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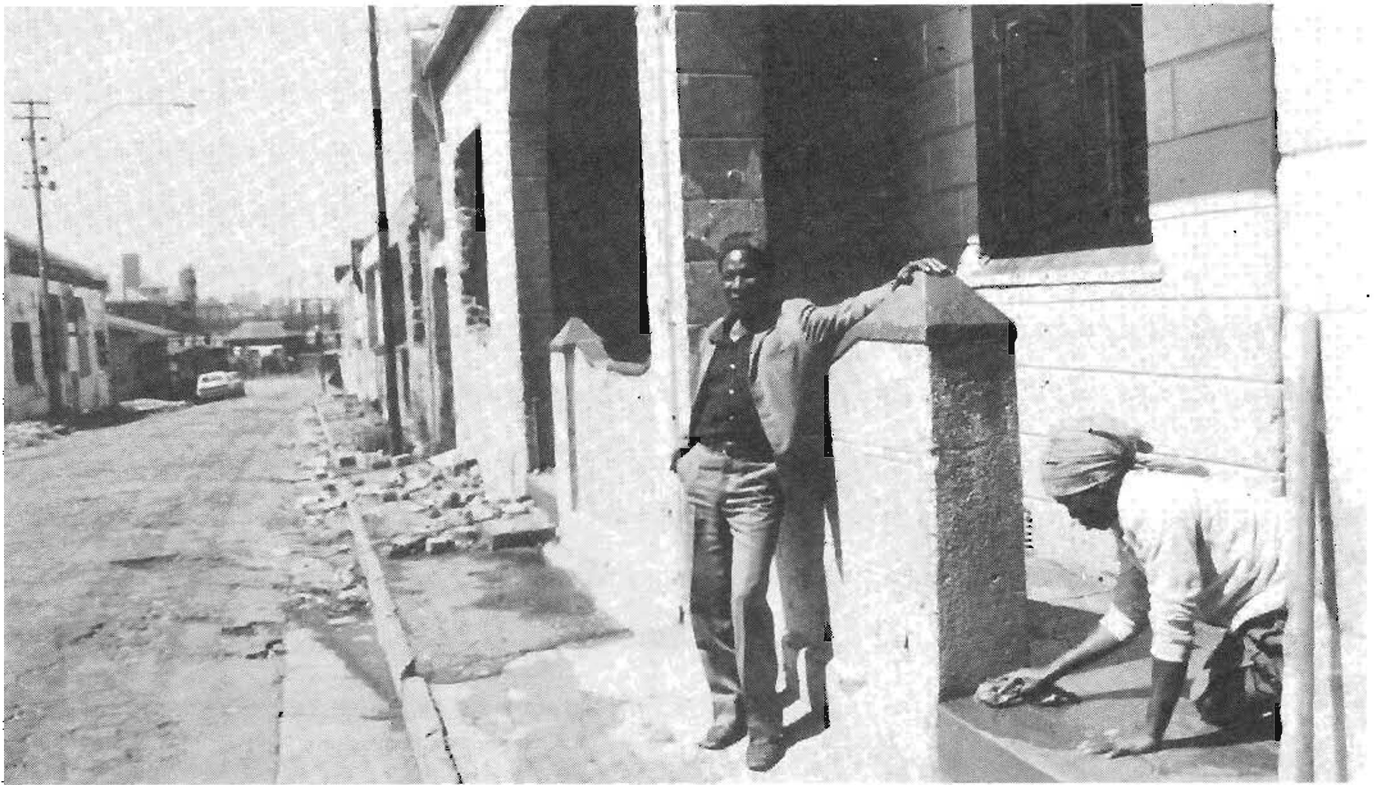

Biddy Partridge

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BRA LUKE OF SOPHIATOWN

AN INTERVIEW BY MIRIAM TLALI

'Bra Luke remembers the police harassments, the drinking parties and the police corruption which achieved very little by way of crime prevention and gangsterism.'

Bra-Luke is a proud Johannesburg-born-and-bred man now in his late sixties. To him, the word 'home' refers to no better place than the townships of Kofifi, Madlera, Thulandivile (or 'Die Kas').

He speaks impeccable English with the eloquence of a scholar and quotes whole passages from writings of great English masters. It is no wonder that those who know him have nicknamed him 'Die Philosopher'.

Come rain or shine, he can be seen early in the morning strutting slowly along Rockville's Lekhooa Street, leaning carefully on his walking stick. With a beaming smile, he greets everyone on either side of the street, wishing them a good day and occasionally making a joke — 'About what?' I can almost hear the reader ask. The answer is: 'Current Affairs' (with a capital C.A.)! Bra-Luke is so well informed that he can indulge in almost any topic you can think of. He prides himself on being friendly to everyone. He remarks:

I enjoy everyone's good company. Anyone who's prepared to extend his hospitality to me. Even a *policeman!* he adds, laughing loudly. I often sit and enjoy a good smoke or a good drink at the shebeens. I can't refuse on the grounds that I'll be reported to be an *informer*. If anyone says that I am an informer, he'll have to prove it.

But the 'Philosopher' is at his best when he speaks of Kofifi . . . the black complex of Sophiatown, as it was popularly known. He remembers how the greedy encroaching whites cast their envious stares on the black townships — their nearness to the City centre whetted their appetites. The white residential areas spread on the outskirts of Johannesburg engulfing the black townships and extended for miles beyond them. These were the poorer classes (mainly Afrikaners) many of whom had cast the decisive votes in the elections of 1948 and thereby ushered in the Nationalist Government. They swore as they passed from Newlands into Westdene and Mayfair that they would never rest until every black person had been weeded out and flung right out of Johannesburg.

Bra-Luke remembers how the feeling of resistance ran high and asks:

Jy onthou? Daai skoot toe sê ons 'ons daak nie; ons pola hie'? Toe sing ons daai song wat ou-Strike ga-compose het . . . 'Ons pola hie' Lanies-hulle was rielie-rielie desperate ga-wees, jy weet? They have a way of digging their nails in carrying out their greedy intentions in spite of all opposition. Hulle vat alles wat hulle wil vat . . . Bietjie-bietjie . . . stadig maar verseker.

We laugh and agree with him.

Like the sharp point of a needle — when it pierces the skin, you can't feel much pain until there follows the bigger end

We laugh loudly while he pauses and adds, speaking earnestly in Xhosa:

Kufuneka ku be na le ndawo e tsolo! (This sharp piercing end is an essential element!)

We continue to laugh.

Bra Luke *Photo Judas Ngwenya*

When I ask him where he stays he answers:

Emgababa. Near Housing Division — Moroka North. You can't get lost. They all know me. Even a small boy knows me. As jy net sê Boeta Luke, die teacher, hulle ken my alman. He — He — he-e-e-e-e!

He joins us in laughing.

Kofifi was onse town. Never mind alles: hy was onse 'kaya'. Life was really adventurous.

He remembers the police harassments, the drinking parties and the police corruption which achieved very little by way of crime prevention and gangsterism. He remembers the raids and continuous arrests when to be drunk was an offence.

Een dag ek ontmoet 'n chomi van my, hy's ga-neining (handcuffed). Ek vra: 'Ao mfo, wat is dit?' Hy sê: 'Ek weet nie; ek hoor hulle sê ek is dronk.' En ek lag.

We all laugh.

Hy mang (is taken into custody) maar hy sê hy weet nie! Die tyd toe ek by die shebeen kom en ons sit met so 'n ander ou, ons sien hy stap in — 'free'. Daai was Kofifi. Die ouens het gavostaan met die corpas (police corps).

He shakes his head when he thinks of what it is like to be black in this country.

He-e-e, jy kon kry 'n klein Laaitiekie van 'n nyoertjie of 'n Engelsman roep jou 'boy'. Or hulle underpay jou because they say: (He switches over to Sotho.) 'O senya chelete; e etsang ka eona?' 'Why waste money on him; what's *he* going to do with the money? I gave him a pair of trousers it's enough. His backside is not outside!'

Our laughter is deafening and he shakes his head.

He-e-e-e — Lanies (whites)! Jy weet, een dag ons is met so 'n laaitie by 'n shebeen and daar's so 'n groot man en *hy* sit langs en hy eet. Die laaitie sê: 'Jy weet, enige skoot ek sien 'n lanie — dit maak nie saak of hy 'n Engelsman of 'n Boer — ek gooi op!'

We laugh.

En die ou man skree vir hom hy sê: 'Sies! Ga o bone gore rea ja?' (Can't you see that we are eating?) Toe't ek hom vra: 'Hoekom?', hy sê: 'The way I hate them!'

He explains.

You see, it has developed from the political consciousness amongst the people — the complete hatred and enmity towards the whites. Gone are the days when a darkie used to say: 'E, Morena, Thobela, Kgosi, Mnumzana!' Today it's just 'Yes mister' and, if they say, 'Why do you call me mister?' you say: 'Why do you call me John?' (He shakes his head.) Dié lanies — Jy hoor hulle sê *hulle* is 'Africans' (Afrikaners). As long as the apparition suits their political purposes, it's theirs. *We* are no longer Africans, *they* are Africans. Jy hoor hulle sê ons is 'invaders', ons het hier gakom van die Noord af: dat *hulle* is die 'natives' van hie — die woord 'African' meen vir *hulle*. They say we walked across the continent; ons is what-you-call — ons is 'foreigners'!

He shakes his head again.

They try to make us fear them. Of course fear can disarm you. Even a small boy can scare you by looking at you and saying: 'Hei jong, chee my cheld!' (his eyeballs protrude out of their sockets making him look satanical) and make you shake with fear.

We laugh. He relates an incident.

Ndake ndabon' u-K — Jy weet hoe sterk was ou-K in Sophiatown. Daai ou, Motsepe — die gaol-bird. Hy't galyk soos ou Wallace Berry. Jy weet moes ou-Wallace Berry bo die films. Ek weet nie vir wie het hy gaslaan en ou-K hunt hom die hele town. Toe't hy hom kry, ons sit so en kyk. Ou-K vra hom: 'Ja, wat het jy gamaak?' Daai laaitie het so gamaak. (He pulls his hand quickly out of his pocket as if pulling out a weapon.) Hy haal uit iets uit sy sak uit, en hy kyk hom, hy sê: 'Is jou dood vandag K, ek votel jou!' Ou K skrik en hy sê somaar: 'Ek speel, my laaitie. (We laughed.) Ou-K surrender! (We laugh again.) En ou-K hol pa-pa-pa, dié kant-toe (He points, laughing) af Good Street En ou-K is sterk of course. Hy kon daai ou gamoer het, maar nou — Is die 'element of surprise' wat werk. Fear — *so* werk hy.

Soos wat hulle sê van ou-Sadat in Egypt. Ek hoor hulle sê toe hulle sê ta-ra-ra-ra — met die machine guns; ek hoor die body-guard van hom het ga-faint! — The element of surprise, so werk hy.

There's a long pause and Luke thinks of the days when he was a student at St Peters, Rosettenville.

He-e-e! Ek onthou St Peters, and u-S'dakwa (a drunken person) our Principal, Mr Darling. Ons het hom S'dakwa ganoem.

We laugh and ask: 'Why? Did he drink a lot?' and he replies:

Nee. It was just the way he walked and carried himself. Jy weet mos, boys will always be boys. They always give their teachers nicknames. The same thing applies to employers. Much later when I was working we called our boss 'Mhlathi'. It was fun being at High School. I was with such guys as Raboroko, Rabotapi, Tambo, Gama, Mokoena — all the big names. After I matriculated, I took a teaching Diploma. Due to lack of funds I could not go to Fort Hare. I started teaching. It was nice being a St Peterian and later being a teacher. We were respected and revered like teachers *should* be. These days, *no*. You'll hear a teacher ask a boy: 'You are back at your smoking again?' and the boy answers: 'Wat makeer met dié teacher, hy soek my op!'

We roar with laughter.

Bra-Luke compares the quality of life of the 30s and life in Soweto today.

He-e-e-e, kuyalanjw'e-Soweto! (People *starve* in Soweto). We no longer eat as we used to in Kofifi. (He pauses.) Well, there's no penny bread and penny liver. From a shilling you would eat and get satisfied. Now if you want food, forget — Never say never, Ayikh'nt'eyingapheli. (Everything comes to an end!)

He sings and quotes from a Negro spiritual.

Gone are the days
From the cotton fields I know
Gone are the friends
who were better
Than I know
I hear the gentle voices calling
Ol' black Joe

In my case it's 'poor ol' Luke!

It's sad, but we all laugh.

His thoughts go back to life in Kofifi.

Ek onthou bo die Inchcape Hall, die Bantu Men's Social Centre - Jy kom kry ons dans die slow fox-trot, die waltz en die Latin-American — Jy kom kry 'n mooi ousie lê op my bors. (And he stands up and tries to show how he used to do his thing, leaving his walking-stick leaning against the chair for a while. He stiffens his neck and faces upwards to the ceiling, his arms embracing an imaginary partner, and we all burst out laughing.) Daai was Kofifi — Die Kas en Madlera —
'n Uidi is 'n uidi —
'n 'Nqa is 'n 'nqa —
Is die way die town gaan,
Die Néne (Here) weet! (God knows). ■

Poetry

P.k. Chipeya

distant times

when distant times
wane with darkness
some will lose
the power of destiny and pride

i see then
the exiled expectations
coming again
floods too

claiming the demarcated zones.

P.K. Chipeya

buried abroad

restless souls
are those
interred in
foreign lands

where
the moon mourns
their wasted lives
in a seasonal
vigil

should history
one day
have them buried
in their own?

P.K. Chipeya

MOLAHLEGI MMUTLE

CEMETERY WITHOUT CROSSES

Azania's thirsty for my blood,
She lifts her lean hands Heaven-wards,
Her conquering call
Is for more and more blood.
Blood must flow at all costs,
The madness of her thirst
For my blood can't be tamed.

She sits cross-legged
On a flying carpet,
From which she points
Her magic wand at
Gugulethu,
Nyanga,
Sharpeville,
Langa,
Crossroads,
Soweto.

The eyes of her broken children
Have the cast of poor
Beasts in a trap.
Poor beasts they are
Awaiting the hunter's coup de grace

Oh, Azania, our fatherland,
You weave with freedom songs
Persian carpets for us to sit on;
Oh, Azania, our fatherland,
Your freedom sons are secret splendour
In the mansions of our souls;
Oh, Azania, our fatherland
You fan the sinking flame
In our souls with wings of Freedom.

Makhanda! you doddering superman
Throw your bones and tell us our fortune,
Tutu! Put your all into your sermons
And ask Him the Maker to cleave
The octopus' strangle.
Run your three-legged race
Prevent the grave-digger from
Digging more graves.
Enough is enough.

Sepamla, Mtshali, Serote, Kunene, Madingoane,
Don't die on your Poetry, man!
Where is the Spirit of Freedom?
Have you not heard
The footfalls of freedom?
Azania is filled with sound.

Oh, I hear Death-the-Redeemer's scream
Her dirge my soul hardly can resist
My wounds red as ripe pomegranates
I'll offer as inkwells
For Azania to dip her feather
And write my name
In the first chapter of History.

The grave digger rubs his hands
As though they are Aladdin's Lamp.
The centurions are throwing
Dice for my wretched soul
And Judas outstretches his
Withered hand for thirty pieces of silver.

The Black Maria I shall ride
As a chariot to
Avalon, Doornkop
Or any other cemetery without crosses.
But the grave is not
Deep enough to silence me.

AM I A SINNER?

A thousand sermons
By a thousand shaven priests
Can't absolve me.
A lake of fire might cleanse me
Of all impurities, of my
Love for a widow.

Under the eiderdown of the evening shadows
Perishing from hunger
I set out,
Climbed up and down
The narrow streets of desolate Soweto.

Smoke rises from chimneys,
People are cooking;
The aroma is carried
On the wings of the breeze.
And my entrails are drooping
Like naked grape clusters.

I drop anchor at White City Jabavu.
White City — The sanctuary of widows.
There, I cool my flaming lips
In the folds of a widow's breasts.
Isn't a widow's warmth the sweetest
Thing in the whole world?

Before the break of dawn
A thunderous knock
Rocks the little love nest.
Platters and pots clatter
Like the teeth of a waif
From the cold.

'Vula, Poisa, Vula!'
Breaks the silver cup of peace of mind.
The romance of widow and widower
Is strangled in its birth.

The door is kicked down
And a torch shines in our faces
The command: 'Permit, Baba Permit'.
I produce my 'Stinker'
My permit is for number 2194 Dube.

Like a recaptured slave
I am shackled and thrown into the 'Kwela-Kwela'
and we inmates are moaning
Like children lost in a busy market-place.

The kwela-kwela ferried us
To the pit of destruction
Where we awaited trial.
For fourteen days we shivered
And made friends with vipers
In the bottomless abyss of the damned.

