside, the voices of hundreds of demonstrators. The Colonel rushed to the window. Terrified by what he saw, he drew the curtains, closed his office door, switched on the lights and sat down in his chair and awaited the worst.

The demonstrators massed outside Rosevale, holding aloft placards and banners calling for the release of Yogi Saryananda. Ranjit was their leader. He was dressed in a saffron robe and carried a staff. Maya, in a white cotton sari, stood beside him, beaming confidently at press photographers.

One of the pressmen came up to Ranjit and asked what the demonstrators intended doing to get Yogi Saryananda released.

'We have come in peace to take him back with us.'

'And if your request is not granted?'

'We intend staying here until he is released.'

There was a knock on the Colonel's door and an officer came in.

'Sir, there is a man who wants to speak to you. He says he comes in peace.'

'Let him come in.'

Ranjit entered the room and sat down on a chair.

The Colonel looked at him in as pleasant a way as possible. He was not going to get himself into trouble over another man in a robe.

'May I ask what is your mission?' the Colonel asked respectfully.

'I have come for the release of Yogi Saryananda.'

'Release? He became invisible and walked out of this building.'

'Invisible? Walked out? We yogis are not magicians.'

'Yes.'

'You must be mistaken, sir. He is still inside.'

'Did he get back? Impossible!'

'You can easily find out if he is inside or not.'

The Colonel picked up the telephone and spoke to an officer.

'Is Borg in his room? . . . Good, so he

got back again . . . Release him immediately and bring him to my office.'

Suddenly screams began reverberating through the corridors of the building.

'What's that?' Ranjit asked, standing up. 'Someone is hurt.'

'Relax,' the Colonel said. 'My men are just trying to get the truth.'

'Truth? What do you mean?'

'You know, about underground activities and so on. We in Security have to see to the safety of the state.'

The screams subsided.

'That is a child's voice,' Ranjit said, looking very disturbed.

'That's nothing. If Security worried about age you and I would not be sitting here.' The Colonel smiled and folded his arms. 'Let's talk about important matters. Borg will soon be here and the whole affair is going to have a happy end. You know the state protects all religions and you are free to pursue your activities as long as you don't interfere with those of others. I have a very high respect for you Indians. You are highly civilized. I believe you wore clothing in the old days when people in Europe walked about naked.'

'Wearing clothing hasn't very much to do with civilization.'

'But it does distinguish the savage from the civilized man.'

'I think there are many more savages in clothing now than there were savages without clothing.'

The Colonel chuckled, took his pen in his hand and said, 'Give me their names and I will fix them.'

An officer came into the room.

'Sir, Borg refuses to leave his cell.'

'Refuses? What! He doesn't want to be free.'

'No, sir. He says that he will shortly be going into a state of transcendental meditation and must not be disturbed. He says that the cell is the ideal place for that purpose. In the meantime, he further says, all those people who are engaged in activities that are not religious should vacate this building immediately. He says that the true inheritors of the Holy Shepherd Convent are the yogis.'

'Is the man mad?' the Colonel screamed, standing up.

'No, sir,' Ranjit said firmly. 'Do not at any time call a yogi mad. You are in effect saying I am mad too.'

'Please then,' the Colonel said, lowering his voice and sitting down, 'tell me why is he making this absurd demand?'

'Absurd? What could be more reasonable? In fact none of us will leave this place if Borg's request is not met. Please give me the keys of this place.'

'How can Security vacate this place? It is a government building.'

'Speak to your seniors.'

The Colonel picked up the telephone and got through to Brigadier Becket. He informed him of his predicament and the demand.

'Lock them all up!' the Brigadier shouted.

'And what if they all later refuse to leave?'

The Brigadier laughed derisively. 'So, Colonel van Dijk, you have placed yourself in the position of a prisoner? The government spends millions on prisons annually — in fact we have more prisons in this country in relation to population than any other country in the world — and now we are unable to use them.'

'Sir,' Colonel van Dijk addressed his superior, 'there are thousands of demonstrators outside Rosevale. Newspaper reporters are having a field day. If nothing is done an incident may take place that will make us the laughing stock of the world. The whole East may turn against us and there is no telling what might happen then. Please help.'

'You know what you may be responsible for? An international scandal, not to speak of your own doom,' the Brigadier replied.

'Sir, if nothing is done, you as my senior will also be implicated.'

'Implicated? What! Did I order you to arrest Borg?'

'Sir, please get me out of this situation. If the government falls we are all doomed.'

'Colonel van Dijk,' Brigadier Becket said solemnly, 'what a lot of trouble you are giving me. I will have to speak to the Honourable Minister who will have to get in touch with the Prime Minister and his Cabinet, for only they can take the decision to vacate Rosevale and save you from doom.'

The Colonel thanked the Brigadier profusely and put the telephone down with a sigh of relief. He turned to Ranjit.

'Can you please tell your followers to be patient. Consultation is now in progress at the highest level in government circles regarding the request made by Borg and supported by you.'

Ranjit rose from his chair, shook hands with the Colonel and left the office.

The Colonel went towards the window and parted the curtains. The demonstrators were swarming all over the place. Here and there men in robes were addressing groups. The Colonel closed the curtains and began pacing his office. The telephone rang and he pounced upon it.

'Yes, any news Brigadier Becket?'

'The Minister was furious at your handling of the matter and ordered your

Continued on page 45

Mhahlamhala 1981

By **Mothobi Mutloatse**

PPPuf-ffff . . . mbvvvvv . . . puuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu . . .
hoo . . . huu . . . webee . . . weeh . . . hoh . . . huu. Would it
ever end? Seemed so near and yet so distant. Actually what
was that sound: was it a horn? Was it Mhahlamhala? It was
such a full-throated sound, such a gusty and appealing sound,
so painful, so mournful and so inspiring that it could only
have been engineered by the gods, with its eerie thousandfold
echo. Oh, would it ever cease tearing lungs and ears apart;
would the blower never stop blowing those sounds of
agitation to the slave masses, rousing them from blissful
slumber in the serfdom of sunny skies, braai vleis, rugby
'n . . .

But their slavebacks had not totally snapped, so why
didn't they respond to the sound of Mhahlamhala, why? How
come the city slaves had isolated themselves from their
country cousins in their struggle for survival and liberation:
why had they, as the original natives of this country, turned
their backs on their own people and cultures by preferring
western materialism and individualism labelled every-man-
for-himself? But why, rootless black slave, why your aimless
wandering and aloofness? Was the sound of Mhahlamhala less
attractive than that of Mozart? Was your culture merely like
the curios at the Carlton Centre, existing only for the hedon-
istic western traveller on safari in our holy domain?

Initially, it seemed the slavemasses had to resign them-
selves to the fact that they were heavily unarmed against
their sophisticated, cunning and rough-riding opponents
from the wild west — for some slaves had opted for the easy
way out, electing to buy freedom and paying with their souls
to get preponderance at the city expense of the legless,
landless but law-abiding masses. The baasboy slaves preferred
to achieve liberation riding in Mercedes Benzes instead of . . .
Their souls were battery flat, beyond use any more.

Death to the Boy Slave Leaders! Down With Tyrant
Asses! To Hell With The Bastard Leaders! were some of the
downtrodden people's hysterical chants. They knew they
were powerless, but realised not that they were powerful in
their powerlessness at the same time, because their potential
power yet had to be utilised. In their silent way the people
began pondering how they could unchain themselves,
mentally first, then physically.

Black national states — black national shit, exclaimed a
village teacher during a matric history lesson, in which the
westerner's ideology was euphemised as education. One day
he would have to come to terms with the paradox of teach-
ing pupils what he himself found disgustingly abhorrent and
intellectually repulsive, the Village Teacher reflected. He
could no longer live with The Lie; sleep with it and be paid
by The Lie. And worse, ram it down the throats of innocent
young people of Afrika, so that they received the distinction
of a certificate and the coveted tag of: isifundiswa. That was
the ultimate objective: to boast to the less fortunate and earn
a higher position as a server to other people, forever and ever
a-hell!

Would it ever end?