From the depth of the hole
I could still recover
The echo of my beloved's voice:
'All love is one;
Whether it be for wife,
son,
mother
or

fatherland.'

MAMA NDIYALILA

An excerpt from a novella by Mothobi Mutloatse. Illustrations by Percy Sedumedi

At night before going to bed with a swollen and heavy heart, Maba did what she usually did whenever she was deeply hurt — turned to writing poetry.

She was depressed, but not too depressed to express her innermost feelings. She had to let them out, or else they would gnaw at her and, ultimately, kill her. Casually, slowly too, she wrote down the title, the first one that entered her boiling mind: *Mama Ndiyalila.*

She read it softly to herself; *Mama Ndiyalila.* She paused for a few seconds, and then the words came:

Mama, oh mama ndiyalila
I am crying mother
Oh, Mother Africa
I am crying for your breast
Your breast of comfort
Amidst these worldly obstacles
Amidst these human snares
Oh, Mother Africa
We shall seek you
We shall love you
Your children are crying
For your breast of comfort
Mama ndiyalila
For my dignity usurped
Mama ndiyalila
For my right to live
Mama ndiyalila
In peace and harmony
And, most of all, as free
as you have created me
Mother, O Mother Africa
Ndiyalila.

Before she knew what was happening, a stray, meek, tiny, quite innocent tear dropped onto the poem, as if saying: 'I am with you, sister, I am with you in this, your struggle.'

However, sleep would not come at all. She tried to cover her head with the blankets, but that did not help. It was as if she had been stripped naked by phantom hands for no apparent reason. For no apparent reason?

She nervously got out of bed, looked for the matches, lit the candle, and went back to sit on the bed. Thinking deeply about what could have caused her anguish.

Just then, there came an answer — from outside, in the sound of a hooter. The hooter of a familiar car. The car that she knew so well.

Instinctively she jumped up, ran like an athlete towards the bedroom window, and peeped through the curtains. There, waiting for her almost as if he had been there all along, was none other than Sifuna.

In that same battered car.

Maba didn't think twice. Love made her jump. It sent her bouncing towards Sifuna. In her flimsy nightdress.

She realised this during a passionate bout of kissing with Sifuna when an eager hand began naughtily creeping up her thighs towards that war centre of passion and creation. Quickly, she sat back, gently removing his hand and at the same time whispering tenderly: 'Not now, love. Tomorrow, I promise you.'

Sifuna did not persist because he could feel it in his bones and foreskin that she meant it. That she was not merely trying to avoid an issue or give another of her old excuses.

The next morning before she went to school, a much happier Maba went to the radiogram and played an album which Sifuna had lent her some months before, Louis Satchmo Armstrong's lilting version of *Let My People Go.* This morning, sunny with a fresh breeze, the tune began to have a strange effect on her. In her early morning reverie she saw herself as a female version of Moses on the mountain, commanded by the Almighty to deliver His message to the Laager President: let the Havenotians go free.

'Maba! Maba! The water is boiling, aren't you going to make us tea?' That was Mother. Did it disturb the young woman's fantasy? Or was it not a prophecy — that she would serve her people in their need?

'Yes, Ma, I'm coming,' she replied.

'If you don't do it now, you'll be late for school, and you'll delay us as well.'

'But, Ma . . . '

'That's enough, Maba. You'll play your records after school.'

'There is no after school, Ma, because . . . '

Mama appeared in the bedroom doorway: 'Please, Maba, let's not be enemies so early. What will the other children think of you if you start misbehaving?'

The appeal was so soft, so tender that Maba could not help smiling. 'Ah, you, Ma.'

She got up and went to the kitchen to do her usual morning thing, making tea for the family of six: her parents, herself, two brothers and a sister — all the other children in higher primary school.

As they were drinking their tea — the parents in the kitchen and the children in the crowded dining room of the four-roomed house — there came a knock on the door.

'Come in,' said the children in a chorus, and giggled.

Mother motioned them to be quiet by placing her palm on her lips, while Father pretended not to have heard anything, as fathers will.

The visitor was a neighbour — an ex-teacher, a balding little man with wisdom written in his grey hair. Mr Sovenga Mosa had resigned some fifteen years back in protest against the introduction of the offensive, inferior and sectional system of education imposed on the Havenotian people by the Laager minority.

The ex-teacher knew what the primary school issue was all about. For the past two years he had pleaded and begged the education authorities in the capital not to go ahead with their imposition of a medium of instruction which the young people recognised as the language of the oppressor.

He had argued that parents preferred English, since it was a universal language and certainly the lingua franca of the various Havenotian tribes. All his efforts were in vain. However, never at any stage did he give up, because he knew all their grievances against the rotten education system were justified. The objection to the language chosen for them was only one aspect of their discontent. Under it all ran the deepest resentment of all: Havenotian parents had not been consulted. Therefore, they were morally obliged to defy this dictatorial edict.

'Morning everybody,' Mr Mosa greeted cheerfully, and sat down on one of the chairs in the kitchen.

'Maba, come and pour your father tea,' said Mother.

She referred to Mr Mosa as 'father' because of Havenotian custom which said that all men were fathers to all children, that all women were mothers to all children, and that all children would address them as such. All elderly people, again, would regard all children as their own. In short, in the Havenotian society, there were, in the strict sense of the phrase, no strangers. Everybody was somebody and likewise, somebody was everybody's cousin. That is why it was customary for Havenotians to greet one another, irrespective of whether they knew each other or not. Strangely enough, it was during such exchanges that real cousins and relations were rediscovered.

'He would not change his statement: that only an educationist with ulterior motives would refuse to dismount from his high and mighty pedestal when he observed the chaos he was fomenting around himself.'

Mr Mosa, over a cup of hot tea, announced to Maba's parents that a parents' meeting over the language issue was going to be held at the nearby high school that very same evening at seven o'clock. Not long after he had given them this news, a boy came running to give Mr Mosa the urgent message that there was a notice pinned on one of the classroom doors.

The meeting had been banned as the chief magistrate feared that it would upset the maintenance of law and order.

'That does it. That just does it,' exclaimed a furious Mr Mosa. 'They won't even allow us to discuss the issue among ourselves. And they call this a democratic country. I will have to inform the Press about this.'

Father came out of his shell and said: 'You don't have to worry about that. They should have heard by now. If not, Maba can get in touch — or, better, Maba can show you where you can find Sifuna. He works for *The Globe*.'

In a firm voice Mr Mosa said: 'I know him . . . ' (He meant that he didn't think much of him.) 'Well, it seems I have no other alternative but to go to him. Okay Maba, let's go, child of my child.

'Yes, sir,' was the feeble response.

The two of them, Mr Mosa and Maba, footed it to Mr Mosa's house where he was to take his car and drive to Sifuna's. But bad news awaited him at his place; his distraught wife told him that five Laager detectives, accompanied by two Havenotian stooges, had been there looking for him. They had left a note for him which read:

Mr Savanga Musa, of 73635 Zone B. Kindly present yourself at the police station this morning at 9. Ask for Capt Sando in connection with a police matter. Please don't forget to take along your identity documents. Yours faithfully, Major [illegible].

All that Mr Mosa would say was: 'They can't even spell my name, the bastards!'

He looked at his wife, saw the fear in her eyes, and in the eyes of his five children.

'Excuse my language, Mother,' he said softly. 'Maba, let us go. Don't worry too much, Mother. I'll be okay,' he tried to assure his wife.

As he and Maba shuffled out of the house towards the car parked next to the house, the whole family followed their progress keenly. Something kept on telling them that they would not be seeing him for some time. The atmosphere was thick and tense. Even their goodbyes were so feeble, so empty and worried that Maba could not resist hiding her face in the palm of her hands. She felt that she and Mosa were like sheep going to the slaughter.

At the station they found the police waiting for them.

Captain K. K. Been, a hefty man with the features of a robust ruggerite, greeted Mr Mosa coldly. 'Morning Mr Musa. Oh, I see you've got an escort,' he said, and Mr Mosa got the sarcastic message loud and clear. He merely nodded his head.

'I'm sorry,' the captain went on, 'you'll be away from home for some time.' Turning to Maba, he said, 'Can you drive?'

'Yes,' she replied in an equally cold voice.

'Then you'll have to drive Mr Musa's car home.'

'She has no driving licence, and she is under age,' Mr Mosa intervened.

'I don't think that matters too much,' said the captain.

Mr Mosa looked at Maba and read the message in her eyes — that she was not afraid any longer and would be okay. He walked over to her calmly and gave her the car keys, then a warm handshake.

'Take care, Maba,' was all he said.

And heard her usual reply: 'Yes, sir. I will.'

She walked — no, marched confidently out of the captain's office, got into Mr Mosa's car, started it, and drove smoothly away from the police station towards her home. The driving lessons Sifuna had given her for the past nine months, in spite of her protests that she was too nervous to drive, were now proving their worth. She was thankful that Sifuna had been so adamant. The police station was only three kilometres from her neighbourhood, but before returning the car, she decided to touch her chairman, at school and relate to him what had happened, so that something could be done about the banned parents' meeting. As well as other matters, like the march.

After discussing the pros and cons of the whole school situation, Uyeza agreed with Sifuna that the march was inevitable in view of the intransigence of the authorities. A meeting of their executive would have to be held to thrash out the matter conclusively.

'I think tonight's all right,' Maba said.

'Don't you think it is too sudden?'

'Nothing is too sudden, because we don't want to be caught with our pants down. Nothing is too little in this struggle. Quick and decisive — they must not follow the example of our parents who should have stood firm when the system was first introduced.'

'Where will we hold this meeting — tonight, you say?'

'The usual place. After I've finished rehearsals. Can you perhaps get somebody to spread the word about the meeting while I return Mr Mosa's car? Courage!'

'Courage, Maba. Courage!'

The outcome of the meeting was short and decisive: their march would take place — seven days later. But this would be a top secret until the afternoon before the march, when all students would be informed by their respective representatives.

When Maba came out of the hall, Sifuna was waiting, as always. And Maba's heart missed a beat when she recalled what she had promised the previous evening.

This time, she had no excuse to give. But as soon as she entered the car, Sifuna told her that their appointment was now null and void because his news editor had assigned him to cover the story of ten miners who had been trapped during a rockfall in the world's deepest mine about 10 km away.

How relieved she was to hear of this! Her face lit up. She had once more escaped her moment of truth. And she didn't mind Sifuna caressing her intimately, more intimately than ever before.

Two, then three days passed without a word from the police, about Mr Mosa's whereabouts though his family asked repeatedly for permission to see him. They were told that he was not at the police station where he had been arrested, but at one of the other three in the complex. At all of these they had the same answer: he is not here, try elsewhere. It was a tedious affair, but the family would not give in. They feared that he might die a lonely and miserable death, as in the case of the unknown man who died of an unknown cause, in an unknown place, on an unknown date.

As a last resort the family, accompanied by Maba and Sifuna, went to the district headquarters of the police. There, in the dead of night, Sifuna had bribed a bored and lonely officer behind the counter. And they obtained in this way an unofficially official statement about Mr Mosa's whereabouts.

He had been taken to a remote police station — some 400 km away to the south-east — on the evening of his detention.

Theirs was an all-too familiar ghetto case, but at least the Mosa family had this consolation: they knew where he was. Unofficially, of course.

Theirs was typical of the psychological torture that was being inflicted on the families of those who had been taken away 'for their own good', as the upholders of law and order put it blandly.

For his own good! Removed from his beloved family for his own good! Divorced from the problems not of his own children alone, but also from the dilemmas and the struggle of all victims of the system! Some protection, that!

In one of the interrogation sessions Mr Mosa was grilled right round the clock. With different questioners every five hours. But he would not change his statement: that he abhorred an alien language when it was thrust down the throats of Havenotian children; that only a man with evil intentions would refuse to yield to overwhelming protests against this policy. That only an educationist with ulterior motives would refuse to dismount from his high and mighty pedestal when he observed the chaos he was fomenting around himself.

In Mr Mosa's last session with the chief of the interrogators, a Colonel, — the dialogue went:

COLONEL: Why can't you people ever say thank you for all the things we have been doing for you? Just once?

MOSA: That's easy — we are totally against things being done for us: we want to do things for ourselves. We wouldn't mind if you'd at least do things *with* us. We are not children, you know.

COLONEL: But look, you are educated, and this couldn't have been possible under a colonial — what do you call it — regime.

MOSA: Don't make me laugh, please — you didn't make me an educated human being. I am what I am because of my brains, and not because you have so decided.

Then an officer arrived with a tray of coffee, but the Colonel coldly motioned him to go away.

COLONEL: If only you people could say thank you for what we've done for you, then things would be all right.

MOSA: That sounds too simplistic. I don't buy that. Secondly we have nothing to be thankful for. You didn't bring us into this world, God did. And if there is one person we have to be thankful to, it's definitely Him. He created us. And for you to claim that you have made us what we are, is nothing short of blasphemy.

COLONEL: Watch what you say, you could get hurt.

MOSA: I don't mind that. I won't be the first, nor the last. Just like the late Dr Martin Luther King said . . .

COLONEL: Don't give me any of that communist rubbish . . .

MOSA: There! Even confusing communism with demands for human rights . . .

COLONEL: Well, that negro bastard was a communist, wasn't he? Don't try and convince me he was otherwise.

MOSA: I don't know what you mean by communism, perhaps you can enlighten me on that score. I have yet to come across a communist, and if Dr King was a communist, as you claim, then I cannot imagine what the KGB are like. Maybe they . . .

COLONEL: I warned you, you could get hurt seriously.

MOSA: Well, my dear colonel, it doesn't matter any more, because as your friend Karl Marx said, I have nothing to lose but these chains.

COLONEL: Would you like some tea to cool you off, Mr Musa?

Without waiting for Mr Mosa's reply, the colonel lifted the phone and demanded tea, pronto. And pronto it was, because as soon as he had replaced the receiver, a Havenotian constable, looking as meek as a lamb in the lion's den, came in with the tea.

COLONEL: Mr Musa, here's your tea.

MOSA: I never at any stage suggested, or hinted, or implied that I wanted tea. The other thing is: I'm allergic to tea and other strange offerings.

COLONEL: I got you, Mr Musa — I got you loud and clear. I won't trouble you again. Constable?
CONSTABLE: Y-yes, Colonel-Boss?
COLONEL: Take away this tea — our visitor seems to be allergic to me as well.

The constable quickly disappeared with the tray leaving the Havenotian ex-teacher alone with the Laager colonel.

MOSA: I think our little conversation is over now. Will you allow me to go home, or am I going to be charged — with what, only God knows.
COLONEL: Don't speak so carelessly about God, man. *(Pause)* I don't know who gave you the impression that we had any intention of charging you.
MOSA: But you can't keep me here indefinitely.
COLONEL: You say we can't, but I've got good news for you Mr Musa: I say we *can*. And we *will* hold you until you give us satisfactory answers to our questions.
MOSA: If that is the case, I will have to make the best of this new and reluctant home of mine.
COLONEL. Don't play tough with me because you —
MOSA: 'Can get hurt.' Don't you worry yourself to death, Colonel. Death is not something funny to me. It is just one of those things, y'know. *My* main worry is, are you yourself prepared for death at this very instant?
COLONEL: Shit!

The Colonel reached for the phone again and shouted for more tea. Then he suddenly changed his mind. 'I'd rather go out and buy myself a beer or two somewhere.'

He got up, glared at Mr Mosa, who had been standing all the time, and, in a very sarcastic tone, bade farewell to him.

And left.

Mr Mosa was unmoved by the melodramatic colonel. He had been watching his adversary's eyes, and he knew that he — Mr Mosa — had won the psychological battle.

Just then the Havenotian constable entered. He produced a bottle of brandy from beneath his shirt and gave it to Mr Mosa, who ably slugged a quarter of it in record time, and then returned it to the constable for hiding.

'But you are so different from the rest. What brought you here?' enquired the ex-teacher.

Speaking as if somebody were forcing him to talk faster than the speed of sound, the constable related how he had come down to Kwa Qonqonqo some three years ago, in search of a job. How he had been arrested five times — each time sent back to his rural home because he had no permission to be in the city.

'And so, because my wife and four children were suffering back home, I was left with two choices: either become a criminal, robbing my own people, or join the police. Because I don't have the guts to hurt other people, I joined the force. That way, I thought at first, I would not hurt my own kind. But I've been doing just that, because that's the only way law can be enforced, it seems. And I hate every moment here. I'm waiting until I finish my three-year contract, and then by our gods I'm going to quit. I too want to live like a human being. I want to stop being a hunter — of my own people. People are not like game in the wild woods, Mr Mosa!'

The ex-teacher stared sympathetically at the constable, concerned about the crisis his captor was in, and absently mumbled: 'Yes, people are not like game in the wild woods.' His mind immediately reflected on that biblical text in which Paul says Christ came to free sufferers, oppressed people, and that they shouldn't allow themselves back into slavery. Lest Christ's labour shall have been in vain!

It now seemed that there was going to be a gigantic collision between the gala night of *Ghetto Boss* and the students' march, and this worried Maba. The last thing she wanted was the cancellation of either project. If only she could persuade the students' executive to — oh gosh, what's the use, she said to herself after much soul-searching. If the die had been cast there was nothing that she as an individual could do. She was part of a whole and not a thing apart. She had to go along with the majority feeling, without being intoxicated by it. She still had a mind of her own: but it was abundantly clear to her that she had to make a sacrifice of one of the projects. Which one would it be? She prayed that Mother Havenotia would assist her in making the right decision — in time. Or could she leave that to time itself to settle? But then the opening night approached with no definite decision from the students' executive about when the march would be: this delay was owing to the fact that the chairman had been confined to bed for some days because of a sudden bout of 'flu.

And Maba heaved a much-deserved sigh of relief . . .

Ghetto Boss's première night had the feel of a really big occasion, but Bra Mti was nowhere to be found. This did not worry the cast as the Stage Manager had told them, amidst giggles and guffaws, that Bra Mti was suffering from one of the oldest phobias in show business: first night nerves. To drown his fears Bra Mti had lost himself in booze that whole afternoon, in one of the rooms in the hall. The Stage Manager had locked him in there — for his own safety — until the show was over, when they would go to him and tell him how the audience had reacted. If — and a big if it was — the reaction was enthusiastic, or at least favourable.

This pre-performance pep-talk from the Stage Manager worked wonders on the cast: all its members knew that they had to do their utmost for the sake of Bra Mti, whose 'baby' the show was. (Literally: he and his wife were childless.) *Ghetto Boss* was like his own real-life child: something he had had a hand in creating. He was not as impotent as

people claimed. The success of the show would show it in clear and unequivocal terms. He was not the bum the cast and the sensationalist sex-soccer-sadism-and-murder press thought him to be. He had the best orchestra in the country, down the line from trumpeter to pianist. The best dancers, singers and actors were in *Ghetto Boss*, and the choreography was unsurpassed. What else was his baby lacking? It had *the best!* And the cast was giving him nothing but *the very best!*

Would the audience appreciate all his efforts? Instead of answering the last query himself, Bra Mti dashed to the bottle, and that is how the Stage Manager had found him at 2 pm — exactly five hours before the big moment, long before the cast had arrived.

If only Bra Mti had been sober enough to hear the applause at the end of each scene, he would have been happy to death and come back jumping. Yes, the applause would have killed him because the audience was experiencing the best musical presentation in years.

When the last curtain was lowered, almost every person in the auditorium rose, showering the cast with thunderous applause. Some female cast members shed tears of joy and one of them whispered: 'If only Bra Mti were here to see all this, hear all this! They love the show — and that means they love Bra Mti; and oh, we love him too!'

Then a man from the audience dashed on stage, lifted a startled but not frightened Maba shoulder-high, and carried her merrily through the audience, with the rest of the cast right behind him exchanging hugs and kisses among one another and with the audience, as the band kept on playing, like people possessed.

After what seemed like a decade, the audience began one by one to file out of the hall with faces gleaming and smiles as wide as the equator: they had really enjoyed themselves. They had responded to Bra Mti's call.

Among the hundreds of people who congratulated Maba were her proud parents. Maba, resting on Sifuna, posed with her parents for pictures while cameras flashed intermittently. Her eyes popped when she heard a familiar voice behind her sweetly saying, 'We are proud of you, Maba, more than proud.'

Maba immediately turned round, and who else should it be but Mr Mosa! She jumped into his open arms and embraced him as if he were her own father; of course he *was* her father as well . . . traditionally.

'When did you come back, sir? What a surprise!'

'About an hour ago. Isn't that grand!' He chuckled.

The Stage Manager appeared with a bottle of champagne in his hands, and announced: 'People — attention please, people. We have forgotten the most important person in the show. Don't be unduly concerned about the booze — there's a dam of it in the storeroom. Our two sponsors — anticipating a brilliant presentation, but not a success of this magnitude — decided to buy drinks to keep us soused until kingdom come — so to speak. Will the cast please follow me?'

Maba kissed her parents on the cheeks, hugged Mr Mosa and hesitated as she turned to Sifuna, until her mother egged her on: 'Go on, Maba, and kiss Sifuna as well.' She blushed, but nevertheless gave Sifuna a light kiss on the lips, while people around them murmured, 'Mmmmm!'

'See you at home— but don't hurry back. This is your big night, remember,' said Maba's father with a smile, and she nodded. Sifuna too. He was being given the licence which had long eluded him, to take out Maba with no strings attached!

'I'll be waiting outside as usual,' he told her as she turned to join her fellow cast members. Maba followed the happy procession to its destination, the room in which Bra Mti had been locked up. With all eyes riveted on him, the Stage Manager then took out a bunch of keys, fiddled for some time for the correct key, found it and opened the door.

Then the guitarist, who had brought along his instrument (wherever he went, so did it, even to bed with the dozens of women who offer themselves to jazz musicians) strummed a ballad from the show lazily, and the rest of the cast sang along with him. That shook Bra Mti slightly. He had fallen from his chair and was prostrate.

'Huh,' he muttered drunkenly, 'what's all this noise, baby? Who are they raping? Is the world coming to an end? I can hear angels singing.'

'Bra Mti,' intoned the Stage Manager, 'rise up and behold thy wonderful work! It is right in front of you. Rise up, man, rise up, for the gods have heard your prayers.'

'You should have been a preacher,' said the guitarist, to which the Stage Manager replied: 'Of course, man. I *am* a preacher! Ask my concubines.'

The members laughed heartily, rousing Bra Mti further still from his stupor.

He lamely tried to get up, but the booze was too heavy for him, and so the Stage Manager helped him to his feet. He belched loudly and the giggling cast toasted their champion: 'Happy landings! Welcome back to the fold, Bra Mti.'

The hard-working mastermind behind *Ghetto Boss* would have fallen if Maba hadn't rushed to his aid and, tiny as she was, held him up straight. Through his unfocussed eyes, Bra Mti recognised her and this really did the trick.

'My Maba! My lovely little star! Tell me, girl. Tell me the truth. Just tell your daddy how it was. Give it to me, baby!'

'Achooooo!' exclaimed Bra Mti in ecstacy. 'We've done it!'

And he couldn't stop saying it: 'We've done it. We've beaten the bastards!'

The Stage Manager produced the bottle of champagne, already opened, and emptied its contents on the frenzied director and the hysterical cast.

There was a knock on the door while this was going on, and in came the two sponsors of the show, followed closely by a fat, balding and cigar-chomping man who dressed like an American gangster from Chicago.

'Hi, guys and dolls,' said the pseudo Yank. 'I have some big plans for you. I would like to record your show — '

He was not able to complete the sentence because the guitarist, obviously enraged (by what, nobody knew) descended on him: 'Yes, you cheat. Where's my royalties? Come tomorrow? Come tomorrow, huh?'

'Don't fight, man, we can talk it out tomorrow.'

The guitarist raised the instrument he so much cherished and worshipped, and brought it down with a heavy thud on the head of his adversary, adding: 'I've longed to do this for so long. Take that, you thief. Let this be a warning to other talent-scout sharks that they can expect the same treatment.'

The huge man collapsed like a pack of cards on the floor, and the cast cheered. Somebody brought more drinks and these were shared among the cast. Nobody so much as helped the talent cheat to regain consciousness. Maba only drank soft drink and had to turn down offers of something harder left, right and centre. She stayed as long as she needed to and then sneaked out.

Outside the door she was met by Uyeza. After a hug of congratulation, he said in a voice that betrayed no emotion: 'Maba, the committee held an emergency meeting at 7 p.m. — just when you were going on stage, and came to this conclusion: that we march tomorrow. At nine in the morning. It is Friday tomorrow, our only chance to act before the police close in on us. There is too much apathy in the community. We've got to act *now* while the iron is still hot. We don't want a situation in which students are reluctant to march because of complacency. Our parents have let us down — only Mr Mosa has been fighting this fight of

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OVER MY DEAD BODY

The first from Es'kia Mphahlele's TALES FROM BIRDLAND

Illustrated by Mzwakhe

Who would have thought Rivane the kingfisher would just kick off like that — just collapse and die while on vacation? Nor was it the first time he was accompanying the swallows part of the way north. That's how he chose to spend his vacation — sky-hiking. Son-of-a-bitch — just flipping over and dying like that! If only I had taken him seriously and prepared my mind for the time when he'd . . . But he wasn't the kind to clown or jest or anything like that — not Rivane. We'd been together for so many years, my instinct might have whispered in my ear to put me on the alert . . .

So Tswiri the robin mused, hitting his head against a tree branch and whistling at the same time, *'Instinct, instinct, instinct!* If I don't have it then there's no such thing as instinct, else I'm not a bird called Tswiri the green robin.'

Rivane the kingfisher was already lying in the mortuary after he had been flown from Zambia, victim of a heart attack. Tswiri the robin replayed in his mind the words from Rivane's beak. 'It's like this, Tswiri my old friend,' Rivane had said that Saturday evening when he and his wife Gunga had paid the robins a visit. 'You're a robin aren't you?'

'What's that got to do with the farmer's wheat — since when have you become a tribalist?'

'No need to take offence, no need,' Rivane stretched out his right leg in a mock gesture to head off a squall. He knew the morula wine was beginning to give a good account of itself in the blood.

Gunga and Tshidi broke off their own conversation for that instant when Tswiri raised his voice. Everyone knew, as much as his own wife Tshidi knew, that Tswiri could unexpectedly fly off the handle. But she sensed also that her mate was talking in jest. The two women fell back to their own talk in subdued voices.

'It's a manner of speaking, Tswiri,' Rivane assured his friend. Tswiri the robin raised his wings in a mock gesture of a truce.

'I mean you're a robin, smart. You robins are often said to be shy, self-effacing and everything. But you get under anyone else's skin when you mock their call in this forest, imitating them off-key. Now that shows how brave and cocky and resourceful you can be.'

'I hear you, I hear you,' the robin said. Not meaning 'your words are entering my ears,' but 'I comprehend and agree.'

'This is my request to you, my old chum — in fact an order: when I die I want you to take charge of my burial. Gunga already knows my wishes, but she and my sons and daughters need a man who can give everybody marching orders.'

'I hear you, I hear you. But you have close relations.'

'I'm doing the talking. Your friends are more genuinely loyal to you than your relations.' Rivane gave his habitual snort, which always served to underscore what he had just said.

'My brother is like a hawk, he'll be coming only to pick my bones and eat my wife out of house and home in the bargain. You must not be afraid. All creatures on this earth are always waiting to be led. They may be loud-mouthed as a crow about democracy and all such windy ideas but as soon as someone stands up in their midst, pushes up his shoulders, scowls, flexes his muscle, walks like he was delivered from his egg by the very hand of a god, see them lie prostrate, ready to take orders from him.'

'I hear you, I hear you.'

'Let me tell you something. The other day I found a kingfisherman on an antheap with a grasshopper in his beak, the other folks looking at him. In jest I said in a commanding voice, "Where did you find that grasshopper? I'm in charge of this part of the forest!" The miserable fellow broke into a stutter and flung the grasshopper away and the other kingfishers trembled and lowered their heads. I could have made them eat a goat's droppings if I had wanted to.'

'I hear you, I hear, but get to the point, kingfisherboy.'

'Just one more before I get to the point.'

There were giggles between the women.

'You know how the stork once stood in the middle of a pond inhabited by the frog nation. Imagine — he a bird, a foreigner, and the frogs around him. The way he stood made them feel like he was born to be king, *their* king.'

'And then?'

'Guess what? The frogs grovelled before him, asked him to be their king.'

'Why couldn't they find a frog king?' Tswiri asked, his curiosity sharpened, in spite of his shy nature.

'When you've found out let me know,' Rivane said.

'That's not the way *our* history has worked out, though. I mean we didn't say to the Friks and the Engs who now rule us, come and be our government. We fought them but lost. You've no right to make generalizations like that. All creatures like to be led, all creatures like to be led, all creatures like to be

led. Crazycrazycrazy!'

'I'm talking about being led within one racial group, one culture, not conquest by an alien.'

'I see I see I see, I hear you kingfisherboy.'

'Now why *couldn't* they find a frog king? I think because the goddam creatures have that obscene, er, undignified way of walking and standing. I mean, look at them — when they're standing, they seem to be shitting, when they walk they must hop and leap. Now you tell me, how can any king do things like these — stand like he's shitting, hop and leap like no king's supposed to do? Imagine a king frog sitting on a throne like the whole world is a toilet. Anyhow, the stork ruled over the frogs. And he had a frog dinner every night. See? All creatures on earth simply like to be dominated. Without decrees and commands and security guards and police they're lost.'

'Get back to the point, Rivane man, enough of this reactionary talk.'

'Right. You just get in there and tell everybody I've left orders that I want to be buried two days after my death, two at the most. I want no wake, no speeches. I know my bird nation. We birds can lie like human beings, you know that. And, and I don't want any two-legged creature beakmouthing off lies about me and my life, creatures that never even visited my home. No. Nothing. No creature's going to use my death as an occasion for an ego-trip. What I am or shall have been is confidential, between me and my maker. Only when I'm alive am I accountable to society.'

'All right all right I hear you, you don't have to sound so learned when you talk to a friend. And I'm just a simple artist, remember? So no preaching, no speeches, right?'

'Never. I tell you, hear me tell you, over my dead — what am I saying? Of course I shall be dead!'

'Getting your metaphors mixed up, old chum,' Tswiri said, laughing aloud. 'Dangerous thing that, you know, getting a metaphor stuck in your gullet. "Here lies Rivane Kingfisher blah blah blah, killed by a metaphor . . . *he-he-he.* Metaphor snapped inside his mouth and only the head escaped . . . ". '

'All right all right robinboy, don't outrobin yourself now,' Rivane interrupted. 'You've heard me.'

'I hear you.'

Tswiri the robin remembered that evening so vividly as Rivane made him solemnly vow that his orders would be carried out.

And now the kingfisher *would* go and collapse and kick off. How indecent!

But even as he tried to plan a strategy to do right by his trusted friend, Rivane's older brother had stolen a march on him. He had simply bullied the widow into submission, made her accept her husband's stay in the mortuary for a week, so all the kingfishers and their relations and friends and other citizens of Birdland could be at the funeral.

'I'm going to give my brother a decent funeral. Forget all the nonsense about Rivane saying tswi-tswi-tswa-tswa. He was joking, if I know my brother well. Forget it, my sister. He had many friends who want to give him a grand send-off, like a thoroughbred kingfisher should have.'

Widow Gunga merely sniffed and cried. Her brother-in-law knew she was breaking down; he was now in full control.

'You're not bird-shitting are you?' Tswiri the robin asked the dead kingfisher's sons.

'How could we joke about a thing like that, Uncle Tswiri?'

Rivane's two sons were telling Tswiri that their uncle was bullying his way through to take charge and bring off a gala funeral. 'I must use all the robinsense I can muster, I must . . . ' Tswiri kept repeating to himself.

'Your husband is an artist and not a small one either,' Rivane had often said to Tshidi. 'I wish I could sculpt like him. But like all robins he loves to heckle, get into other birds' mouths while they sing and call one another. 'Sgoing to get him into hot waters one of these days.'

'Why don't you speak to him?' Tshidi would say.

'Have you ever known artists to listen to anybody else but themselves? They don't even listen to one another.'

Just then Tswiri would come into his homestead.

'Oh there you are!' Rivane would shout.

'What am I guilty of this time?'

'Just been telling your good wife I can't understand how the heckler and the artist in you live together.'

'Simple,' Tswiri would say, seating himself. 'I've black-and-white spots on my belly, that's where my heckling speed comes from. The rest of me is green — the artist.'

Rivane's brother had it all figured out. Although Rivane had ended up as a fishmonger, truer to his cultural origins, he had been a social worker. As ghetto social work amounts to nothing more than home visits and filing of records, touching not even the fringe of Birdland's social ills, he decided the smell of fish money would place him in a better position. So it was goodbye to a miserable government salary. Since the Friks and the Engs formed a coalition government things had become tough for Birdland, which had no political or economic rights whatever.

The brother figured as Rivane was well known, the funeral donations would be abundant. He must be vigilant. He smacked his lips at the idea of abundance. His sister-in-law and her sons had said they were not going to pay a cent more than what would feed the people for the day of the funeral and for the coffin. Besides, on a weekday there would mostly be people who wished badly to attend even if they had to miss a day's pay. Insurance would take care of the coffin.

'If you must turn the funeral into some show business,' they had told the brother bluntly, 'you'll have to pay all the extras.' He had stomped out of the homestead without saying goodbye, feeling self-righteous.