Was it that hopeless . . . ? It was two years after the bundu
farce had taken place when the rumblings began to be felt by
both the masses and their offspring: it was an electric feeling

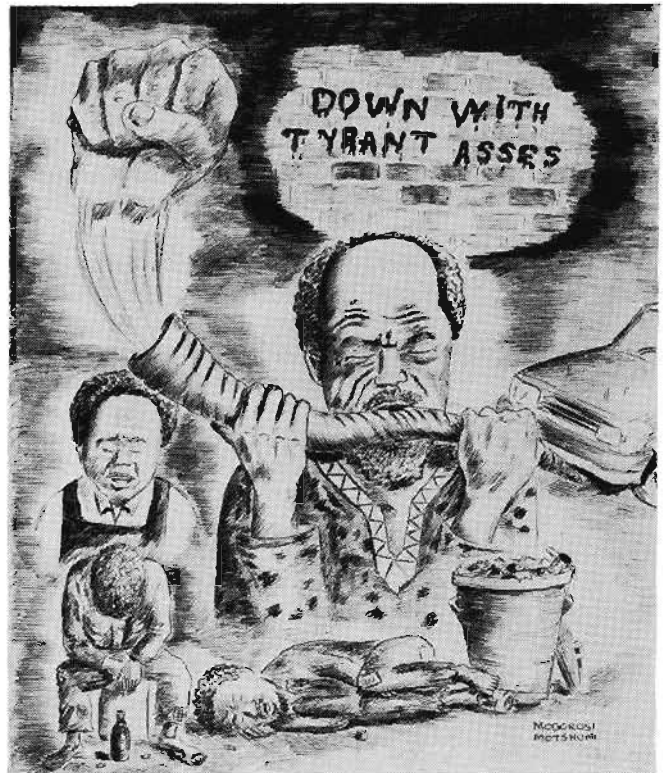


Illustration: **Mogorosi Motshumi**

of physical struggle, not mere idealistic sloganising and
tamati-box rhetorics abused to hell-and-gone by theoreticians
— endlessly intellectualising about struggle, to possibly cover
up their fear of Tshona! For that meant soiling their shirt-
sleeves and high-heeled shoes. Nevertheless the spirit of mha-
lamhala, the ancestor's wailing and hailing, had strongly em-
bedded itself in the young bones of the young people of the
land of the black man. Unarmed as heavily as they were, the
Children Rose As One Body against Goliath armed with
mechanical hippos and blood-thirsty bullets, some of which
were trademarked Made In Belgium.

Would the cries of the dying Children never stop?

How could ancestral spirits be so cruel as to render the
young as sacrificial lambs in the liberation struggle? Couldn't
adults have been used to liberate the masses? But the masses
were **THE CHILDREN THEMSELVES!**

And soon the sound of mhalahala was being experienced
in nearly every nook in the slavecommunity, with pupils re-
volting against their teachers in the classrooms, and in their
homes to the amazement of their petrified parents, for the
westerner had indoctrinated the slavebabas seemingly beyond
repair, that the west and the rest were the standards of
civilised societies, therefore they as elder 'pupils' had to
mimic the westerner to be greater. Enough was enough, said
the ancestors through the clenched powerfists of the
Children.

Now the gods had finally decreed . . . there was no turning
back.

One specific blue Monday, on the lawn of a park situated
on the northern side of the Johannesburg traffic depart-
ment's legalised hijacking yard, in the 5 o'clock hours of the
morning, three slavehoboes, two men and a mother, were
drying themselves around a paper-fire after they had been
soaked to their black and beautiful skins the whole night by
a sudden angry downpour. Perhaps the Gods were cleansing
them for a mission ahead of them. They were thoroughly
lashed and thrashed and washed — gratis — by the rain. It
could have been a comical scene were it not that this was a
daily experience of the hoboes every summer. They had to
take a bath, twice or thrice daily — much against their will,
for the rains also invited flu and other annoying ailments for
nomadics like them who had no shelter, except the open sky

and/or concrete lawn. In the land of their birth.

The woman looked outrageous: her rags were raggier than before, and when she tried to squeeze her rag dress dry she caused it to cling to her like glue, and it tore into shreds when she attempted apartheid — separating clothing from skin. In the end, she found herself wearing only her much-patched navy blue bloomers, provoking uncontrollable laughter from the men sharing a zoll.

This infuriated the somewhat emaciated little woman to shriek at them: 'Stop it now, or I'll moer all of you again.'

Fatso retorted: 'We've been telling you to stop frustrating your ezzies with the white man's tablecloths. Be like us and aerate your body the natural way, regularly, by not wearing underwear.'

This was provocative stuff, and like any woman scorned, she let go of the boiling water from the red-hot stove: 'Yah, you! What a shame, sis! You're a useless lot: the bloody two of you can't even naai me properly without my guidance. Ag, shut up, ma'an, or else you don't get any blue waters today.'

She had them really under her skin. And they knew it, they were trapped. Caught with their pants down.

Suddenly, before she could resume her biting sermon from the hip, 4-by-5 found herself knocked to the ground by a manslave who appeared to be running as if the devil himself was on his heels. Naked fright was conspicuously sculptured in his face. He was a man on the run — from the dombook police.

Pandemonium: with the Runner trying frantically to hide among the hoboies, and with the hoboies simultaneously battling to cover up their female companion in disarray. The runner's dompas sprint had come to an abrupt end, and he knew what would follow next. Like lightning, a heavier manslave descended on the group, and baton-charged the Runner in rugby-style, knocking the unsuspecting hoboies off their feet. With vengeance clearly mirrored in his face, the heavy hand of the law began crushing the head of the Runner, who was elusive, and kept ducking, bobbing and weaving like a seasoned boxer. But that didn't help, for the slavelawman used his booted feet to cover the Runner's cries of pain. Then he jumped on his man, boots, fist and baton, an action which propelled the hoboies into reaction.

'Leave him alone, son of a dog. Let him go!' they shouted at the policeman.

'The law doesn't say you must act like a god and do as you like. Stop punishing him, he's a fellow black! 4-by-5 screamed at the lawless lawman. It appeared that he was deaf, and perhaps dumb. He kept on kicking and punching the defenceless dombook victim. This is going too far, Thoho whispered to himself, and, without warning, assailed the lawman from behind. However, one punch sent Thoho sprawling on the ground. Lo and behold, Thoho shed blood — and not meths — from the bruise he sustained on the lower lip. And the taste of his own blood enraged him. 'You fucken bastard, you'll know your mother, today,' he yelled while charging. But a booted kick in the groin got Thoho screaming in pain: 'Ijoo! Ijoo! He's gonna die now!'

Seeing their comrade in hoboism being 'plastered', boiled the blood of both Fatso and 4-by-5: through some unexplained simultaneous instinct, they too charged at the lawlessness in plainclothes, to the rescue of Thoho. But they were similarly sent packing, and, like Thoho, were unyielding and continued to come back either for a boot or a baton-punch or at times, both kick and punch, until all three were bleeding profusely from their mouths. They were unarmed whereas he was — well-armed: but then they were armed with one of the most persistent weapons: guts. They kept on charging, singly as well as collectively; and were thrashed respectively. It seemed the mini massacre would never end.

They were surely made of sterner stuff — perhaps rubber, for they kept on bouncing back onto their feet each time

they were grounded. Then it struck 4-by-5's mind that there was one particular spot in which man was both the strongest as well as weakest.

'Grab his balls, Thoho. Grab them!' she shouted.

She couldn't have spoken sooner for Thoho, always good on the ear, dived head straight towards the law's balls, got hold of them, and amid piercing screams of anguish began squeezing them as if they were mere oranges. Just then the other two threw themselves onto the slavecop and started scratching, biting, kicking and squeezing him unmercifully. The Runner, who by now was about to lose consciousness, got up groggily. Fatso coaxed him to give the torturer a goodbye kick and a punch too before he scuttled out of sight. The Runner obliged, and a kick from him sent the lawman into sleep. Thoho would still not release his groin-grip.

'Come on, gents, leave the dog alone now. We've moered him enough,' 4-by-5 argued.

'No!' protested Thoho. 'We've only just begun —'

The Runner landed another kick in the face . . .

'Hey, we're not sadists, let go of him now. And what's more, other women still need his services,' 4-by-5 retorted.

Yet Thoho was unrepentant. 'I must have him taste his own beetroot too,' he said, punching the man with his unoccupied left hand.

'Well, if this bugger gets up he's going to moer us again; or his chommies will get here and bliksem us to pieces. And you Thoho, stop playing Jack Palance, Me-Myself-and-All-The-Barbarians-Under-My-Command. This is not the bioscope, jong. It's real. Let's go. And this is for the last time!'

The threatening tone in her voice was enough of a command, and off they ran, in a comical manner, through the quiet streets and unpeopled alleys.

Unbeknown to them, earlier on, a passing tourist with a camera, equipped with an alert eye for photographic material, captured the assault on Thoho through a telephoto lens. Ready-made front page material for a morning newspaper.

LAWMAN ON THE ATTACK screamed the headline to the brutally chilling photograph of the hoboies being pulverised by the law. It appears that the passing amateur photographer was so disgusted by what he had filmed that he felt he could not let this apparent abuse of power go past unrecorded and unexposed.