'Tswiri,' Rivane's brother said, leading him away from a cluster of birds in the yard of the deceased. 'You're an artist and you write well, I'm told. I hear you write poetry and short stories for *Staffrider* — I don't read poetry myself, never could understand the damn thing at school — but could you write an obituary on your friend?'

'I don't take orders for writing poetry, like a tailor takes orders. But as a matter of fact, I happen to have written one in the last few days. And I must read it myself in the Community Tree. M.C.'s always bullshit their way through a text, mangle and garble it until the audience can't make out the pauses from hiccups, birds from beds, bush from boosh. All M.C.'s seem to have sucked from the same breast. Agreed that I do the reading?'

'Agreed.'

'Who's M.C.?'

'Me of course.'

'It figures,' Tswiri said, thinking at the same time how thick he is, this man. His lust for grandeur's all in his big watery eyes.

Wednesday Gunga was reported very ill. It had been too much for her, birds said. So off to the hospital she went, in the middle of the day. The two sons and two daughters accompanied her and also slept out. They all returned Thursday, late afternoon. Word went round that Gunga was much better.

Friday night Rivane's remains were brought from the mortuary to sleep at home for the last time. The very last time.

Tswiri managed to persuade the doctor to announce that on no account should the coffin be opened for the crowd to view it, not even for the chief mourner. Reason? Because the hospital suspected Rivane had died of an infectious disease, not a mere heart attack. No guarantee. Just a strong

'You just get in there and tell everybody that I've left orders that I want to be buried two days after my death. I want no wake, no speeches. I know my bird nation. We birds can lie like human beings, you know that. And, and I don't want any two-legged creature beakmouthing off lies about me and my life, creatures that never even visited my home.'

possibility . . .

Saturday. Burial day. The M.C.'s great day. And five speakers were lined up on one branch of the giant Community Tree where public meetings were held. And the Tree teemed with birdlife. And there were kingfishers and kingfishers *and* kingfishers. 'Who'd have thought there were so many kingfishers in Bochabelo!' someone was heard to remark. 'Whatever happened to the good old days when kingfishers were so self-effacing?' The group of listeners nearest him frowned to register disgust. One retorted with a hiss, 'Tribalist!' Must have slept through a revolution, the creep.'

When Tswiri the robin saw a swarm of birds do a storm ballet in perfect harmony up in the sky that morning, he thought, 'They look so happy and carefree I can't help feeling this is also my day. The day of the artist. After this masterpiece I don't mind if I die, I swear by my Birdland ancestors.'

The Community Tree was illuminated with the most dazzling, colourful plumage Birdland could ever boast. One even tended to ignore the solemn occasion that brought the birds together. Nor could the gathering care two hoots about the small-time ghetto aristocrats and capitalists like the couple of storks who passed by on a leisurely stroll, or the bunch of egrets feeding on ticks on the backs of two bulls not far off. 'The egrets say,' someone remarked, 'as they can't move the bulls nearer the Tree, they'll just have to hear the speeches from where they're eating . . . '

First, Dr B., chairman of Bochabelo Rentpayers Association, also of the Action Group of Fourteen. Power, Guts and Grit to Birdland! The rent issue, poor facilities for health care, poor transport, violence as a result of appalling overcrowding and insecure ghetto life . . . Practically everything concerning birdlife was thrown in. The deceased had served his people faithfully. This ghetto called Bochabelo contained several ethnic groups — sparrows, kingfishers, robins, petrels, doves, vultures, crows, egrets, storks, herons, kites, buzzards, hawks, and so on. 'We're poor and oppressed, but see what beautiful birds we are. Look what a dazzling sight Nature our god has created. But it takes *all* of us to attain power, not just one or two or three.'

Dr B. went on to say that there are no tribal clashes in Birdland except those set up by its successive rulers — first the Friks, then the Engs, then the Friks and the Engs together — they divided Birdland. 'Bochabelo is called a bird sanctuary, just a nice word for ghetto, fenced in. It is time some birds stopped sitting on fences and came in with the rest, Guts and Grit to Birdland!'

Wild applause.

Next, chairman of Bochabelo Village Assembly. He was not one to be outdone by his rival, Dr B. whose organizations had pledged non-collaboration with the assembly system meant to be run by stooges. Stooges voted into power by a mere six percent of Bochabelo's voting eligibles. Always the Assembly insisted on saying it was six and a half percent. Always Dr B. sneeringly replied, 'Then the half must be a gnat dressed up like a bird!'

Mr P., the Assembly chairman, and himself a kingfisher, a fact that would not need to be mentioned if he were not always emphasizing that he was proud of it, stood up to praise the Assembly system. It was practising ground for democratic management, he said, very much like the parliamentary House of Assembly. 'The village assembly is for the birds,' he said, but was cut off by general laughter. 'Can't stand educated birds messing with metaphor,' Tswiri whispered to himself. Must have picked up that one from the humans who once kept him in a cage. Damn colonial stooges!

But the laughter was very brief, so was Tswiri's contemplative moment. For a group of young birds leapt to the dais and rudely dragged Mr P. away while raising their thumbs and shouting, 'Guts and Grit to Birdland!' The crowd joined in. Someone struck up a traditional bird tune to relieve the tension. The crowd took it, and the Tree was filled with birdsong from hundreds of voices. Indeed the Tree itself served as an instrument that absorbed the sound and then distilled it and gave forth still purer music that brought the earth and sky together in the embrace of Nature's poetry. Tswiri was slowly learning that poetry already exists; that the poet's genius is in the plucking of it and replaying it for mortals.

Dr B. rushed back to the dais and gently eased the song to the end. 'Friends,' he said, 'don't get violent. There is a hawk in the front row here who has been taking down notes throughout. We all know him. Let him write, he's paid for it. We're all used to hawks, aren't we? *Aren't we*, I say?'

The Tree shook with the vibration of birdsound as the crowd responded, 'Yes!'

Rivane's brother thought to cut the tension wires that quivered in the tight, thick air all round by telling the pallbearers to pick up the coffin. Two rival couples went to the coffin and pushed the chosen bearers violently aside, seizing the handles at the same time. The bearers came back. The struggle was now over possession of the box.

The box slipped from out the hands that held it, evidently moist from the emotional outburst. Or maybe because one handle was ripped off in the scuffle. The box crashed on the ground. Bricks rolled out of it. The masked doll's head glued to the end of a block of wood lay open for everyone to see the results of a hoax.

When Tswiri saw this, he slipped away silently. By this time the family had also left the Community Tree. More and more birds took off in great haste amid crow calls and twitters and hisses and curses.

Rivane's brother was the last to leave the scene, an eloquent sign of chaos and ruin.

If you asked Tswiri the robin at the end of the day what the meaning of all this was, he would have replied, 'I made a mask resembling as closely as possible Rivane's face. Thursday we took Rivane north where he had come from and buried him in a style he had ordered. Hospital? Aw, just bird-shitting, man. Infectious disease? Bullshit. What if the coffin had not busted? The masked block would have gone down the grave. All those speeches and grave-side prayer and singing would have been the ultimate self-mockery in Birdland.'

That night Tswiri thought, 'You were always one to mix your metaphors, Rivane my old chum . . . this time you simply killed the meaning of a figure of speech. *Over my dead body* — my ass. You've given it a meaning it never had, but as an artist I admire you for being so original.'

Tshidi sat up in bed with a start when she heard her husband laugh and laugh and laugh. She knew better than to ask him what the joke was — these eccentric artist types!

For his part, Tswiri was going to tell his wife something he was thinking, but then chose to let it ride. This was: dying can be an art and everyone should decide how to create the moment of his departure. Unless . . . well, unless you were wrenched from space by a hawk or falcon, or maybe the present coalition government had it in for you. He knew if he told his wife these heavy thoughts, she would just look him straight in the eye and say, 'Stop robinshitting, robinboy!' ■

Poetry

Paul Rikhotso, Jaiprakash Bhula, Essop Patel.

THE LEPERS

In the far places,
Remote from civilization,
Between the koppies,
There lies a town,
A Bantu town,
A Plural town.

In this town a leper is found,
A healthy leper.
The town is his Isolation Ward.

He is in the hands of special doctors,
Dr S.B. and his dedicated team
The stern iron eyes of the South African people
Timelessly watch his progress.
After five years he may be cured,
After five years he may be discharged . . .
God save the lepers.

But in the fifth year
Some further leprosy complications may arise,
Inviting another five years
In the Isolation Ward,
For the further assessment of his condition . . .
God save the lepers.

Visitors to the lepers
Can only come one by one,
And unbeknown to them
Files are opened
And *their* health constantly watched
In case they have contracted leprosy . . .
God save the lepers.

When the leprous symptoms are confirmed
The poor Plural
Is admitted to the Isolation Ward
And declared a leper.
He may stay that way till Doomsday . . .
God save the lepers.

Paul Q.B. Rikhotso

MOTHER

The puke of your madam's child
is the scent that greets your own, oh mother
as you return home so late at night.
With longing eyes, it cries out
for the embrace of your tired arms, oh mother
as you put it off to sleep.
It dreams of being with you
all night long, oh mother
for the daybreak sees you far away from home.
It cuddles stray street dogs for warmth, oh mother
as you with loving arms caress
the forehead of a child that will never be your own.

Jaiprakash Bhula

BY THE BEACH, BY THE ISLAND, BY THE ROCK

school children
sitting on the beach
throwing pebbles
watching ripples
blinding fishes
silently we watch
bronze bodies
gathering in communion
where the ruthless waves
beat the nimble bodies
of voiceless seaweeds

buckshot of seaspray
striking the panoply
of a prison island —
a fragment of my country
in the bondage of the oceans
where stones whisper
the agony of broken spines
where vultures hover
in jet-like formation
around the water's edge
threatening sundown

the crystal silence
of the obdurate rock mocking
the echoes of interrogations
the anger of the sea lunges
with brute force, imprisoned
in the power of the tide
a black gull
with broken wings
coughs invectives
with blood in the eyes

(lament of the voiceless people)

by the beach
by the island
by the rock
we come to receive our dead

by the beach
by the island
by the rock
we bury our dead among our dead

by the beach
by the island
by the rock
we will build shrines tomorrow . . .

Essop Patel

THE LINE IS BUSY

By Michael MandlàButi Mathabela

Illustrated by Mzwakhe

Hello, is that Exchange? Eeeeh, could you please get me through to 3940. I beg your pardon? Yes, 3940. That's right, thank you.

'Hello . . . Hello, Girlie. Hoe gaan dit? Jy werk nog lekker vir die Missus, huh? Ek is bly, Girlie — en baie trots op jou. Ha ha ah . . . Die Missus sê sy is trots op jou. Bly, Girlie. Nou ja waar is die missus daar? Asseblief, Girlie. Dankie.

Hello . . . Hello . . . Is that Chriselda? Chrissie, it's Pam here. P-A-M! Ha ha ha. You got the spelling now? Don't you dare forget it.

I agree it's a fine Friday morning, Chrissie. Anyway, I called to explain that I won't be able to accompany you to the hairdresser's as arranged. Now, come Chrissie darling. I'm not lazy. I've got to clean the car. Yes — the car. For tomorrow's braaivleis. What? My boy John? A lazy skeleton that one is. A real idiot.

You know, this morning I was so angry I nearly fired him. Oh! you curious little darling. Curiosity killed the cat, they say. No, Chrissie, it is exhausted in England only. It's not over-used here.

Anyway, back again to this idiot, John. I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast . . . Ja, die lyn is nog besig, dankie, Chrissie. As I've told you, I was in the kitchen preparing breakfast when he came and stood outside the kitchen door. 'Moro, mesis,' he says. Like he always does, Chrissie. It amuses you but it's true, Chrissie. John always croons 'Moro, mesis' . . . Yes, I agree with you. They're all the same. Hardkoppig. Nothing ever stays in their heads.

I say, 'More, John.' He just stands there. Stupefied. Not saying a word. 'John, hamba sebenza,' I say . . . Oooh, that, Chrissie. It means: go and do your job. Ha ha ha. Yes, I know a bit of Fanakalo. Frank taught me. He has mastered it, that one. He tells me at work not even one of his Africans understands these two official languages. Not even his baasboy, Chrissie.

Well, there he goes to the garden . . . To work? What a laugh, Chrissie, darling. No! To loaf around and wait for food. At breakfast I call him for his coffee. He purrs 'banya danki, mesis' — his eyes on the ground. Like they always do. But he never touches his beker. I then lose my temper. I scream at him to accept the koffie-beker. He just stands there, Chrissie. The idiot. Suddenly he looks up . . . just when I was rushing him. I then see the idiot is crying . . . Yes: tears, Chrissie. They too cry tears. He keeps wiping his eyes with the back of his hand . . . I beg your pardon? Oooh, you mean how old is he. To be honest I don't know, Chrissie. Why, I don't even know his real name. I just call him John because I know they all like being called John.

I lost my temper, 'John, wena funa lobaas se sjambok? Huh? Yini wena funa (What do you want?)' I say in . . . Now don't you pick on me, Chrissie, darling. I don't speak broken Fanakalo. I'm better than you anyway. You don't get enough practice because both your Africans can at least speak broken Afrikaans.

Well, he says; with tears in his eyes, 'Mesis, lomama kamina yena file mesis.' Meaning that he's lost his mother . . . Yes, I was still angry, Chrissie. The stupid liar. That one; he can lie about anything. One of these days he'll tell me, 'Mesis, mina file.' Now c'mon, Chrissie. He'll be meaning: 'Mesis, I'm dead, I ask for permission to go home.' He ha ha ha ha. Fortunately I'll fire him before that one comes.

Why do I say he was lying? Now you must have something better to ask, Chrissie. You mean you can't tell when they're lying? It is not the first time that he has come with a story . . . Nog besig. Dankie . . . With a story like this one. If you may believe him; he has lost three relatives since he started working here And he's been with us for only six months.

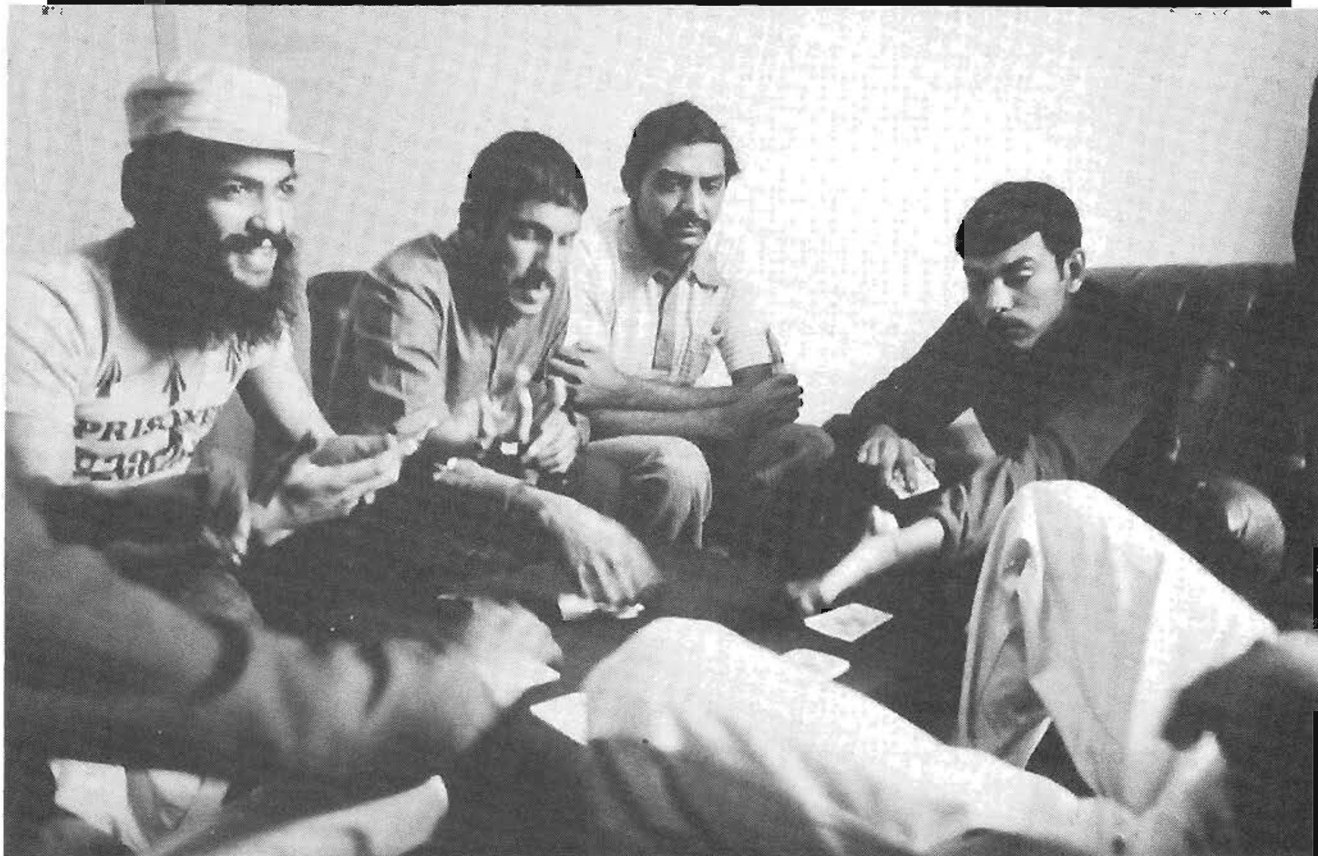
First: it was his sister who died of T.B. Yes, Chrissie, T.B. But don't you believe that! Second: it was his brother who was knifed in a shebeen brawl . . . Yes, Chrissie, they always kill one another; that's true. But don't you believe his brother was knifed. Lies! Third: 'Mesis, lomama kamina file.' How can they die like flies sprayed with Doom like that? Now you see he was lying. I had every reason to be angry . . . What did I do? I did what every right-thinking person would have done. I did nothing. Simply told him to go. But I first made him understand that I'd tell Frank he's not interested in work. That he's a lazy skeleton. The idiot . . . Come back? Oh, yes he will, darling. Where else can he go? Sjambok or no sjambok he always comes back that one. Nothing ever intimidates them more than hunger does . . . The line is still busy. Besig. Yena busy loline. Dammit, don't speak to me like that you . . . A very ill-mannered Bantu this one, Chrissie. He says we can't speak for the whole day. With his very broken English. He sure is a stubborn one that one. Unlike John. He was fortunate to hang up on me before I could tell him what he really is.

Oh, sorry, Chrissie. Okay darling, you can go to the hairdresser's. I have this car here to clean. Eeeee, yes Chrissie. Then tomorrow at the braai. Yeeesss. Bye . . . ■

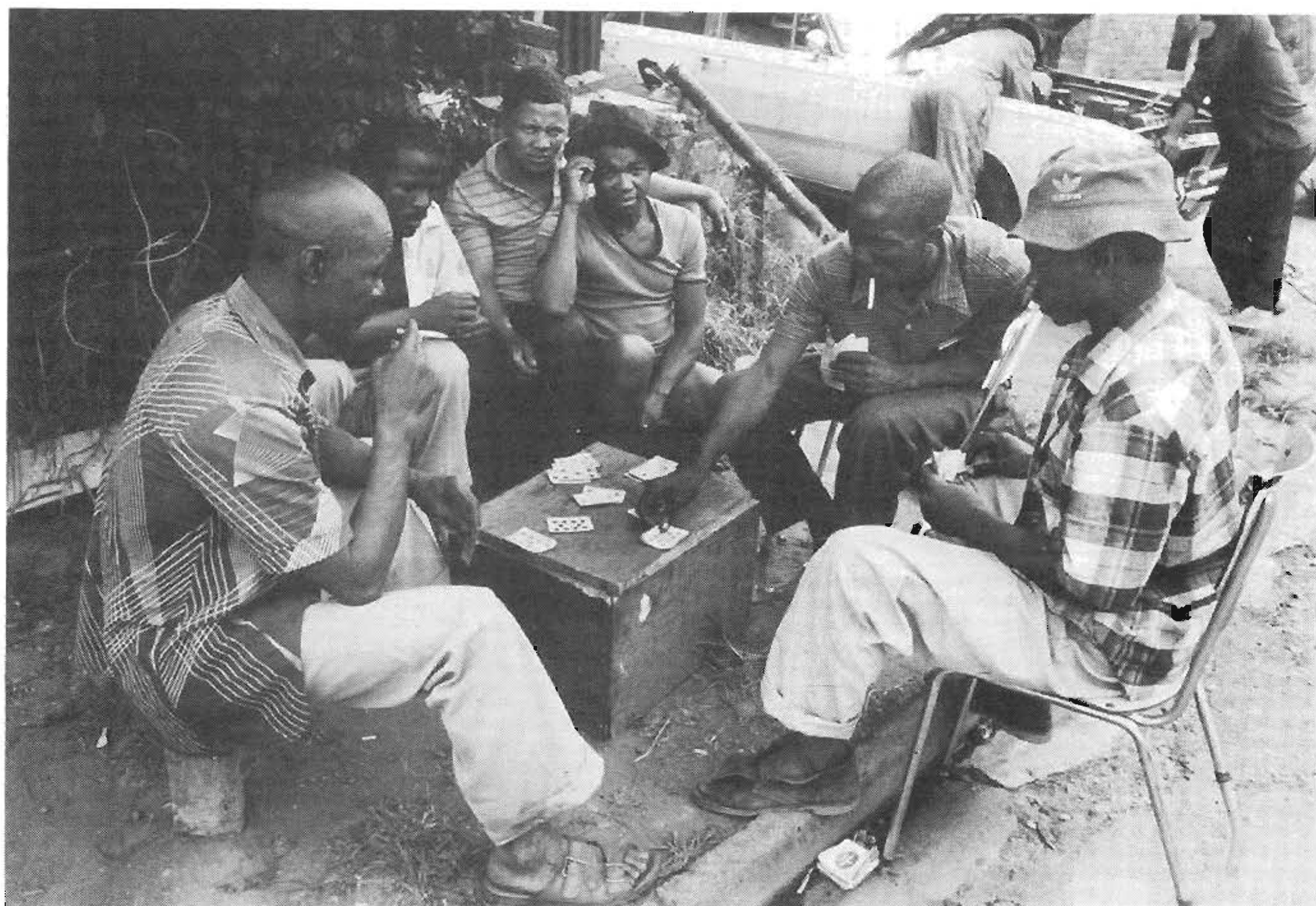
Photo Diary

PAUL WEINBERG, JUDAS NGWENYA

"SEND IN YOUR PHOTOS FOR THE STAFFRIDER EXHIBITION NOW"



Paul Weinberg — *Card players*



Judas Ngwenya — *Card players*

SETHOKGWA

A Story by Letshaba Thubela. Illustration by Gamakhulu Diniso

Sethokgwa, so named because it is perched on a bushy koppie, a conglomerate of rundown ramshackles bordering on the southern tip of Katlehong, it was not a township to begin with. There had been a crippling house shortage in Katlehong and a few of those severely affected — by threats of banishment to the 'place of origin' — had ganged up shouting: 'Senzeni na? Amandla ngawethu!' and decided to do something about it.

Among those who had gathered, was Ndodana ka Mhlaba or Bra Terra as he was known, a strong leader of positive stature and a strong sense of commitment. There was nothing of the tycoon or the lumbering know-all-bully demagogue about him. In fact, it was his enduring dedication to the ideals of justice and fairness, and an immense inner power, deceptively belied by his small frame and his country bumpkin looks, that propelled him to the forefront of the leadership of the people.

Bra Terra had long been a resident of Katlehong. Born in the old township of Dukathole, he had grudgingly come with his parents to Katlehong after their forced removal under the notorious Group Areas Act. On arrival in Katlehong he was not married, or even betrothed and hence could not qualify for a house under some evil subsidiary law derived from the same Group Areas Act.

When Bra Terra eventually did marry, all the houses were occupied and the 'Waiting List' had become enormous. Being a township-bred boy, Bra Terra could also not envisage himself greasing the palms of the Administration Board or Community Council officials in pursuit of a house. He knew from experience that such actions of necessity entail a great deal of misery for countless destitute families: it is these families that are evicted to make way for the obliging palm greasers.

'Ubuntu' had been an abounding feature of life in Katlehong Township and many a rent payer had been tolerant towards his less fortunate brothers. Landlords allowed the homeless to build tin shacks, imikhukhu, for a nominal payment in their yards. Though the unscrupulous ones exacted wild profits from such schemes, it was nevertheless a sign of brotherhood and solidarity that they allowed imikhukhu at all. And so it came to pass that when the landlords started to receive official letters demanding the demolition of these shacks, a wave of panic struck right across the bond that had held the landlords and the tenants together as a common people. A numbed sensation of hopelessness permeated the township. And all about people dragged themselves to and from their tasks in a distrait stupor. While vexed minds tried to probe deeper into the recesses of the white mentality, the Community Council's half-hearted protests and vague and contradictory demente as to its collusion did nothing to enlighten the people about their future.

Bra Terra, being one of those affected and being the stoic and resilient spirit that he was, decided to come out of the fray clawing and punching to the death if need be. Skilfully, through the bush telegraph, he re-implanted into his fellow sufferers the purpose of their existence and their pride in being human beings without resorting to outrageous embellishments or egocentric demagoguery. Not long after he set out to do what he was convinced was right. Using the same line of communication, he called a meeting to deal with the pending crisis.

I stood swaying amidst the surging mass of excited people. Placards of all sizes vied for space in the air, and, on all of them one theme ran through: THE HOUSING SHORTAGE. As my eye wandered over the faces all around me, some numbed with helplessness, others nonchalant and defiant in the face of a calamity, I beheld an array of young and old fellow sufferers imbued with a wish for an eleventh hour reprieve from doom. I could not help feeling that our position was analogous to Czechoslovakia in 1939.

I was about to ask when the meeting would start when the redoubtable Bra Terra mounted a table-shaped stone beneath the big old marula tree in the square to which we had been summoned and boomed in his gravelly baritone: 'Amandla!' The resounding, 'Ngawethu!' emitted by the people suffused my whole being with a warm and gratifying sense of accomplishment and my innate

pride in my people surfaced once more and left me speechless with joy. It was as if, though a start had not yet been made, our purpose had already been achieved.

'Bantu bakhithi . . . ' There was a suppressed anger in his voice and a single-minded determination on his countenance. An expectant hush enveloped the thronged mass. 'We are facing a crisis. We have no quarrel with anyone yet we are being challenged. Our right to live is being challenged. Senzeni na?' In my mind's ear wafted the lyrics of a song of the liberation confrontation of 1976, and I wondered if I was the only one hearing it. The people remained hushed and I could feel how pregnant that silence was.

'We call ourselves human beings made in the image of God and yet someone sees fit to deny us that right to live as human beings. What will become of you and me if we have no roof to call our own? Can we rightly call ourselves people when we live as scavengers? Reason has to prevail. What man has a right to call himself a man if he cannot fend for or protect his family? What woman has a right to be regarded as a woman if she can consciously let her off-spring wallow in the mire of degradation if she can help it?' He paused to let the effect of his words sink in and then he continued: 'It is useless for us to protest and then do nothing about our situation. As for the big-shot brothers of ours in the Community Council there is nothing I wish to say — for you know that they are in the pockets of the Administration Board officials who run our affairs.' Hearing these words the masses came alive with an intense hostility, and denunciations and condemnations of both the Community Council and the East Rand Administration Board flowed freely until they had reached a frightening crescendo. The spirit to fight had at last been aroused by a hatred of these institutions that were threatening their existence as a people worthy of the respect and the right to live in honour.

'Senzeni na?' someone screamed. As if he had been giving a cue, a chorus of emotion-charged voices rose and fell as people belted out the freedom song.

When they eventually came to a humming stop, Bra Terra took over again. He was now sweating and mopping his brow, a frown creasing his face. 'Amandla!' he screamed and the people returned with equal force, 'Ngawethu!' Theirs was a determination that struck the fear of God into the most obstinate of the rearguards. 'Bantu bakithi,' Bra Terra continued, 'We did not choose to come to Katlehong. We were happy at Dukathole and they forced us here. We are not responsible for the building of the houses in Katlehong, they are! And yet they have not done so. We put up imikhukhu to protect ourselves from the vagaries of exposure and night prowlers, and they have come demanding that we demolish them — and yet they have not provided us with alternative accommodation. What is to be done?' The question was more rhetorical than demanding, and the people waited for the answer with bated breath.

'I and my men,' said Bra Terra, 'have reconnoitred the outlying lands outside the immediate vicinity of Katlehong. I need not, of course, remind you that the East Rand Administration Board, with the acquiescence of the gentlemen of the Community Council, has made it plain that it does not want us in Katlehong and that it will send the Blackjacks to come and rout us out should we decide to stay here defiantly. And, as I have said, my men and I have been looking over the outlying areas. In our collective mind we feel that we have found a suitable sanctuary on the bushy koppie outside Katlehong. There are trees there that will give us some defence against the marauding bulldozers of the Erab.'

'Sethokgwa! Sethokgwa!' The voices of the people rose in unison as soon as he had pointed out the direction of the place. 'Sethokgwa! Sethokgwa!' they chanted with a zealous fervour. Their hope had been restored once more.

'Amandla!' Bra Terra screamed.

'Ngawethu!' they rejoined, took up another of the freedom songs of the last confrontation, and sang their hearts out. And so Sethokgwa township was born.

When Sethokgwa township came into being, the resolve of the homeless had reached a fever pitch and all over the available space shacks sprouted with an alarming speed and an equally bemusing amorphousness. The people were building with a haste that suggested the need to beat a certain deadline. And in all this confusion one soon came not to know who one's next door neighbour was. This of course did not matter, for all blacks regard one another as neighbours. What really mattered was the beauty of arrangement, but more than this beauty was the DEADLINE. People knew that if they were to be caught at it by the Erab officials that would mean the certain death of their dream. They could not afford the luxury of too many aesthetic considerations. Belated charges of squatting were, however, soon bandied about by the officials. Bra Terra and his well-chosen band of men resisted them with all their might, even venturing into the courts of law to exhort from the officers of justice an equitable resolution of their predicament.

As this drama was being played out in the austere courtrooms of justice, there came into the midst of the people a rotund philanthropist by the name of Nsizwa ka Mathatha.

The Sethokgwa populace did not know much about this robust tycoon. A sketchy patchwork of fact and guesses surrounded his present. Nothing was known about his past. It was well known that Mathatha, as everybody called him, owned a few shops in the township of Katlehong and that he was an eccentric whose periodic philanthropic sojourns into the world of the Cinderellas brought immense relief to the downtrodden. On the other hand, the cynical vowed that to him these sojourns had nothing to do with the relief of the people and much to do with the gratification of his queer whims. It was also known that Mathatha had once made an abortive bid for a seat on the Community Council, and that since then his virulent chastisement of the Council for even the slightest aberration had not endeared him to the councillors.

When he came on the scene with his avuncular gestures, Bra Terra and his men had no choice but to co-opt him into their committee. It was a cautious and well-considered move. On the one hand they could not completely trust a man who had once aligned himself with a cause that was inimical to their interests, and on the other they could not afford to slap a highly-esteemed benefactor in the face for this action would have aroused the ire of the suffering masses.

For a considerable length of time Mathatha proved himself indispensable to the committee and the people of Sethokgwa. And even when he dropped seemingly innocuous hints about the need for a township infrastructure, which could be brought about only through the Community Council, the people laughed heartily at what they considered the sybaritic aberrations of a self-indulgent mind.

Soon the time for the court appearance of the Sethokgwa people and the Erab approached. Even though the people had given their implicit support to Bra Terra and his committee, Bra Terra thought it would be prudent if their committee could be formalised through the voting of a constituted meeting so as to give it an authentic mandate. The meeting was called and the office-bearers were elected.

It came as a mortifying shock to Mathatha when he realised that he had not been voted into office. The simple-minded people had nothing against him except that they thought there was no need for him to be an office-bearer on

'While vexed minds tried to probe deeper into the recesses of the white mentality, the Community Council's half-hearted protests did nothing to enlighten the people about their future.'

the committee of a township in which he did not live. But to him this signified a rejection of astounding proportions.

In contrast to the gregarious fountain of joy that he had been, Mathatha now turned out to be a churlish and an emotionless cad, driven by an all-consuming greed for power. From being the staunchest cheerleader for Bra Terra, he soon revealed himself for what he was: a crafty usurper and a mortal enemy. He went about besmirching Bra Terra and his committee at any given opportunity. And the simple people of Sethokgwa really could not fathom how the imbongi of yore could distort his previous grandiose praises of Bra Terra into such acrimonious vituperation.

Only a few of the inhabitants agreed with Nsizwa ka Mathatha. The rest did not, but they kept their opinions to themselves for fear of what he might do to them. He now went about extolling the virtues of the Community Council and arduously trying to convert people to his perception of things and events. 'Terra and his band of nonentities,' he would roar at the reactionary mavericks that he summoned to attend his tirades, 'will sell you down the drain. There is nothing that they can do about your plight. The Erab, in spite of their pleas and entreaties, will send its bulldozers to flatten your township, *my* township, if we remain unaffiliated to a statutory body like the Community Council. I can talk the officials out of doing that, but I need your support. I can bring prosperity to Sethokgwa, but I need your support.' He would go on with the breast-thumping fervour of an accomplished populist and his listeners would bear his usual rantings with varying degrees of tolerance and slumber.