However the whole front page seemed ridiculous — probably the work of a crank. Next to this blood-curdling photographic masterpiece was the first-class journalistic manure of an upper-class 'madam' boasting about how she loved sleeping with her sweet bitch; and how she loved sending it weekly for shampooing and the like, to a private exclusive vet. Below that story ran another equally stinking cowdung story in which a certain slave master croaked about how great the master race was, and how slaves were kept in bondage until Kingdom Come, oblivious of the fact that as far as the slaves were concerned, Kingdom Come had come — and landed heavily and unmercifully on their heads. They were now awaiting the Utopian hell, because at least it was unknown, exciting, and thirdly, uncontrolled by the pure master race.

And to crown it all, there was another brag by the President of State and Other Affairs (not in the political dictionary) — so paranoiac that he even suspected his house serf of being the secret agent of an unknown underground movement, not yet detected by the see-all-hear-all-but-catch-nobody intelligence section — that the future of the southern tip of Africa South would not be settled around a conference table, but rather, in a public convenience. Or, to use the people's lingo, in a loo for all races and sexes.

However, at the other side of the town, in the village of a supposedly black national reserve bantu-pendence, a 'state



president' sent out his henchmen to demand R5 from each and every household as a donation towards the marriage of his daughter to the son of another puppet of a bundu regime, labelling the occasion as a political breakthrough between two African states. And the local bush university, operated by remote control from Pretoria, hundreds of kilometres away, honoured him with an honorary doctorate in law, for the honourable leader's humanitarian services to all mankind, in particular the small nation of 500 000 in this region. This is what our forefathers themselves wanted and fought for. A piece of ground. Thus read the citation decorated with spelling and grammatical errors.

'It can't be! Father! My long-lost Baba!' a man exclaimed in the simple hut of the village headman and only teacher in the area. He could not believe his eyes when he saw the photograph in the morning newspaper. He didn't waste a moment — he jumped into his coughing family car, after having informed his three mothers that he was driving as fast as he could to Johannesburg, to search for his father. For one of the hoboes bore an uncanny resemblance to the man his blood Mother always told him of — especially the scar on the man's forehead inflicted during a clash with police over the dombook in the Dinokana area, many, many years ago. The only tying up left for him to do now was to verify whether

the man in question was really his lost father, because the whole village had also been awaiting his role in chieftaincy — ever since he had lost his mind after going to Johannesburg to visit relations there.

The newspaper photograph had set a son afire. He was ablaze with hope, and his face beamed like Mr Sunbeam's, perhaps rather more with feeling. It was almost sensual. Ooh, it was like being born again. Not in a biblical sense. Biologically? Maybe . . .

And in his haste, the Son collected several speeding fines totalling R150, but that still didn't deter him nor dampen his spirits. He was on his way to find his father, and no man or dog was going to come between Father and Son. 'He was alive! I knew it; I always believed it!' the Son kept on muttering to himself even though the traffic officer on the main national road leading into Johannesburg a few minutes drive away, was slowly scrawling out yet another traffic fine.

On reaching Johannesburg, he drove straight to the traffic department's scrapyards, making quick inquiries about the hoboes who frequented the northern wing, but without any success. In fact most of his questions either drew a blank or hopeless answers, mainly because he was too excited and panting too heavily to be coherent in his speech. He was babbling rather than speaking. They are all a bunch of bastards — all damn stupid asses, he said to himself after having run out of both ideas and stamina. He had had it. He then drove slowly and dejectedly without any specific direction, and inevitably found himself in Hillbrow, almost knocking down a jaywalking hobo. That shook him up immediately. 'Excuse me, can you please help me —'

'Fuck off — help yourself in your car. Leave me alone.' And the chap was gone before the Son could even explain his important mission to him.

Without thinking, he drove down what he thought was a narrow street, actually an alley, and came face to face with a singing group of 'cats'. They were boozing, and jiving. It was a bizarre scene — both visually and aurally. The group was singing a topical ghetto historical piece, even providing their own percussion on dustbin lids coupled with empty beer cans. And rhythm flowed so naturally; they had the beat amid the heat. They chanted drunkenly, rhythmically:

*A huna vbudzulo
a huna vbulalo
ri do ita bandi?
Kha ri lwe!*

*A huna mishumo
a huna mulalo
ri do ita bani?
Kha ri lwe*

The song was too familiar to the Son. This was yet another commentary on the slave-situation by the people's scribe, Maano, and the Son rammed on the breaks, jumped out, and dashed straight at the bewildered group. By some unexplained stroke of nature, Father and Son recognised each other like thirsty young lovers who had been told they had a few minutes to live . . .

'But, Son, I can't leave my comrades behind. We live and eat and sleep together,' the Father began arguing.

'That's no problem, then. Then that's fixed. We'll all return home.'

'What did you say?' 4-by-5 wanted to know.

'My Son here — my own flesh and blood — has come to fetch us — all three of us — and take us home. What do you say to that?'

'Come on, let's go then!' was the unanimous reply. While driving back, the Comrades Trio resumed their song about: *no place to stay; no place to sleep; what are we to do? Let's fight; no jobs; no peace; what are we to do? Let's fight.*

Surely, ancestral spirits were on the move behind the scenes, motivating, rearranging the course of events, re-directing the destiny of not only Father and Son, but also of a beleaguered people. The gutsy sounds of mhalamhala were

running through the blood vessels of the comrades; through the restless blood circulation of the Son. It was just no coincidence: it had been planned, long planned by the badzimo. There was much work to be done, and it was such important work it could be done only with dedication, by an unselfish group of people without any hangups whatsoever, and according to the amadlozi, the Comrades Trio and Son fitted the requirement like a glove.

The first obstacle was to deal with — perhaps topple — the tyrannical puppet, after which the people would decide what to do next. That was the Son's suggestion, accepted without any deliberation: that tyranny was the order of the day for the masses was not the real issue, only how to deal with it.

Fatso pondered: 'Unzima lomthwalo, comrades, but nevertheless it is not insurmountable.'

'We've only got to be united, then we'll be a formidable force against the evil forces,' 4-by-5 philosophised.

'However,' reacted the Father, 'we should be careful about being over-hasty.'

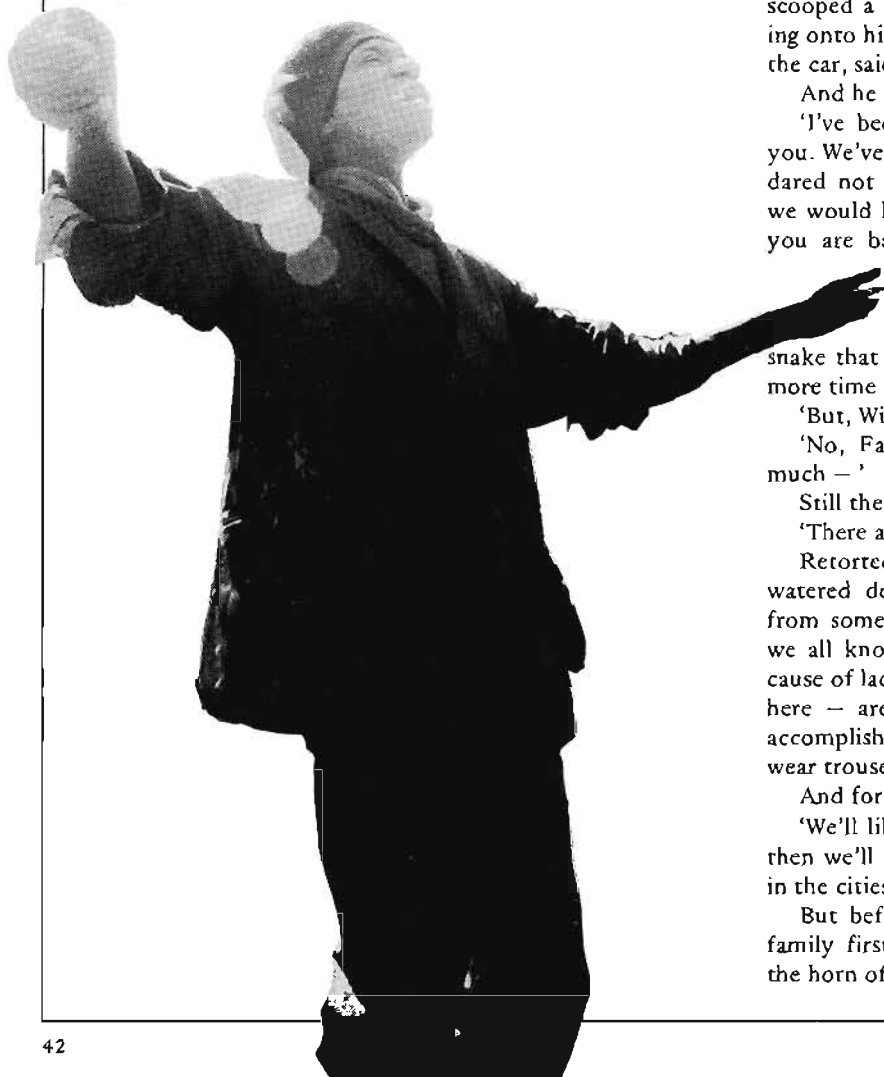
'You're wrong, Father,' said the Son politely. 'Freedom does not wait for anybody.'

'You gotta grab it with both hands before it slips out of your grasp forever,' Fatso retorted.

'Yes, because . . .', then she started singing in a surprisingly sweet and inspired voice:

*'Hayi umkbulu lomsebenzi
unsebenzi wenkululeko
u-Mandela ufuna amajoni
amajoni enkululeko
naba oSamora bafuna amajoni
hayi amajoni obu bhanxa.'*

'Hey, 4-by-5,' an animated Father shouted, 'where the hell did you get that song. I think I like it — it's many years since I heard it.'



‘It was a bizarre scene. The group was singing a topical ghetto historical piece, providing their own percussion on dustbin lids and empty beer cans ...’

‘Oh, that’s nothing . . . this car trip reminds me of our drive to Pretoria, 20 000 of us women, with MaNgoyi leading us in the ’50s.’

Meanwhile . . . As the evening approached back at the Son’s village, the Village Sage, old and frail, had got up to the amazement of everybody, and performed what was to him a holy ritual he last performed many, many decades ago: blowing his mhalamhala. Within minutes, people from all over the village began trudging to the Main House, with lit natural torches in their hands; men, women and children. They came, one and all — as one. The Village Sage’s horn carried some tidings they reckoned, for the Old Man had been the natural advisor to the Son during his Father’s absence from his traditional inheritance of being the village chief.

On the other hand . . . as the Comrades Trio and Son approached the village, the Son firmly placed his palm on the mechanical horn, and when he removed his palm to avoid being a nuisance, he found that the hooter would not stop rooting: it was now on automatic! Try as he might the horn would not refrain from blowing, as if responding to the Old Man’s horn, because he had not stopped blowing either. Indeed the Old Man’s horn stopped only when the car had come to a standstill in front of him, amid the ululations from the maidens and mothers alike. And with a frenzied ibongi reciting the Father’s and clan’s history at record speed.

‘He’s backckckckckckckckckckckckckckckckckckck!!’ was all that the Old Man said, in a soft voice after he had motioned with his right hand for silence. Then he stepped forward, scooped a piece of umhlaba with his right hand, while holding onto his horn dearly, and when the Father climbed out of the car, said: ‘This is yours, my son. Retrieve it.’

And he did.

‘I’ve been waiting; we’ve been waiting all these years for you. We’ve been ready to go into battle for our rights, but we dared not do so without you, our traditional Head, because we would have invoked the wrath of the gods. But now that you are back with us once more, we can face up to the challenges before us, especially the arrogant one that each and every family household must pop out R5 in two days’ time, to that despicable snake that is giving us hell. Now that you’re back, there’s no more time to waste; we’ll attack tonight.’

‘But, Wise Father, don’t you think that is too risky?’

‘No, Father: we’ve had enough. We can only take this much —’

Still the Father was not absolutely convinced.

‘There are mostly women here and . . .’

Retorted 4-by-5 in her old defiant tone, which she quickly watered down on observing the expressions of disapproval from some of the mothers next to the Village Sage: ‘Chief, we all know that a battle can’t be delayed indefinitely because of lack of adequate equipment: we ourselves — all of us here — are sufficient weapons to do anything we aim to accomplish. And another thing — liberation does not only wear trousers, it also happens to wear a dress.’

And for that, 4-by-5 received a thunderous applause.

‘We’ll liberate ourselves,’ said the Old Man excitedly, ‘and then we’ll march further and liberate our brothers and sisters in the cities too.’

But before that, the Father had to be reunited with his family first while he awaited the sounding of mhalamhala, the horn of Afrika, and . . . ppfff . . . puudududuuu . . . ■

POLITICS AND LITERATURE IN AFRICA: A REVIEW

African writing has become synonymous with politics in the minds of many. There's nothing wrong with that. Africa's most pressing problems are political and any writing that professes to come to grips with Africa today cannot be other than political. We can look at such writing from two angles: First, the literature of the countries under white domination; secondly, the literature of independent Africa.

POLITICS OF RESISTANCE:

This kind of literature thrives in plural societies where Africans live or have lived under a white-settler minority regime. It was common in East Africa; it persists in Southern Africa.

Ngugi wa Thiong'o is probably the leading exponent of such writing in East Africa. His first published novel, *Weep Not Child*, is based on the Mau Mau emergency. Since he's looking back after independence he's able to go beyond cataloguing mere grievances and events, and concentrates on character and relationships. He re-enacts the tension of the whole war situation within a single family and shows how events from without contribute towards creating strained relations. *A Grain of Wheat*, considered by many to be Ngugi's best novel, is set in the early days of Kenya's independence but actually takes us back to the era of the Mau Mau. It is structurally more complex and linguistically more sophisticated than any of Ngugi's other novels. The novel gradually unfolds towards an understanding of Ngotho's mysterious character and an exposure of Waiyaki's betrayer, one of the leaders of the Mau Mau. Ngugi manages to show the effects the long years of struggle have produced on contemporary Kenyans: shame, guilt, fear, suspicion and so on.

Godwin Wachira's *Ordeal in the Forest* is also based on the Mau Mau revolution. Wachira depicts the ordeal of five boys, who are hounded out of their homes and forced to flee school in order to join the freedom fighters in the forest.

This kind of writing is now of historical interest to East Africans and it is highly probable that less and less will be heard about the Mau Mau era. But the issue of white domination is still a burning one in southern Africa, hence most of the literature in this region focuses on the problem.

The opening of Alex La Guma's *In the Fog of a Season's End* shows the polarization of political attitudes between black and white in South Africa. The black and white views appear irreconcilable. The white Major of the Special Branch addresses his prisoner in the following paternalistic terms:

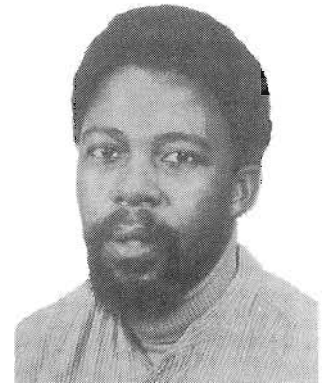
I do not understand the ingratitude of your people . . . Look at what we, our Government, have done for your people. We have given you nice jobs, houses, education. Education, ja. Take education for instance. We have allowed you people to get education, your own special schools, but you are not satisfied. No, you want more than what you get. I have heard that some of your young people even want to learn mathematics.

The prisoner replies in the following uncompromising terms:

You want me to co-operate. You have shot my people when they have protested against unjust treatment; you have torn people from their homes, imprisoned them, not for stealing or murder, but for not having your permission to live. Our children live in rags and die of hunger. And you want me to co-operate with you? It is not possible.

Predictably, the black man in the novel is imprisoned and locked up and that marks the end to the dialogue. La Guma gives this instance as the background to black guerilla resistance in South Africa, which is the subject of his novel. His

This article by the author of *Mzala* (Staffrider Series No 5) is part of a longer paper in which he also discusses the question of literature and culture. Mbulelo Mzamane is currently preparing a thesis on South African writing at Sheffield University in England. He is also writing his first novel.



other works *And A Threefold Cord*, *A Walk in the Night* and *The Stone Country* are also concerned with the conditions under which the blacks of South Africa live.

In *A Night of their Own* Peter Abrahams, though with considerably less skill than La Guma, also deals with political resistance to white oppression. He's as much concerned with the fate of blacks as with that of whites. His novel, however, suffers as creative writing because of his over-reliance upon real events. The South African situation has provided him with ready-made plots like the so-called Durban riots, the Sharpeville massacre, the Rivonia trial and so on. The novel turns documentary. His characterization here, as in his other novels, suffers because he compels his characters to stand for his ideas. His technique as a novelist in general is deficient, but his value as a pioneer and an inspiration in the field of African literature has been acknowledged by such prominent writers as Ngugi and Mphahlele.