To anyone knowing Bra Terra, it was not surprising that he did not engage himself in a public exchange of recriminations with Mathatha. His was a resolute decision, peppered and nurtured by a clear conscience about what he was, and a clear consciousness of what he was doing. He also knew that Mathatha's haranguings were nothing but an insidious way of trying to ingratiate himself with the people. He knew of Mathatha's greed and vaingloriousness. He had never forgotten the aghast expression on his face when he had received the news of his defeat in the elections. He could not bring himself to worry about Mathatha. He did not care.

The court decision went against the people of Sethokgwa and the lordly arbiter expressed his dismay at having to hand down such a decision. 'But,' he commented in his lofty way, 'if I were in a court of Equity, I do not hesitate to say that I could have returned a different verdict. But as it is, the law stands. My only advice,' he said as he adjusted his spectacles, 'is that you should seek a moratorium with the minister or the chief civil servant of the department concerned. It will be up to him whether he views your predicament in the same light as I do.'

Bra Terra and his men, amid the scandalous tirades of Mathatha, rallied the people round to give them the bad news and seek from them another mandate for their next course of action: that of seeking a moratorium. Meanwhile Mathatha's venom had reached terrifying proportions. 'Now that you have seen how Terra and his band of crooks work for nothing but self aggrandizement,' he would shriek to his ever-loyal cronies, 'you surely do realise that I am the only saviour left. Turn against me and kiss your tin-shacks bye.'

Once or twice enraged mobs had tried to beat him into the ground but, elusive as always, he had managed to escape unscathed. Yet, notwithstanding his slipperiness, he had done enough harm to earn the wrath of the people. He had become their enemy. It was not surprising therefore, that when the bulldozers and the pantechnicons of the Erab laboriously ploughed their way in the direction of Sethokgwa, at the tail end, in tandem with the police van, rumbling, spitting and coughing, came Mathatha's car. Six bulldozers waited at the foot of the koppie in a crescent formation and not far from them, as if coming closer to savour the whole inhuman spectacle unobstructed, stood Mathatha's car. A little farther to the side stood the six trucks and the police van. A loudspeaker hailed thrice, even though the drab, wary dwellers were within proximity, watching the formidable spectacle before them with distaste and hatred. 'I am Seun de Toorn,' a white official said through the hailer, 'adjuct engineer in the office of the Town Planner. Listen to this order as I read it.' The people stood defiant and indifferent, and he read: 'Under the Urban Areas and Squatters Proclamation Act, you are hereby ordered not to resist your removal. You are to be moved from here to a habitable place of safety.' Abruptly he folded the paper and put it back in his safari suit jacket pocket.

The people started to whisper agitatedly among themselves, some gesticulating menacingly. Bra Terra and his men, calm and determined, manned the front line. 'We are awaiting the results of an appeal to the Department of Co-operation.' Bra Terra spoke without a tremor of anxiety in his voice. 'We have asked for a moratorium and our answer has not yet come back.'

'Mora-wat-se-ding, orders are orders,' the white official returned impatiently. 'If you don't resist I guarantee that your belongings will be taken care of. But if you do,' — there was a suppressed gloating as he said it — 'we shall have no alternative but to bulldoze everything out of here. You see them?' He pointed at the bulldozers with an affection that a horse trainer reserves for his most promising yearling.

The people stood their ground. 'We are waiting for the results of our appeal,' Bra Terra said.

'Alright . . . ' Seun de Toorn turned to his men on the machines of destruction. 'Move in!' They rumbled into life simultaneously and, as if their course was already plotted, started up the shallow incline with a grating dreadfulness. For a moment time seemed to stand still. Then out of the seething mass a stone catapulted, and landed flush on the cheek of one of the bulldozer drivers. Pandemonium broke loose as stones and missiles of all shapes and sizes rained on the bulldozers. Quickly the police assembled, and over the noise of people and the guns going off, the hailer could be heard wailing frantically. 'Not directly! Over their heads! Shoot over their heads!' It lasted a horrifying three minutes that seemed an eternity. When it subsided — with people, like wounded animals, having scuttled off into the recesses and the gorges — Seun de Toorn stood to attention and took stock of the situation. The outcome of the Sethokgwa affair, of the struggle between Bra Terra and Mathatha, of the cycle of hope and despair, was not new to him . . . ■

DEVIL ON THE CROSS

An extract from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's new novel

(HEB African Writers Series 200)

Gatuiria spoke Gikuyu like many educated people in Kenya — people who stutter like babies when speaking their national languages but conduct fluent conversations in foreign languages. The only difference was that Gatuiria was at least aware that the slavery of language is the slavery of the mind and nothing to be proud of. But in the heat of discussion Gatuiria was able to speak his language without pausing, hesitating or reverting to English.

'It is said that differences of opinion breed hatred. But often where there is conflict, shoots of truth spring up,' Wangari told Gatuiria, by way of encouragement.

Gatuiria cleared his throat, then he tried again. *'I can't quite see the difference* . . . sorry. I mean, the difference between your two positions . . . *Let me ask* . . . sorry, I mean, let me ask you this question. *Do you believe that God and Satan exist,* I mean, let me ask you this question. Do you believe that God and Satan exist, I mean, that they are alive, like you and me?'

'If God exists,' Mwaura rushed in, 'then Satan exists. But personally I don't know.'

'But what about believing? What do you believe?' Gatuiria persisted.

'Me? Young man, I don't belong to those churches of yours. Business is my temple, and money is my God. But if some other God exists, that's all right. Sometimes I pour out a little liquor for him, so that he won't be tempted to do to me what he once did to Job. I don't examine the world too minutely. What did I say before? If it leans this way, I lean with it. The Earth is round, and it changes. That is why Gikuyu said that the sun does not rise the way it sets. Caution is not a sign of cowardice. I don't have that many questions to ask. Show me where the money is and I'll take you there!'

'What about you?' Gatuiria asked Muturi, after Mwaura had had his say.

'Me? I believe.'

'What?'

'That God exists.'

'And that he's alive?'

'Yes.'

'And Satan?'

'Yes, he exists too.'

'And he's also alive?'

'Yes, he's alive.'

'Do you really believe these things?'

'Yes, I really do.'

'But you have never seen either of them with your own eyes?' Mwaura asked Muturi.

'This young man was asking about believe,' Muturi replied. 'I believe that God and Satan are images of our actions in our brains as we struggle with nature in general, and with human nature in particular, in our search for something to eat, to wear and to shelter behind that keeps out the sun, the cold and the wind. The nature of God is the image of the good we do here on Earth. The nature of Satan is the image of the evil we do here on Earth. The question is this: what are evil actions, and what are good actions? Young man, you are making me repeat the words I have already said and put behind me. There are two kinds of man: he who lives by his own sweat and he who lives by the sweat of others. The riddle lies there, so take a forfeit and solve the riddle for us, because you seem familiar with books.'

' "In the sweat of thy face," Wangari spoke as if she was reading from a Bible open in front of her, "in the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground".' Wangari closed the Bible that was in her mind and returned to Gatuiria: 'That is another riddle, and you must solve that one too, so that we can all hear the answer. Take a forfeit from me too.'

'I won't take too many forfeits because you are a clanswoman,' Gatuiria replied, laughing a little.

'Oh, so you do speak good Gikuyu, and I thought that you only knew this language of *"Good morning"*,' Wangari told him, lightheartedly.

Gatuiria felt himself relax somewhat.

'I used to listen to riddle competitions long ago,' Gatuiria replied, 'but now I wouldn't be able to solve even the simplest one. If you and I were to compete, you would win all the forfeits until you had won all my property. But let's go back to the root of the matter. I must say, I felt that your talk raised doubts and conflicts that I've had in my heart for a long time. I mean, I have a knot in my heart, and I would be very glad if you would help me to untie or loosen it a little.'

Gatuiria paused again.

Wariinga sensed that Gatuiria's voice had changed. She felt suddenly apprehensive, as if she had heard that voice somewhere else, a long time ago, but she could not place it. She decided that the apprehension was prompted by a burning desire to know what knot was troubling Gatuiria.

All the other passengers were sitting attentively, anxious to hear the story. It was as if they feared that Gatuiria's knot might be similar to the ones they each carried.

Gatuiria cleared his throat again. He looked at Muturi. 'You talk as if you knew I came from the university, and it is true. I am from there. I'm a kind of research student in culture, I'm a junior research fellow in African culture. *Our culture* . . . sorry. I mean, our culture has been dominated by the Western imperialist cultures. That is what we call in English *cultural imperialism.* Cultural imperialism is mother to the slavery of the mind and the body. It is cultural imperialism that gives birth to the mental blindness and deafness that persuades people to allow foreigners to tell them what to do in their own country, to make foreigners the ears and mouths of their national affairs, forgetting the saying: Only he who lives in the wilderness knows what it is like. Hence a foreigner can never become the true guide of another people. It is about our generation that the singer sang:

The deaf man, the deaf man,
The deaf man is he who can't hear for the nation!
The blind man, the blind man,
The blind man is he who can't see for the nation!

'Let us now look about us. Where are our national languages now? Where are the books written in the alphabets of our national languages? Where is our own literature now? Where is the wisdom and knowledge of our fathers now? Where is the philosophy of our fathers now? The centres of wisdom that used to guard the entrance to our national homestead have been demolished; the fire of wisdom has been allowed to die; the seats around the fireside have been thrown onto a rubbish heap; the guard posts have been destroyed; and the youth of the nation has hung up its shields and spears. It is a tragedy that there is nowhere we can go to learn the history of our country. A child without parents to counsel him — what is to prevent him from mistaking foreign shit for a delicious national dish?

'Our stories, our riddles, our songs, our customs, our traditions, everything about our national heritage has been lost to us.

'Who can play the Gicaandi for us today and read and interpret the verses written on the gourd? Today who can play the wandindi, the one-stringed

violin, making it sound like the voice of a young man wooing his love as she comes back from picking peas in the field, or fetching water from a cave in the valley, or digging up arrowroot, or cutting sugar cane in the slopes of the valley? Today who can play the bamboo flute, whose sound makes the hearts of a young man and a maiden beat in unison as they go to the fields to scare birds from the millet fingers while the Moon casts its light over the land?

'That's why some people at the university, students and teachers, are now attempting to unearth the roots of our culture. The roots of Kenyan national culture can be sought only in the traditions of all the nationalities of Kenya.

'I, for instance, work in the Department of Music, which concerns itself with music and musical instruments and their uses. I research into traditional instruments mostly — drums, flutes, jingles, rattles, oryx horns — and into all kinds of string instruments like the lyre and the one-stringed violin.

'I am also a composer. My ambition and dream is to compose a piece of music for many human voices accompanied by an orchestra made up of all kinds of national instruments: skin, wind, string and brass. I have composed a number of songs. But I have not yet found the tune or the theme of the music of my dreams. Day and night I have searched for the tune and theme, but in vain. You can't know the pain I carry about in my heart.

'Often, when I'm alone in a hut thatched with grass and bracken and it is raining or the wind is blowing, or when I'm on my own at night and the moon is shining down on the land, I can hear the many voices gone, the many voices now living, the many voices to come, all singing to me in whispers. At times like those I feel I am just about to catch the tune, the rhythm and the theme of the music I have always longed to write. But it drifts away, carried on the waves of the wind.

'At other times, lying under the shade of a spreading tree or walking all alone in the plains or by the seaside, I often hear with the ears of my heart flutes and trumpets blown by a choir of herdsmen in the plains, the drums of the whole land calling on the youth of our country to go to war, then a thousand jingles, and rattles swung by our national heroes as they sing victory songs, and then the voices of women ululating in praise of their victorious sons. And suddenly I hear the sound of the national horn blown in victory, and oryx horns and others responding in joy. And then I hear the voices and the sounds of all the men and all the instruments come together, finishing with one voice, with many voices, with many voices in one voice, like a choir of earthly angels proudly celebrating the heroic deeds of the nation.

'I seize pen and paper to write down the message of the voices before they are carried away by the wind.

'People, what can I tell you now?

'Have you ever dreamed of fruit hanging just above your head when you are very thirsty, under a scorching sun during a dry month, and when you raise your hands to pick one to cool your parched tongue, the fruit slowly rises out of reach and disappears into the sky? "Here I am! Here I am! But as you have refused to pick me, I am going away . . . " Or that's what they seem to be saying, teasing you merely to whet your appetite and desire. That is how the voices and the instruments whet my appetite. But when I start to write the music down, alas, the music and the flutes are no longer there.

'I console myself by claiming that it does not matter, who has ever gained by moaning?

'I begin the search all over again. I myself ask a question that I have posed many times: what can I do to compose truly national music for our Kenya, music played by an orchestra made up of the instruments of all the nationalities that make up the Kenyan nation, music that we, the children of Kenya, can sing in one voice rooted in many voices — Harmony in polyphony?

'I have spent many sleepless nights. A composer who is unable to snare the tune, the theme and the rhythm of his music is a shell of a human being.

'For a year or so after coming back from abroad, I was like a farmer trying to uproot a blue gum tree with a blunt digging stick. I could not get to the bottom of the root I was after . . . '

Gatuiria cut short the story of his endless search. Nobody spoke.

Wariinga felt restless, but she did not know why — was it Gatuiria's words, or the way he told his story, or simply his voice? His voice was like that of a man who has been carrying a load of deep troubles for several days and who has spent sleepless nights wrestling with questions for which he cannot find answers. Why had he ended the story at that point? Waringa kept asking herself. What was the knot he had wanted to help in untying?

Gatuiria turned to Wariinga as if he could read her thoughts. But before he could take up the story again, the man in dark glasses spoke in English: *'So you are on the staff of the university?'*

The other passengers were startled by the voice. These were the man's very first words since he entered the matatu at Sigona bus stop. Throughout the journey he had remained in his corner as if he were afraid that he would be murdered in Mwaura's matatu.

'Yes, yes, I'm on the research staff,' Gatuiria replied in English.

'So you know Professor Ngarikuuma and Professor Gatwe Gaitumbi?'

'Yes, Professor Ngarikuuma is in the Political Science Department, and Professor Gatwe Gaitumbi is in the Department of Commerce and Economics.'

'What about Professor Kimenyiugeni?'

'He is in the Department of History. But he only knows European history.'

'And Professor Bari-Kwini?'

'He's in the Department of English — English literature. But he sometimes gives lectures in the Department of Philosophy and Religion.'

'I see, I see,' the man in dark glasses said, in a voice that indicated a heart more at peace with itself

They waited for him to ask another question or to add something else, but he didn't speak again. It appeared that he was now much less afraid, however, and he even sat back, more relaxed. Gatuiria resumed his story.

'The day came when I thought I could at last see the light. A certain old man from Bahati village in Nakuru — '

'Bahati, did you say?' Mwaura shouted. 'Bahati, Bahati in Nakuru?'

'Yes,' Gatuiria replied. 'What's the matter?'

'Nothing . . . nothing much. Go on with your story,' Mwaura said in a worried voice.

'*Anyway*, the old man from Kakuru, from Bahati, was the one who showed me the way. I had gone to him and I had begged him: "Father tell me old stories — tales of ogres or animals." He was silent. He looked at me. Then he laughed a little. He told me: 'There is no difference between old and modern stories. Stories are stories. All stories are old. All stories are new. All stories belong to tomorrow. And stories are not about ogres or about animals or about men. All stories are about human beings. Young man, I can't understand the kind of education you all receive these days, or the kind of learning you want to acquire overseas during the course of so many years. How many? Fifteen years? Did they ever teach you that literature is a nation's treasure? Literature is the honey of a nation's soul, preserved for her children to taste forever, a little at a time! Gikuyu said that he who has put something aside never goes hungry. Do you think Gikuyu was a fool when he said that? A nation that has cast away its literature is a nation that has sold its soul and has been left a mere shell. But it is good that you have come. Say yes, and I'll tell you the stories I can remember." ■

THE SPRING OF LIFE

by Daniel Kunene

Illustrated by Mogorosi Motshumi

'Name?'

'Sandile '

'Reserve?'

'Transkei.'

'Chief?'

'Duma.'

'Date born? . . . Date of birth, dammit!'

'I er-r . . . I born . . . '

'Damn stupid bastards! Fancy not even knowing when they were born!' The white man held his chin and looked down for a moment. Then he looked at Sandile again: 'When . . . were . . . you . . . BORN, for God's sake?', he screamed; 'Little baby . . . you . . . WHEN?'

Sandile answered, seemingly unruffled, 'I hear mother and father say I begin walk after big sickness after big war.'

'Big sickness! Big war' What's that supposed to mean?'