Dennis Brutus, one of the most prolific poets South Africa has produced, evokes the hardships under which the blacks in South Africa live. The predominant image in his poetry is that of the forces of oppression; police batons, sirens, prisons and so forth. Though Brutus can be very depressing he never completely desponds. In a poem like 'Somehow We Survive' the sense of life amidst oppression and the will to live are very strong. *Letters to Martha* are poems which primarily deal with his experiences as a political prisoner on Robben Island. They're characterized, in Daniel Abasiakon's words, by 'vigour, integrity and defiant hopefulness.' His other poetry publications are *Sirens*, *Knuckles*, *Boots*, *A Simple Lust* and *Poems from Algiers*.

Keorapetse Kgositsile says he hopes by his revolutionary poetry to bring together blacks everywhere. His poetry, as in *My Name is Afrika*, shows signs of Afro-American influences. His other poetry publications include *Spirits Unchanged* and *For Melba: Poems*.

Richard Rive is known more for his novel, *Emergency* (about the political upheavals of the sixties) and as a short story writer than as a poet. 'Where the Rainbow Ends' is an expression of his firm commitment to non-racialism. He demands an equal place under the non-racial sun:

*Where the rainbow ends
There's going to be a place, brother,
Where the world can sing all sorts of songs,
and we're going to sing together, brother,
You and I, though you're white and I'm not
It's going to be a sad song, brother,
Because we don't know the tune
And it's a difficult tune to learn,
But we can learn brother, you and I,
There's no such tune as a black tune.
There's no such tune as a white tune.*

*There's only music, brother,
And it's music we're going to sing
Where the rainbow ends.*

Stephen Smith's poetry (and the rest of the poems in *Black Voices Shout*) is meant to arouse his fellow blacks to more positive action, not necessarily to a violent uprising as his detractors are inclined to think. He is, like most of the emerging black poets, an inward-looking poet who addresses himself primarily to his fellow blacks:

*You buy
Stupid
Black Power Stickers
Which you think
will bring about
A change
A change of what
I don't know
You greet each other
Screaming 'Power'
which you label
The Black Tradition
But you sit on your arses
Accepting the white
Slave-trader act
I tell you brother
You're a fool.*

POLITICS OF RECONSTRUCTION

This is the kind of literature that's commonest in independent Africa; it is an area in which the West Africans excel. The purpose of the literature in this category is reconstruction. The writers who undertake such a task mean to serve as the consciences of their respective peoples. They're usually unsparing in their criticism of their own political institutions. Such are the writings of Armah, Achebe, Aluko and Okara in West Africa; Rubadiri and Serumaga in East Africa.

Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is a scathing attack on the black political opportunists who, while they live in very great comfort, make everybody else's life miserable. The novel explains the disillusionment among Ghanaians which led to Nkrumah's coup. One need only comment on what is perhaps the novel's most misunderstood feature, to bring out Armah's technique as well as his strength. The novel abounds with images of putrefaction, excreta and vomit as well as with the expletives of the type — 'Your mother's rotten cunt.' The technique brings out in no uncertain terms Armah's disgust with the System. The corruption, the living conditions and the general decadence all around him are abominable. The language is fittingly shocking, suitable, that is, to the subject.

His other novels, *Fragments* (also an attack on corrupt politicians) and *Why are we so Blest?* (about a young African intellectual's problems) are written in an equally erudite style which reminds one very much of Soyinka.

Though Achebe's technique differs from Armah's, his novel, *A Man of the People*, has the same theme as *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The unprincipled, opportunistic politician, Komsoon, in Armah's novel is Chief Nanga's counterpart in *A Man of the People*; the protagonists of both novels are alike in their opposition to corruption and in their impotent rage. Both novels culminate in the overthrow of the detestable regimes.

David Rubadiri's novel, *No Bride Price*, like Achebe's *A Man of the People*, also predicts the era of coups and military take-overs in East Africa. It is about Lombe's disillusioning experiences as a civil servant under a corrupt government until a coup finally topples the government. Rubadiri is also a poet whose poetry is concerned with the problem of

“All these writers are viewing, as though through a lens, Africa's most pressing problems, magnifying them for all to see.”

adjustment in a continent recently freed from white domination.

Another novel which is concerned with the problem of government in Africa is Timothy Aluko's *Chief, the Honourable Minister*. Aluko has largely modelled himself after Achebe, as have most West African novelists. His *Kinsman and Foreman* is about corruption and nepotism, like Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. His hero, like Achebe's, must withstand the claims of relatives and clansmen for favours. Another novel, *One Man One Matchet*, deals with the problem of resistance to change among traditionalists.

A slightly different novel is Gabriel Okara's *The Voice*. In the novel Okolo seeks to vindicate his integrity — this is the meaning of his search for 'it' — in a world marked by wickedness and corruption. He sees his society's disintegration as a product of moral degeneracy and materialism. A most interesting aspect of the book is its language. Okara attempts to reproduce Ijaw speech inflexions in his English, as when he writes:

I am — I mean — we are soft-hearted people, soft like water . . . Our insides are soft like water even if you say our insides are filled with stone. Our eyes too are soft and they cannot fall on suffering. We have been turning it even in our insides since you threw your back at us and left. Our biggest son, Abadi, has been telling me an English saying, which I agree fits you, and that saying is that when I do not see you, you will not be in my inside.

Inherent in Okara's writing, especially in his poetry, is a lament for the loss of Africa's innocence, expressed in a poem like 'Once Upon A Time'. 'The Call of the River Nun' which won the Nigerian Festival of Arts Award in 1953, is a search for roots and a glorification of the African past in Negritude fashion.

Soyinka's *The Interpreters* is about a group of disillusioned young intellectuals trying to come to terms with an exceedingly exasperating world of corrupt politicians, gross inefficiency, religious charlatans and affected academics (who say 'meral' when they mean 'moral'). The book is often spoilt by Soyinka's delight in verbiage. His story may be complex, his characters may be very sophisticated and profound thinkers even, but the novel doesn't always benefit from the further obscurity imposed on it by the difficult language. Sometimes one is left with the impression that the author is merely proving his mastery over English, for which he's been highly praised.

Robert Serumaga's *Return to the Shadows* is based on the 1966 Ugandan crisis which led to the military confrontation between the forces of the Kabaka and Obote's. Serumaga's message is that tension in East Africa could easily culminate in bloody rivalry which would mark a return to the 'shadows' of the Mau Mau.

All these are writers viewing, as through a lens, Africa's most pressing political problems, magnifying them for all to see. Their purpose, as has been said, is clinical so that by focussing on these problems they hope that those in authority will heed their word and do something to remedy the situation. Their writings often keep pace with political events, so that a writer like Achebe has written about the early days of independence, the period immediately leading to the Nigerian coup and, more recently, in *Girls at War*, the Biafran war. This makes their work topical and relevant. ■

IN THE SUN

Continued from page 34

bus, taxi street, was deserted, except for lone lovers, hand in hand, walking to the stadium.

I saw the light gleaming through the curtains. The sun had long set. There were many people now in the yard. They were still drinking and laughing. I entered the yard, the light from my window, our window, told me that Lily had come back from work.

'How was your day?' she asked, leaning against the table, looking me in the eye.

'Okay,' I said, 'you?'

'Okay, I was tired though, when I came.' She looked at me.

'I waited for you to come, but after some time, I could not take being in the house.'

'Where did you go?'

'Spent some time with Mama, then I went to see John, and he and I went for a drive. When he went to Pretoria I came home.'

'How's mama?'

'She's okay,' I said, 'I think the old lady is a bit weary now.' Silence fell.

Lily was working her pots, dishes, cups, spoons and all that. I went to the record player. 'Members don't get weary . . .' Max Roach was saying.

'Have they heard anything about Fix?'

'Ja.' I thought of Mama. 'Ja, they have only heard that the security police wanted to know how many brothers Fix had.'

She looked at me. What could I say. 'Members don't get weary . . .' Roach kept saying. Otherwise, there was absolute silence. A comfortable silence, for I knew Lily and I, at that point, were tossed about, in search of what that question from the security police meant. 'Members don't get weary . . .' the singer kept saying.

In our silence Lily and I became closer. No, it was not silence at all. It was a knowing. Lily knew Fix through me. I came to know Fix more, through Lily. He used to talk to me about her. I know he used to talk to her about me. We used to talk, all of us, laugh, fear, cry, love together.

How many brothers or sisters did Fix have? My mother had asked: 'What has that to do with you?' They had said, 'We want to know and we have to

know.' And they wrote the number down. My mother had said to me, 'What have you all been doing?' She said it, or asked that question as if she had never known me, had never seen me before, would never ever guess what I could do. She had carried her arms folded on her bosom, looked at me, as if watching me carefully, every step, so she could protect her life, protect herself from me. She did not want to hurt. She did not want to be hurt by strangers, strangers don't care. She asked me 'What have you all been doing?' That was a hard question. I tried to think what we had been doing. What had I been doing, at least. I did not know. She had stared at me, with her eyes and her face. In silence, she had stared at me. At last I said, 'Mama, truly I do not know what I have been doing.' We had tea. Did not talk. I had to go, because the weight of the silence was too heavy for me. She had barely managed to say bye, when I shut the door behind me.

Lily gave me food. We ate in silence. The food was good. I did not know I was so hungry. After food, we had tea. We went to bed in silence. I remember how I clung to her. ■

EAST/WEST

Continued from page 38

instant dismissal. It took me a lot of effort to explain the situation and plead on your behalf. He has now communicated with the Prime Minister who has summoned a special meeting of the Cabinet in Pretoria to discuss the matter. As soon as I receive further information I shall contact you.'

The Colonel thanked the Brigadier, but as soon as he put the telephone down it rang again. It was a newspaper editor. In fact for the next hour the telephone went on ringing. Newspapermen wanted answers to several questions. Was it true that Yogi Satyananda had refused to leave Rosevale? Were the authorities going to accede to his demand and that of his supporters? Who was considering the matter? When would a decision be taken?

After answering the questions with as much equivocation as possible, the Colonel went towards the window and parted the curtains. The demonstrators seemed to have taken possession of Rosevale already: some were strolling along the tarmac driveways, others over the lawns, some had brought food and were picnicking under the trees, children were playing games. A group of robed men were sitting motionless under the giant oak tree, intoning the words of a ritual hymn. The atmosphere

seemed to be one of celebration.

The Colonel continued pacing his office. After the passage of two hours the Brigadier's telephone call came through: 'Order the evacuation of Security headquarters immediately. The Honourable Minister will soon be there by helicopter to hand over the keys at a formal ceremony.'

The Colonel immediately telephoned an officer to summon Ranjit, and inform everyone at Rosevale to start packing and to prepare to leave. As soon as Ranjit and several other yogis entered the office the Colonel informed them of the government's decision.

'Thank you very much, sir,' Ranjit said. 'Perhaps the decision is the result of Yogi Satyananda's communion with the supreme Reality.'

'I don't understand your religion,' the Colonel said. 'I am a practical, god-fearing Christian involved in day-to-day matters, especially matters connected with the security of the state. I shall be glad if you will tell your followers of the government's decision and get them ready to welcome the Honourable Minister who is on his way here by helicopter.'

'Please do not regard,' Ranjit said, 'the giving over of the former Good Shepherd's Convent to the yogis as a defeat on your part and the government's part, but as a victory of truth over the irrational. Indeed, let me congratulate you personally on your contribution to that victory.'

Ranjit and the other yogis shook

hands with the Colonel and left the office. Soon afterwards they saw a helicopter hovering over Rosevale, then slowly descend onto a stretch of lawn. Everyone crowded around the helicopter and the Honourable Minister emerged. In front of him he saw a band of men in saffron robes. On his left he saw several trucks laden with boxes, desks, cupboards, ready to leave. Then he saw Colonel van Dijk and a group of officials and officers appear from the entrance of Security headquarters and march towards him. The crowd made way for them. The Colonel saluted and handed the Honourable Minister a bunch of keys. The Colonel then signalled to Ranjit to come and stand close to him. The Honourable Minister began his speech:

'Ladies and gentlemen, in pursuance of my government's policy of fostering harmonious relations among the various races that make up the peoples of our beautiful country, I am proud to be given the opportunity of handing over the keys of the building in front of me to your most highly respected leader. It has always been my government's policy to grant every race complete religious freedom and in compliance with that policy to offer every possible assistance, whether moral, material or technological. It should always be appreciated by all of us that since our country is part of the great Christian, democratic free world . . .'

Meanwhile, in his cell, Borg meditated. ■

Reggae Rhythms

from Africa to the Caribbean - and back again

Reggae bloodlines run from Africa to the Caribbean and back again. Jamaica is free from the British and the Spanish invaders but not free from oppression. The rich are still rich and the pressure is always up. The city is too full - it balances on a thin wire - the reggae rhythms step down the street, lethal, spiritual and prophetic.

*Slave driver the tables are turning
Catch a fire you gonna get burned now
Every time I hear the crack of the whip
My blood runs cold . . .*

- Bob Marley

The inhabitants of Jamaica are descendants of African slaves. (The indigenous Arawak Indians became extinct soon after contact was made with Europeans.) Their ancestors were transported from the Gold and Ivory coasts in slave-ships and put to work on the sugar plantations, or sold to American buyers. The spirit of resistance was born amongst the slaves but the numerous uprisings were put down with force. A small band of renegades made it into the hills where they waged continual war against the planters who dominated the arable lands and reaped the rewards, growing rich and getting plenty sugar to sweeten their tea. Just when the struggle seemed lost, slavery was abolished by an act of grace from the British crown.

The gap between rich and poor worsened and the planters in their hill-top houses became fearful of the black man with the bush-knife held casually in his hands, courting the maid. So the colony was more troubled than it was worth and it was made independent in 1962. The Jamaicans inherited a crazy

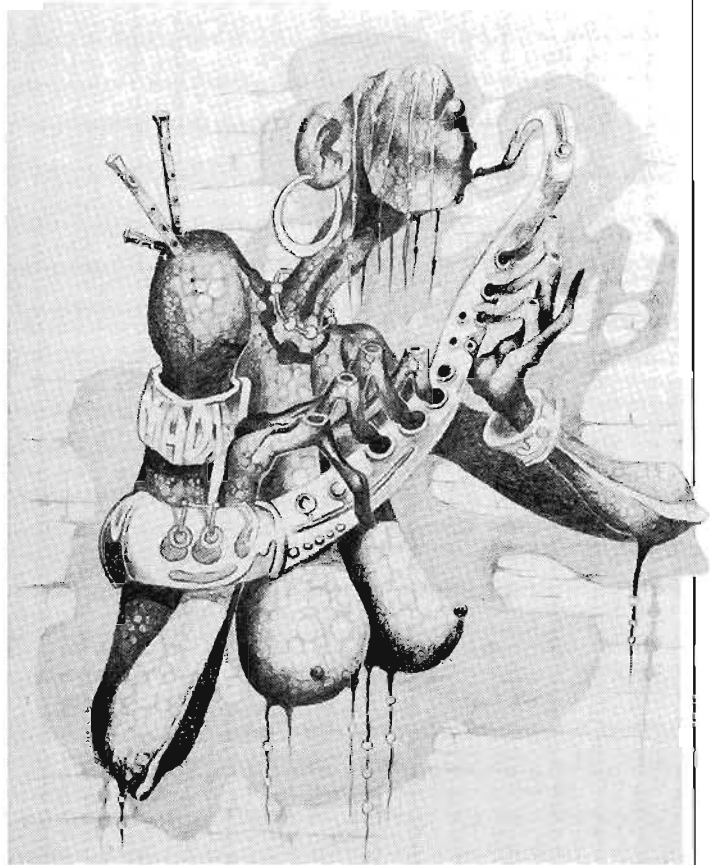
mixed-up land where poverty was a reality for the dispossessed. There began a gradual movement out of the hills and into town with its glittering chance of getting a Buick.

Town means Kingston with its shaded suburbs and spreading cardboard shantytowns. Life revolves around the street-corner or the local record shop, knife in pocket, rude boys rule. Political violence abounds as governments rise and fall amid a weak economy and a turbulent society. Harsh laws make the possession of firearms a mandatory life sentence and outlaw the use of ganja (dagga), the spiritual herb of the Rastafarians and source of money and guns for many others. Meanwhile the sound systems pump out reggae, the pulse beat of the people.

*Sound coming down the king's music
iron/ The rhythm just bubbling and
backfiring/ Raging and rising . . .*

- Linton Kwesi Johnson

The rhythm came from Africa with the slaves. Music is in the blood. With the influence of the radio, American rhythm & blues and soul, mobile disco's mushroomed. Music was the release from the pressure on the street. Sound system deejays began to record local music called ska. Fast, hypnotic riffs, a



*words by Chris Chapman
music by Madi Phala*

fusion of soul and African heart-beat, dance music to the core.

But ska was too fast for the summer heat so it slowed down to rocksteady until Toots Hibbert of Toots and the Maytals did a song called 'Do The Reggay' and the music of Jamaica became known as reggae.

'Reggae means regular people who are suffering. . . . Reggae means coming from the people, from majority,' explained the legendary Toots.

Social, political and spiritual concepts entered the lyrics of reggae, mainly due to the influence of Rastafari. Reggae musicians became Jamaica's prophets and high priests.