At this point the white man decided he needed the help of an interpreter. 'Prince!' he shouted, 'Pri-i-nce!!' Some black men in the office took up the cry, and the name of Prince echoed within the walls of the large hall and beyond. Meanwhile the white man got up, stretched himself and yawned and walked to a white girl typing at a table near the opposite wall. This brief interlude gave Sandile time to make a quick survey, through the slit, of the interior of the building. There were huge, massive tables, some with at least one wire paper basket containing some papers — folders, letters, and other kinds. A few also had typewriters on them. But everyone of them had at least one rubber stamp and a pad, and there was something frighteningly final about the sound of those stamps as they came down on the papers. It was always the last thing — the stamp went bang! bang! and the papers were quickly gathered together and given to someone or put away.

Those black men working here, Sandile pondered, they too carry passes. They must often find it tempting to hit their own papers with just the stamp needed to keep them out of trouble! Maybe they might do it for other black people too. There'd always be a fee, of course; and, as with all other types of profitable employment, whether legal or illegal, there would always be a white man at the top — least exposed to the occupational hazards, but best paid.

There were a few backless benches, sturdy and seemingly immovable, as if they had been carved out of solid rock together with the building. The bare floor boards were clean but unshined. The ceiling was high, and the light bulbs dangled, like frozen tear drops, from thin cords attached up there. The larger windows were protected by strong iron railings. The harsh austerity of the place made Sandile shudder.

A black man came to the white man at the table with the white girl typist. He was about twenty-five. He stood at a respectable distance, holding his hands in front, waiting for the white man to notice him. After a little while, the white man turned around and walked back to the slit where Sandile stood, and the black man followed him.

'Prince,' said the white man.

'Sah?' said Prince mechanically.

'Ask this stupid fool when he was born.'

Prince came closer to the slit and said, *'He, mfo ndini, uthi umlungu waazalwa ngomnyaka mni.'*

'I am told it was shortly after the war of the Germans. I was beginning to walk at the time of the epidemic. I tried to tell that mlungu, but he gave me no time.'

Sandile's tone of impatience made Prince nervous and, without changing his facial expression or his tone of voice, he warned Sandile quickly in Xhosa: 'My friend, this is a *pass office*, not the royal court of the king of the Xhosas. We're all beggars here. If you want your papers straightened out, be patient and answer the white man's questions.' After a brief hesitation Prince added, 'Until we regain our freedom — one day. Now, say something, he must think I asked you a question.'

'Well, I don't know what to say,' answered Sandile. 'But I do appreciate your advice, my countryman. I should know better.'

The white man was getting impatient: 'What did he say, Prince?'

'Influenza epidemic, sah, at end of first world war.'

'Is that all you talked about?' The white man was clearly suspicious.

'Yes, Mr Blessing. I had to find out *which* war, *which* epidemic, and all that!' Prince succeeded in sounding hurt at Blessing's doubt of his loyalty.

'All right. Year 1918, month and day unknown. All right, Prince. And be quick with that tea now.'

'Yessah,' said Prince, turning to go.

'Prince,' said Blessing with a frown after a moment's hesitation, 'next time just translate what I say, OK? — No additions, hear?'

'Sometimes it's impossible, Mr Blessing,' protested Prince.

'No additions, Prince. That's all, you may go now.'

Mr Blessing picked up his interrogation of Sandile once more. 'You! Employed or unemployed? . . . Listen, are you deaf? You got job or you got no job?'

'No job, baas.'

'Last job! Where? For whom?'

'Sea Point. Miss Marais.'

'*Miss* Marais or *Mrs* Marais?'

'Yes baas, *missus.*'

'Look here,' said Blessing irritably, 'I just want to know whether she was married or not. Did *Baas* Marais come home every night?'

'Yes, every night, baas.'

'*Mrs* Marais,' said Blessing with a sigh. 'Oh, how one has to dig for this information. Now, why did you leave the job? Break saucer? Steal money? Or try to sleep with *Miss* Marais, you bastard?'

'One day Miss Marais just say, "No more job, John." I say, "Why, Missus?" She say, "You see, John, it is like this: Baas come home drunk every night and he drink much money, and . . . "

'All right,' interrupted Blessing, 'I'm not quite ready for a fireside tale yet. Don't you know you're not supposed to tell tales during the day? It's your culture, you know! You'll grow horns! Like this . . . '

Sandile forced a smile as Mr Blessing put his arms beside his head to imitate horns.

'Wife! . . . Woman! . . . You married?'

'Yes, baas.'

'Where is wife?'

'Johannesburg.'

'Children?'

'Don't know baas. You see baas, it is like this . . . '

Blessing burst into laughter. 'O, Jesus Christ!' he said, wiping the tears off his face. 'Wife in Johannesburg! Don't

'We are all beggars here. If you want your papers straightened out, be patient and answer the white man's questions. Until we regain our freedom one day.'

know if you have children! I bet you don't. The bitch must be having a good time, and you are going to be the happy father of a litter of picaninny bastards! Hell, I really need that tea now, with just a tot of brandy in it. I wonder where the dickens that damn Prince is. Pri-i . . . O, there you are. Shut that slit, Prince, I don't want him staring at me while I drink my tea. He's really funny, I'm having a good time.

When the shutter came down, Sandile leaned against the wall, shut his eyes and let out a deep sigh. He opened his eyes and mopped his brow with the sleeve of his jacket. There were crowds here outside — men in their own interminable line that snaked away and disappeared around the corner of the building; women went to a separate office, and so formed their own line, a much more disorganized one, with tired mothers sitting flat on the dusty ground either suckling babies or watching resignedly as their little ones crawled on the sand and put a miscellany of objects in their mouths and spat them out, making faces. *Dust unto dust* flashed through his mind. Death. You hear those words by the grave side; you hear that unforgettable sound of earth dropping on a coffin you wish you could rip open and walk back home with your loved one. Death! Violence to rob death of its victim! *Dust unto dust.* Everyone looks like dust around here. Sandile could not suppress a sudden feeling of disgust. His father's death when he was only eight years old, a little too young to comprehend the full meaning of that event, yet too old not to be aware that something terrible had happened. *Dust unto dust,* and that awful sound of a handful of earth on a box! As final as the banging of a rubber stamp! His mother had cried bitterly then and, supported by one woman on either side, she had also thrown in her handful; and then the children, their hands guided by adults with glum faces.

Dust unto dust. Do people really turn to dust after they are buried? How long does it take? Would *he* turn to dust? Sandile cleared his throat and looked at the tattered papers in his hand. The papers of life and death! Where was his Nonkosi? In Johannesburg, nine hundred miles away. Or was she? Had she conceived during the few weeks they were together after their marriage? Why hadn't he heard from her? Of course, as the officials put it, he had 'no fixed place of abode'. Which meant he had no home. This hopping from place to place, finding temporary shelter with friends or friends of friends while looking for work? Maybe he had been hopping just one step ahead of Nonkosi's letter. Maybe the letter had stopped hopping after him at some previous address. If she had got pregnant, the child would by now be at least three months old. That was a long time. They had been apart for a little over twelve months, and had exchanged only a couple of letters at the beginning, and everything had then suddenly gone dead. He had written whenever he could, but nothing had come back.

Sandile changed his position, shifting his weight to the less tired leg. In doing so, his attention was caught by a black man, obviously an employee at the pass office complex, judging by his uniform. The man was speaking in low tones to an attractive young woman he had called aside from the women's line: 'These white people are troublesome, my sister.' The woman cast a shy glance at him and looked down at her papers. Sandile strained his ears to catch every word. 'What papers do you want?' the man continued. 'Let me see.' He took the papers from her hand and, after examining them, gave them back saying, 'Oh, permission to stay? I see. Well, that is easy and not easy. But the most you can get is six months, maybe a year if you are lucky; maybe nothing! Who knows? They mustn't see me talking to you here. Come and see me tonight at my house. I think I can fix your papers. O.K.?' She was hurt, but she smiled and said yes, she would come.

Nonkosi! Are they doing this to her? I would kill any man who dared! Sandile's feeling of manhood flooded his entire being and his eyes flashed with lively sparks of anger.

Suddenly the shutter went up. Put on your mask, son of Mendi. Remember to say 'Yes, baas,' 'No, baas.' It is a game; sometimes you win. Sometimes!

'Boy!'

'Baas!' answered Sandile.

'Ever been arrested? Go to jail?'

'No, baas.'

Sandile knew that the white man could easily find out if he wished to. He had been arrested several times since he reached the age of carrying permission papers — the age of sixteen. But even before then he had been in and out of juvenile courts. When his father had died, he had carried on in school for a few more months, then the burden of buying his books, paying his school fees, keeping him decently clothed, had become too much for his mother.

'I want the truth!' Blessing barked and stared at him. But Sandile showed no emotion, and simply said, 'Not been to jail, baas.' After all, if this white man had to investigate the arrest records of all the crowds that came daily to this place, it would totally disrupt the important business of processing their papers. Anyway, what the hell! He would take whatever consequences.

The telephone rang. Blessing turned around and picked up the receiver. 'Blessing! John Blessing! . . . '

Sandile immediately lapsed back into his reverie. Working for that shopkeeper in their rural village after his father's death had, for the first time, brought him into direct confrontation with the white man.

'Ten shillings a month,' the white man had said to him. 'Monday to Friday, eight to five, Saturday six to one. All right?'

'Aw right, baas,' Sandile had said, more puzzled than frightened.

The urgency in Blessing's voice brought his thoughts back: 'He is not stubborn, Mr Van Tonder, but you know how it is. So damn difficult to get direct answers . . . I know . . . I know . . . No, I . . . Still getting preliminary details . . . I believe he has them . . . I'll . . . Yes, sir, I will . . . Yes, Mr Van Tonder . . . Yes . . . Yes . . . Bye.'

Blessing was now more impatient and abrupt with Sandile. 'Your papers, quick!'

Sandile handed them to him. As he fingered through the papers, Blessing read each heading aloud: 'Labour Bureau; Efflux and Influx Control and Registration; Employer's name, address and signature; Union Tax; Bantu Authorities Tax; Curfew; Native Law and Custom; Residential Permit.' He turned to Sandile: 'Where do you stay?'

'Transit Camp, baas.'

'Residence Permit number?'

Sandile had lied again. He was staying illegally with an acquaintance in the location. He had, however, foreseen this problem and secured a permit to reside in the tattered tent city called Transit Camp on the sand dunes not too far from an unfrequented part of the beach. He handed the paper to Blessing.

Blessing started to scribble furiously on a permit slip. He tore out the papers, replaced the carbon between the sheets, banged a rubber stamp on each copy. He used other rubber stamps on the other papers Sandile had given him. Now and again he signed or initialled. Then he collected all the papers together and pushed them over to Sandile.

'One more week at Transit Camp, and find work. Have your finger prints taken and go and register with the Labour Bureau. Come back in one week.'

'Yes, baas. But if . . . '

'One week! . . . Next!'

The week went by. No job. But he was determined not to go to that pass office again. He no longer qualified to stay at Transit Camp since his papers were not right. He did not stay there anyway, but now his Transit Camp paper was finished. So also were his job-seeking papers. He was a criminal, and he had to maintain a wide berth between himself and the vengeance of the law.

He had not decided what to do, where to go. But he had, at least, to get out of this Transit Camp — maybe hide in the bushes and think. He had not gone far when a car suddenly swung around the corner in front of him, and its headlights shone full in his face. The car came and pulled up level with him. Instinctively he knew the game was up, at any rate for this moment. A kind of numbness took hold of him, and the words seemed to come from far away: 'Stop! Come here! Show your pass!' Sandile showed the policeman his papers.

'Aha-a!' said the policeman shining a flashlight in Sandile's face, 'You Sandile Mendi?'

'Yes, baas.' His own voice sounded to him like a distant echo.

'Khwela! Get on! Quick!' A strong arm grabbed him by the scruff of his neck and he landed head first in the pick-up truck.

For some time Sandile could not fully grasp his change of circumstances. Everything had happened so quickly and so unexpectedly — the blinding lights, the barking voice, the triumphant shout of the policeman, the suspension of his feet in the air as he was hurled into the truck — these events had simply outstripped his consciousness of being, of time, dislocating his entire axis. It could have just been a bad dream, and he might wake up warmly cuddled in Nonkosi's arms. On the other hand, there was no mistaking the backs of those policemen in their frightening uniforms, the bumping and swerving of the truck as it prowled around the shanty town like some fabulous swallowing monster searching for more victims. His senses were returning slowly as he swayed from side to side. What was he going to do?

That was not a night for sleeping, and Sandile was the most wide awake of all the prisoners. He was trying hard to concentrate on some plan of action. But what? Escape was impossible. Anyway they would catch him before he had gone far, and then he would be subjected to merciless beating, and would have a second and more serious charge against him. Better not try that. The babble of the other prisoners interfered with his thoughts, and he refused to engage in any conversation. What were they going to do with him? And how could he inform Nonkosi of his plight? As long as they don't send him to one of those farm prisons where you dig potatoes with your fingers while the prison guard's whip comes down mercilessly on your back. He had heard of pass offenders who had been sent to such farms who had been clubbed to death at the whim of a prison guard. No, he *must* see his Nonkosi again.

At last he succumbed to sleep. But it was fitful, and each time he woke up, it was sudden and startling, as if daylight suddenly shone its brightest without the prelude of dawn.

Next morning he was exhausted. When his turn came to appear before the magistrate, he was almost listless, showing no particular interest in what was going on around him. One did not bring a lawyer to these places — either one's papers were right, and one wouldn't be there, or they were wrong, and one was guilty. This magistrate and his funny gown, Sandile thought. It was all just a monkey game. They might as well pick you up and take you straight to serving your hard-labour sentence. The magistrate had no time to listen to involved explanations. There could be no extenuating circumstances.

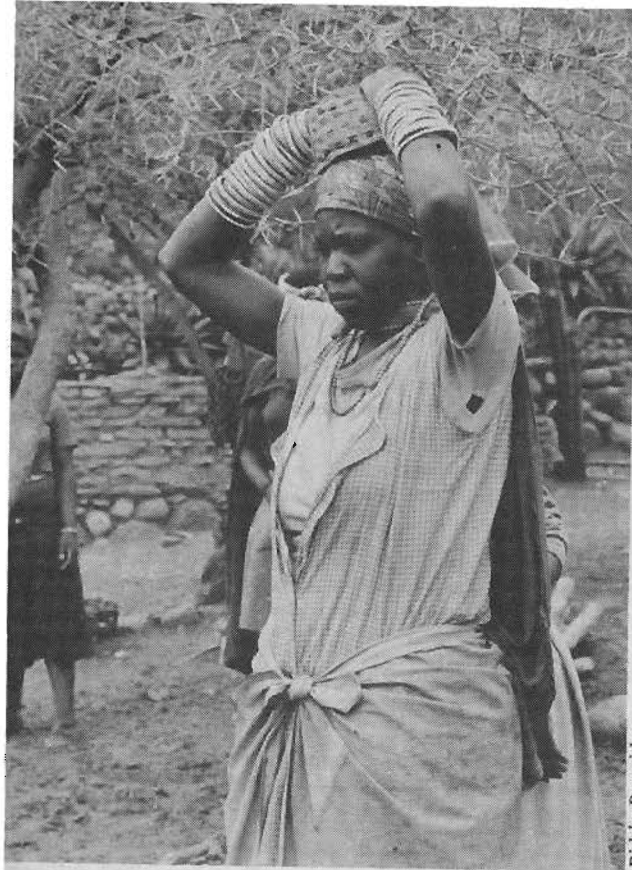
'Guilty. Ten days' hard labour. No fine. To be returned to the pass office at the conclusion of sentence and be disposed of in accordance with the provisions of the law,' said the magistrate unemotionally. The words did not frighten Sandile — he had not entirely recovered from the numbness that seized him the night before when that pick-up truck screeched to a halt beside him.

At last the longest ten days of his life came to an end. And now he stood together with a small group of about eight others, waiting to be 'disposed of'.

'Sandile Mendi!' The words snapped him to attention. 'Having become redundant to the labour needs of this area, and having no lawful claim of domicile anywhere in the country, you shall be taken to a resettlement camp where you shall spend the rest of your natural life, or return to the white areas of this country when labour needs shall so dictate.'