Rastafarians are the main cultural force in Jamaica today. The movement is the most recent expression of the history of suffering and resistance to domination of the black Jamaicans. It is a highly religious and revolutionary movement that hinges on the belief that redemption for the black man can only come through his return to Africa. It embodies the Ethiopian ideology that Ethiopians and Egyptians are one and the same race, both black, and creators of one of the world's greatest civilizations. Rastafarians worship Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia, who they believe was the living god according to the prophecies of Marcus

'Bob Marley is the black prince of reggae. He is a third world spokesman expressing the suffering and defiance of black people through the seductive rhythms of reggae.'

Garvey. According to Garvey, the white people have their own white gods. 'We negroes believe in the God of Ethiopia.'

Rastafarians are essentially peace-loving, they don't eat meat or drink alcohol. They grow their hair into dreadlocks following the instructions of the Old Testament. Locksmen are the warriors of Ethiopia. A central element in their spiritual belief and ritual is the ingestion of ganja. The most important exponents of reggae music are Rastafarians.

The ex-Prime Minister of Jamaica, Michael Manley, says of Rastafarians: 'Look around you and see what colonialism has done to a displaced people. Man has a deep need for a religious conviction and Rasta resolves the contradictions of a white man's God in a colonial society. They're a very beautiful and remarkable people.'

Bob Marley is the black prince of



Bob Marley at Rufaro, Zimbabwe Independence Celebrations, photo, Paul Weinberg

reggae. He is a Rastafarian, prophet of a nation, and inspiration to musicians all over the world. Bob is a third world spokesman expressing the suffering and defiance of black people through the seductive rhythms of reggae. His songs are anthems of violence and love, repression and liberation.

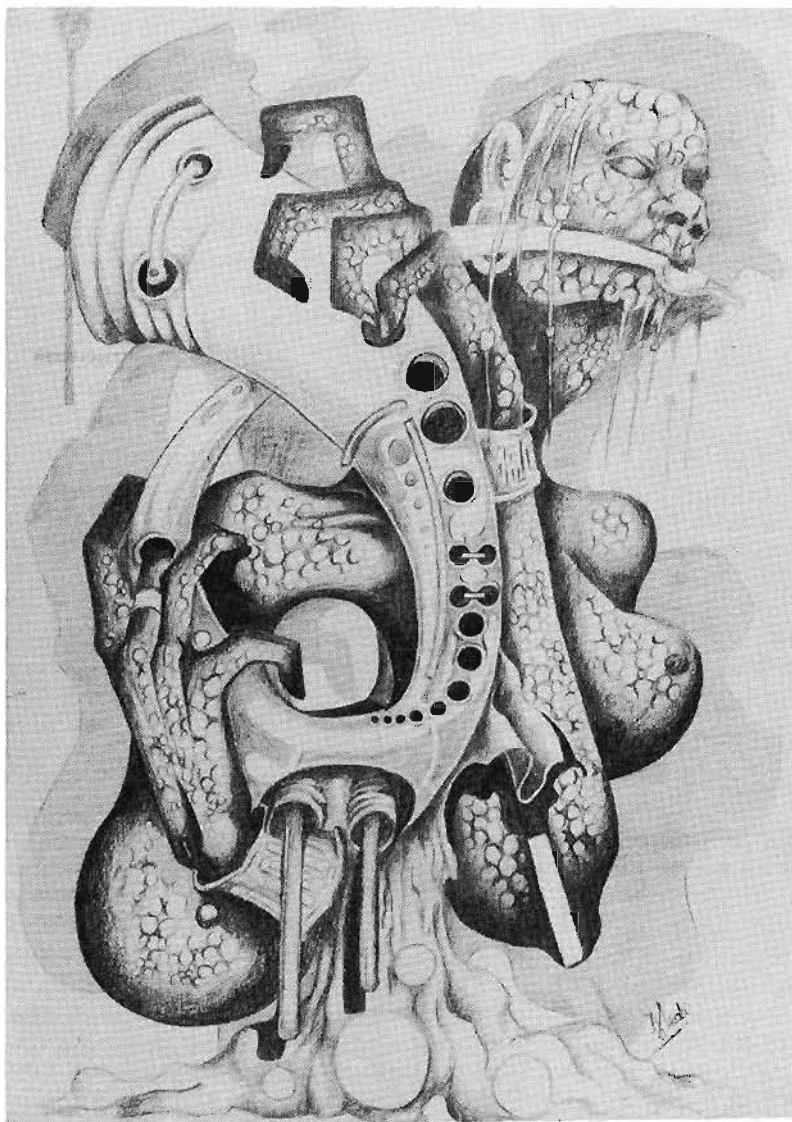
*Emancipate yourselves from mental
slavery
none but ourselves can free our minds
bave no fear for atomic energy
'cause none of them can stop the time
How long shall they kill our prophets
While we stand aside and look
Some say it's just a part of it
We've got to fulfill the book
Won't you help to sing
These songs of freedom
'cause all I ever heard
Redemption songs
Redemption songs...*

— Bob Marley

Marley grew up in a ghetto so he knows about poverty and the law of the razor. He was paid a total of £60 for his first six singles. When British musician Eric Clapton recorded 'I Shot The Sherriff' it became an international hit and Bob Marley became a household word from New York to Salisbury. By this time though he was already a legend in Jamaica. ('I Shot The Sherriff' was originally entitled 'I Shot The Police' but was changed to keep Bob out of trouble in Jamaica).

In 1976 Manley's socialist government called a general election and Marley agreed to appear at a mass rally in support. But three days before the rally two limousines pulled in to a band practice session and sprayed the entire Marley clan with machine-gun fire. Bob was hit in the arm and chest. A bullet glanced off his wife's head. Bob's manager, Don Taylor, took five bullets in the groin. Miraculously, no one was killed. The band performed at the rally three days later, some of them in bandages, and Manley was elected.

In 1980, reggae returned to Africa



'In 1980, Reggae returned to Africa, where its deepest roots lie.'

where its deepest roots lie. Bob Marley and the Wailers performed at the Zimbabwe Independence Day celebrations at Rufaro stadium before thousands of jubilant Zimbabweans. The prophecy was fulfilled, redemption at last.

Another reggae master, Jimmy Cliff, completed a controversial tour of South Africa earlier this year. (Marley refuses to set foot in South Africa until discrimination is wiped out.) Cliff was instrumental in breaking reggae music to the world with his role as Ivan O. Martin in the film 'The Harder They Come' which documents Jamaican street life and the archetypal struggle of the rude-boy to get his songs on the hit parade and thus climb out of the ghetto. The film ends when Ivan falls foul of the law, is betrayed by his friends, tries to jump a freighter to Cuba, misses the boat and dies laughing at the wrong end of a police gun. In real life Cliff left Jamaica to live in England and became a Muslim. Regarded as something of an outsider he is nevertheless a reggae musician of great importance.

Burning Spear do not sing of love or sex. They are a political, Rasta propaganda machine. The name is taken from the Burning Spear of Kenya, Jomo Kenyatta. Spear are a vital part of the reggae landscape and Winston Rodney is arguably the definitive reggae singer.

Cry blood cry Africa

No more invasion

No more black blood na go run inna river Jordan

Cry blood cry Africa

Free Africa cry blood . . .

— Burning Spear

DUB MUSIC

DUB is roots music, a kind of submarine form of reggae. It burned in the market places, the streets, the bloosdances. Deejays with princely names operated their sound systems right into the crowd — the latest soul disc from America or a local reggae band. To get the edge over his competitors, or just to whip up some enthusiasm, the on-the-spot jockey started jive-talking, shrieking, stirring up the atmosphere — pushing his system's output to greater heights.

The art of deejaying extended into the studio where the vocals on a record would be rubbed out and a 'jay' would punctuate the pre-recorded rhythm with

his own vocal interpretation. Dub is driven by a heavy bass sound so the people on the street could not miss the beat. The best deejays are I and I Rastafarians, preaching Jah love and Jah culture. U. Roy, Big Youth and Dillinger are dub prophets.

JAH RHYTHMS IN ENGLAND

England is a bitch . . .

— Linton Kwesi Johnson

Jah rhythms reached England via the West Indian immigrants. Reggae burns in the tenement houses of Brixton as the brethren search for work and meet the British workless head-on. Racism is not law but is often felt to exist. England is the heart of a giant rock-music industry and reggae music was very strange at first. The influence of the black men from the West Indies on the English culture was strongest on the music front.

The first kids to pick up on the off-beats of reggae were the skinheads, the bad boys who had a strong affinity with the Jamaican rude-boy, the ethos of which is an essential element in reggae. From there it took off and reggae carved inroads into the rock corporate machine and into the minds of a despairing nation.

Off-beats ruled by the end of the seventies. Bob Marley was completing a triumphant tour of Europe and England, supported on all concerts by an English pure reggae band, Steel Pulse. Peter Tosh was scorching at the Rainbow in London to a swaying crowd of West Indian and English fans, smoking giant spliffs shoulder to shoulder. 'No matter where you come from as long as you're a black man you're an African' sang Tosh with locks flying, shaking a large finger at the spellbound multitude, stalking panther-like down the stage-front, dagger in his waistband and a pair of handcuffs hanging uselessly from one

wrist.

In Brixton, a poor area in South London, a Jamaican immigrant and Rastafarian without locks, Linton Kwesi Johnson, was chanting the ancient rhythms of dub and getting heard.

And when reggae fused with punk rock it turned into a form of ska revival — fast skanking off-beats, a mutation that draws heavily on reggae roots, African roots. The saxophone licks belong in the jazz traditions of the townships — as the toasting belongs in a Kingston sound-system. The raw guitar belongs in the hands of the punk. Not only is the music a mixture of styles but the musicians are a mixture of races. Nothing new, but significant because the two-tone bands present a unified front, soul front, at a time when the evils of racism are rampant close to home.

JAMAICAN CONSERVATIVES

A landslide victory for the new conservative government in Jamaica's recent election could set back the Rastafari cultural movement on the island.

The new Prime Minister, Mr Edward Seaga, is unlikely to look kindly upon the anti-establishment anti-capitalist philosophies of the brethren, and their ganja-smoking rituals will cause alarm.

These policies are in contrast to former Prime Minister Michael Manley's interest and support for the rastamen.

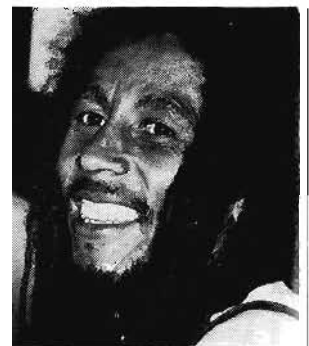
Manley's socialism and connection with Cuba have also been reversed by Seaga who is encouraging foreign investment and has already ended the Cuban influence.

But the conservatives will draw the fire of reggae musicians who have already infiltrated the world with their rhythms, and they won't like that.

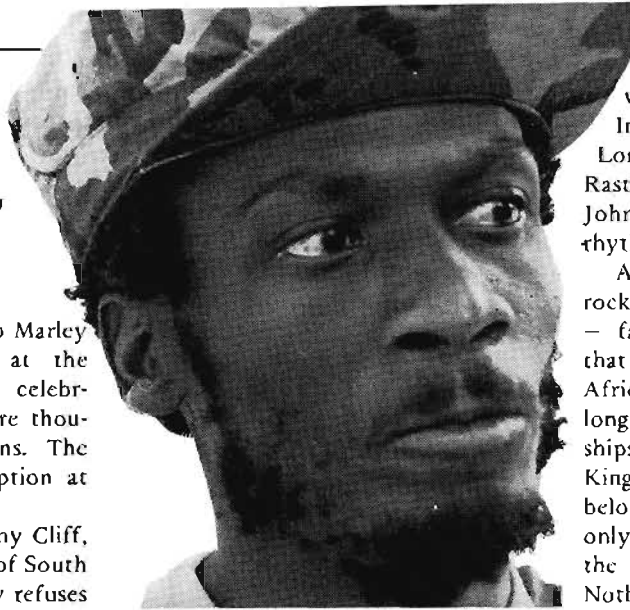
Shake dem locks and a weak heart drop.

STOP PRESS

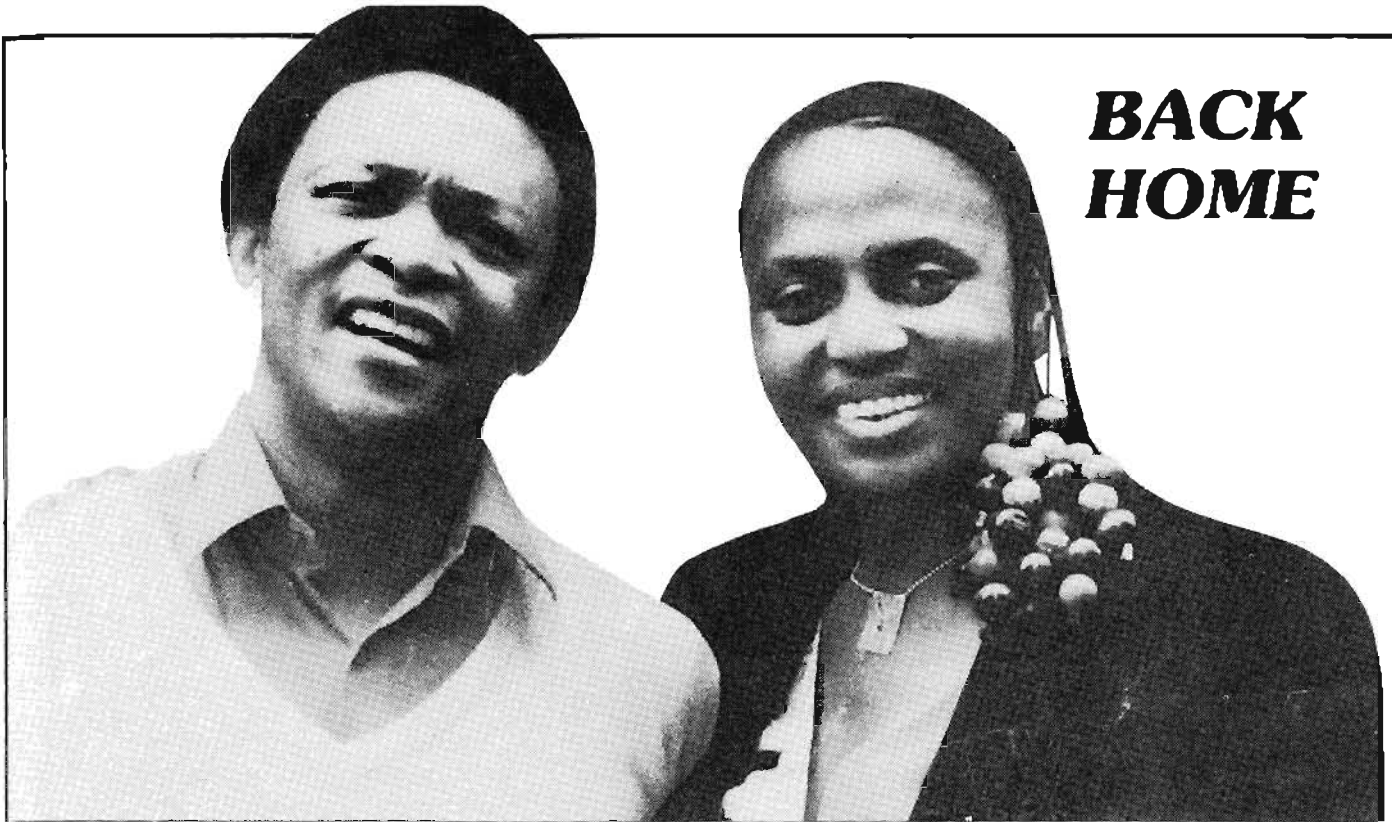
BOB MARLEY MAY HAVE CANCER.



At the time of going to press it had been reported that Bob Marley was critically ill, possibly with cancer. His London concert had been cancelled and his millions of fans the world over wait for news of his condition.



Jimmy Cliff, photo, Bidy Crewe



**BACK
HOME**

**MIRIAM MAKEBA
HUGH MASEKELA**

**Also Harari • Spirits Rejoice and Joy
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On Saturday, 7 February 1981.
Photographic exhibition, book display, music, a film on Alex – past and present – slide-tape shows, including people's resistance in the 1950s, and plays by Junction Avenue Theatre Company and Soyikwa. Watch press for further details.



Frider Gallery
A tribute to Ralph Ndawo

Azanian Love Song

Like a tall oak
I lift my arms to catch the wind
with bruised fingers,
and somewhere in the ghetto
a Child is born,
a mother's anxiety and pain
hide in a forest of hope.

Like a straight pine
I point my finger at God
counting a million scars
on my dreams
and somewhere in the ghetto

a Child is weeping,
a woman writes her legacy
on leaves of despair.

Like a weeping willow
I drop my soul into a pool of fire
somewhere in a dark sanctuary
I hear the sound of a Freedom Song

The Child has risen
and walks defiantly
towards the lion's lair
undaunted, unafraid . . .

Omarrudin