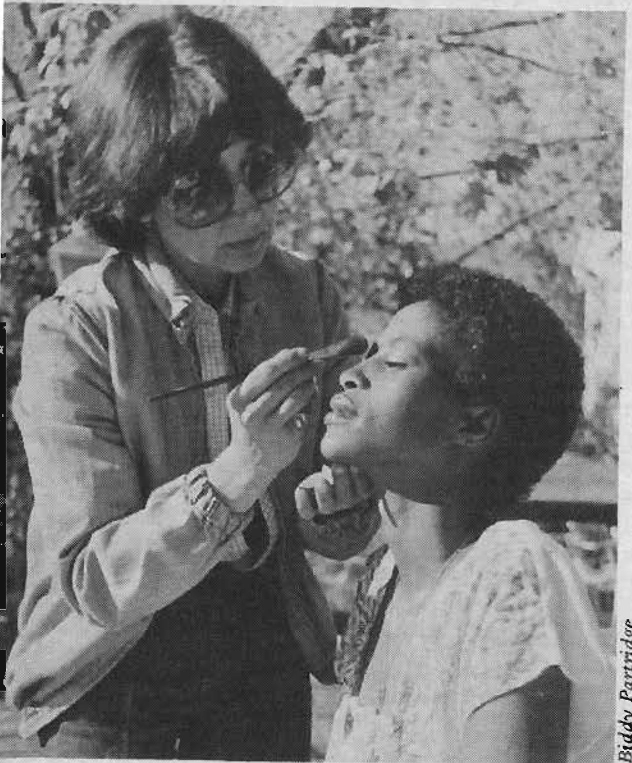
'So, it has happened at last,' he said to himself, 'the graveyard wagon is going to carry yet another load to the place of living death!' *Dust unto dust!* The words began to flash in his mind with the slow throbbing of muffled drums. Yes, he had heard about those places: No work; dry, barren soil as unproductive as the womb of a woman cursed by the gods; no water, where men and women and children dig ditches, praying meanwhile that some subterranean springs might seep through into their grave-like trenches to quench their thirst. 'Nonkosi! Nonkosi! Can this mean that I shall never see you again?'

Continued on page 26



Biddy Partridge

Biddy Partridge

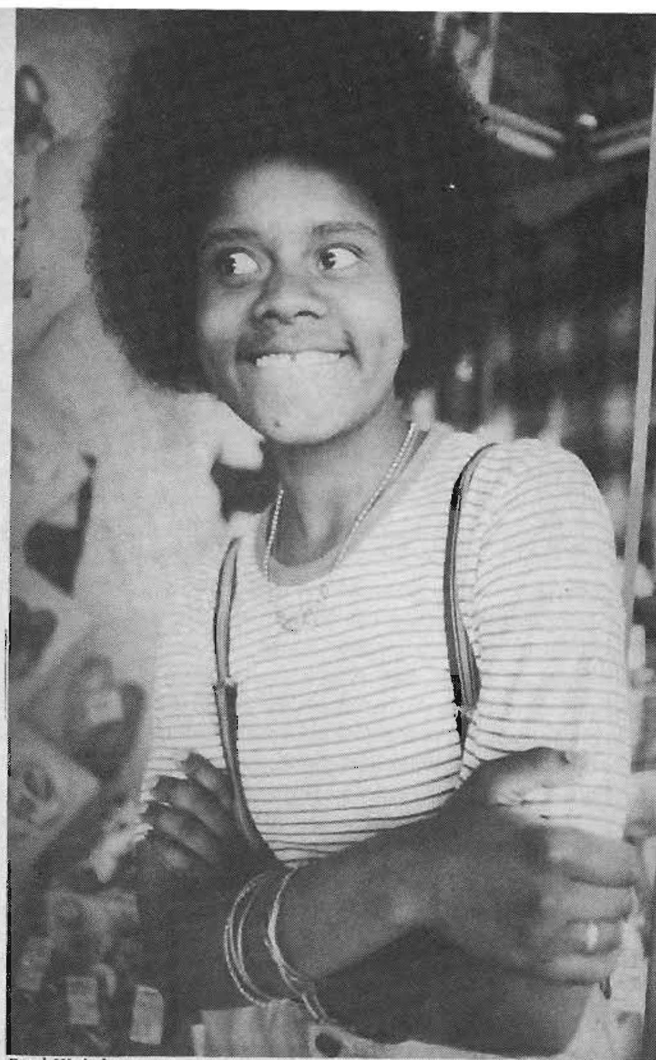


Biddy Partridge

Stan Winer

Biddy Partridge

Mxolisi Moyo



Paul Weinberg

WOMEN IN AZANIA

Omar Badsha

THE SPRING OF LIFE

Continued from page 23

Imagine him, Sandile Mendi, being banished to one of those human dumping grounds to be put away and forgotten! The politicians were right when they said that one day the black man will be compelled to answer force with force. What the hell! Hadn't he tried to find his way through their maze of papers? Hadn't he been separated from his wife by their papers? Hadn't he been denied an honest living, freedom to come and go, by their dirty papers? Now he has to be buried alive because of those stinking papers thought up by some son-of-a-bitch of a white man to legalize cheap, black, slave labour. To hell with them! Who needs a politician to teach him that this is slavery? This old man here, for instance. At this thought Sandile looked up at the old man and then suddenly screamed, 'Ba-a-as! Sto-op! Sto-o-op!' Then all at once everybody was yelling at the top of their voices: 'He-elp! Sto-op! Ho-o-o, ba-a-as!'

The old man had begun to slide off the bench just as Sandile looked at him, and he lay there retching and throwing up, and his eyes were beginning to roll backwards. One of the guards turned around and screamed at them: 'Shut up you, with your black anuses!' But when he saw the old man and the mess on the floor, he told the driver to stop. Everyone was ordered off the truck, and some men were instructed to carry the old man off and put him under a tree.

'Just give him a kick in the arse, he will get up,' said another guard, laughing.

'Look here, man, this is no time to make funny jokes,' said the one who had ordered the truck to stop. 'Bring that first aid kit from the cabin. Someone hold him up. Get a rag and wipe that mess from his mouth. Get that can of water and . . '

In the midst of confusion, Sandile seized his chance and bounded off. The guard of the funny joke, catching a glimpse of him as he disappeared in the rather dense forest, grabbed his gun from the truck and fired two or three shots in that direction.

Sandile's calculation had been right — they would not risk losing the rest of their human cargo just for him. Indeed, they had never thought that anyone could be foolhardy enough to wish to be abandoned in that God-forsaken wilderness.

'Well,' said one of them, 'let him be. He will soon realize that he would have been better off at the resettlement camp.'

Determined not to be recaptured, Sandile ran for some time among the trees, caring little where he was going as long as it was away from that death-wagon and its dehumanized guards. When he was sure he was no longer being pursued, he sat down to rest and think. He still had the five shillings given him by the kind woman. That crisis in the truck had happened shortly after they had eaten their lunch, such as it was, so he could go on for several hours without food.

He remembered hearing that highways — the big ones — were constructed close to railway lines. Stowing away in a freight train would be relatively easy. That way he could achieve his immediate goal — to reach Johannesburg, find Nonkosi and be with her for some time. The old man had got sick not too long after they had veered left off the main highway, at an acute angle. He would walk across the country in a line completing the triangle begun by the highway and the country road, and hopefully find a railway line going to Johannesburg.

So he was ready to continue his journey. But before doing so, he felt in his pockets and took out his papers. He examined each one carefully, almost tenderly, and then with something of a sense of ritual, he arranged them in a neat little pile and set them alight. And as the smoke went up, and he turned around to go, he felt at once free and frightened and sad. He almost ran.

It was around half-past-two in the afternoon when he escaped from the truck, and, since it was summer, he had enough daylight ahead of him to feel confident that something would turn up before dark.

The going was rough, especially in the forest where, for the most part, he was not sure that he was keeping to the right course. But even after he emerged from the forest, he had to pick his way through wild terrain — round boulders, over hills, across streams. Could he be going the wrong way, he wondered as he began to feel tired, or is that highway further than he thought.

Another hour's walk brought him within sight of a village. He went straight to the nearest house and explained that he was trying to reach Johannesburg to find a job. He was walking to the nearest railway line in order to get on a train. He had never travelled by train to Johannesburg, and was not sure exactly where the station was, but believed it was in the general direction he was following. Would they direct him? Sandile spoke as briefly as he could, being careful not to betray his exact identity and his recent story of escape. He hoped they would not ask him searching questions. They looked like kind, honest people, but one could never take a chance. The man and his wife did not bother him with unnecessary questions, beyond asking him what clan he belonged to, and about the welfare of his people. He, for his part, answered as truthfully as he could, adding just enough to make it seem that he had seen his mother quite recently. The man and his wife gave him food and insisted that he stay that night and the next, and have a good rest before proceeding on his journey. After that, the man said, he would have time to drive him in his horsecart to the nearest railway station, which was not too far from there — maybe half of a morning, riding. Sandile thanked them very much, but insisted that he had to pass on the same day. It would suit him fine, he thought to reach the station under cover of darkness. The man thought for a while, consulted with his wife, then ordered his son to hitch the horses to the cart — he would at least take Sandile part of the way. Meanwhile the woman of the house prepared some provisions for Sandile.

It was an uneventful ride, with sporadic bits of conversation between him and his benefactor. At last the station lights were in sight — maybe another two miles away. The man stopped the cart and said, 'My friend, I have taken you further than I had intended. I must go to work tomorrow, and it is late. There is the station, where those lights are. It is not too far now.' Sandile could find no words to thank this kind-hearted man. The man, for his part, waved his hand and said, 'It is nothing, child of my father. To be generous is to put away in safekeeping

for oneself. Who knows? One day you might help my own child in the same way, or in some other way.'

So they parted.

Sandile reached the station, but stayed in the shadows, hoping there would be a freight train that night. After many hours of feeling cold and restless, he heard a train whistle. Yes, it *was* going north, and it *was* a freight train. This was a very small station, called a siding, with a short platform, leaving the bulk of the train unobserved by the train guard and the station attendant. Sandile went on the side away from the platform, to the rear end of the train, and stowed away in an open car. Before daylight came, he got off at another station to find a hiding place for the day, and then got on another freight train to continue his journey. He finally reached the outskirts of Johannesburg, got off the train and walked the rest of the way.

Nonkosi watched the man approach her house. She was curious. As he came closer, her heart began to beat faster, her earlier uncertainty disappeared. It was he. It was the Father-of-Mbandezelo. How could she have even begun to doubt him? Her man had come, and she was afraid and sad and happy. She stood there smiling through a stream of tears. Then she laughed as he dropped his bag and came running to her in a somewhat hobbling gait. They clung to each other and the spasms of Nonkosi's laughter gave way to hysterical sobs. Sandile walked her into the house. Once in there they grabbed each other again, and as her sobbing continued with renewed violence, Sandile's tears flowed in torrents. It was as if he had reserved for this moment the revelation of his wounded soul. Yes, yes! How could he have bared himself like this before anyone but Nonkosi?!

There they stood, beyond the reach of time, and no word was spoken. Nonkosi looked up and, seeing the wetness on his face, freed one hand and wiped him and kissed him and cried the more.

Outwardly they looked odd. Nonkosi wore a cheap print dress, quite old, and a little too long to do justice to her figure. But this, too, had suffered since Sandile last saw her — she had lost a good deal of weight, and the parts that needed to protrude were almost flat. Her once-beautiful breasts and buttocks did not carry her clothes so well any more, and the dress almost had the appearance of being draped over a stick. She wore flat shoes that got rather badly disfigured on the outside towards the heel when her full weight pressed on them.

The expensive trousers, jacket and shirt worn by Sandile were mocked by his shoes which were down at the heel and had holes in their soles. He too had lost some weight, and was somewhat swallowed up by his clothes.

My man has lost none of his tiger's grip, she thought as she felt his strong but gentle grasp. He is setting me afire! He's revived a spark I thought had turned to ashes these past thirteen months. O, how my stomach growls! Sandile, for his part, marvelled at Nonkosi's strength of will that had kept alive her capacity to love. Her self-confidence had remained alive. Indeed her smaller frame seemed to make her, if anything, livelier and more responsive. She nestled in his arms like a trusting baby.

Neither seemed inclined to speak. Neither knew what should be the first word when they began to speak

A sudden cry from the baby, who had been sleeping all this while, broke the spell. Nonkosi freed herself to pick up the baby, saying with a smile as the tears glistened in her eyes, 'Father-of-Mbandezelo, your child is crying. I'll bring him to you.'

She brought the baby, but as they came closer, Mbandezelo, now about four months old, turned away from Sandile and clung to his mother. 'Your father, my baby, your daddy!' she cajoled him. But Mbandezelo began to cry and clasp his little arms around his mother's neck.

Sandile smiled and said, 'All right, my beloved. He has to get used to me slowly. But he will in the end.'

Both Nonkosi and Sandile were too exhausted to start narrating their separate tales. Without saying it, they communicated this feeling to each other.

While Nonkosi made tea, Sandile began his slow overtures with the baby who was now lying on the bed and playing. By the time tea was ready, Mbandezelo had gained enough confidence to smile and giggle at some of Sandile's antics, provided he kept at a distance. Sandile was thrilled, and he became so totally absorbed in this that nothing else seemed to matter in the whole wide world.

Suddenly he turned around and said to Nonkosi, 'By the way, the police! Am I safe?' Nonkosi reassured him. There was no local police station, and the police came on monthly inspection visits only, unless they were specifically called out — and that, too, depended on what they were called for: They would much more readily come to investigate an alleged infringement of the pass laws than robbery or rape or murder. 'Don't worry, Father-of-Mbandezelo,' she concluded, 'it will be another three weeks before they come again.'

She bore his absence with much fortitude. She worked hard on her little plot tending the crops that partly supplied her and the child's needs. The four months he had spent there with them had meant a great deal to her, and the child had grown very attached to him. She always strove to banish the memory of that night of their parting when he melted into the darkness of the night with three strange men. These days her meagre supplies were supplemented regularly by packages of food and clothing that came mysteriously from where she did not know, sometimes with a note in his hesitant hand, saying, 'I love you. Look well after yourself and the child.' One such note, a longish one, had said, 'I can understand that the name you gave our son was inspired by the white man's oppression of our race. When our next child comes, whether it be a boy or a girl, let it bear the name *Khwezi*, for we are saluting the morning star that heralds the new day of our freedom.'

The fears she had had when he was in Cape Town did not plague her now. In that earlier parting she had been tormented by nightmares of his possible arrest and torture by the police. She had seen him in her daydreams and nightmares, rendered helpless by the pummelling of hammer-like police fists with his arms pinned behind him by another policeman. She had dreamed many times that he was dead. But, worst of all, her faith in him had begun to be shaken. If he was all right — and God knows she wished him so — why had he stopped writing? He had to be all right! He *was* all right. After all she had been forced to change her residence a number of times. Maybe the same thing had happened to him, breaking down their correspondence. But, on the other hand (oh, how she hated the very thought of it!) maybe he had found another woman and forgotten all about her. She would feel anger and despair surging up in her chest: After all, they had both mentioned the possibility of her being pregnant before he left for Cape Town, and any man would make it his business to find out where and how his pregnant wife was — or whether she was pregnant or not. At last she had resigned herself to a position of neutrality. He would come one day if he really meant to. Meanwhile she would wait and attend to the more immediate problem of keeping herself (and later the baby also) alive.

His parting this time, however, was different. She waited with hope and conviction. She did have her moments of depression, of weakness, especially when the baby would keep saying, 'Mama, dada,' sometimes raising a finger, as if to point in some unknown direction.■

The People's Leaders (for the sake of our weaker brothers) *(woodcut) by T Jali*

TOWARD PATRIOTIC ART

An analysis of T. Jali's woodcut by Mpikayipheli

'As artists we need to be with our people, on all the many occasions of struggle. In the factories. In the political meetings. In the rural areas. In the backyards of the posh houses of missus and baas . . . '

At a time when more and more people are becoming involved in the cultural struggle, and when we can say that cultural resistance is definitely on the agenda, a woodcut like T. Jali's *The People's Leaders* (subtitled 'for the sake of our weaker brothers') points the way ahead to a national democratic culture.

Political meetings by blacks are nearly always illegal. People gather defiantly despite government bans. They know they will face harassment — before, during or after. What Jali has managed to capture is the inevitably electric atmosphere at such a meeting. In so doing he registers the mood of one of the most important occasions in the lives of the dispossessed Azanians.

The main force of the work comes from the expressions on the faces of the three prominent figures, the leaders. But we notice that the two silhouetted forms on the extreme right and left are also important. They connect with the three leaders, suggesting the way leaders will continue to emerge with determination and confidence to accomplish their tasks.

Feelings of determination and defiance strike the viewer as he looks at the leader in the centre, and in this the leader is representative of his people. His confidence and determination are qualities needed in the ongoing every-day struggle against oppression and humiliation.

On the left of the main figure we see another leader who has, it seems, been overcome by emotion; and on the right, a lowered face that is entirely silhouetted, above shoulders that seem dejected. As we look at these two figures I think we understand why Jali has subtitled his work 'for the sake of

our weaker brothers'.

The main figure is indeed exemplary to the other two. He has not broken down with emotion, despite his strong feelings. Nor is he unpredictable, like the leader on the right, who is a doubtful character and would sooner bend towards opportunism. But this position is watched. Note the more responsible figure behind him.

Jali has done well. His 'people's leaders' are not only evocative. Through the three contrasting types he has created he leads us to think about the qualities we should look for in a leader. But . . . who are these leaders? How, in our beautiful land, would fictitious leaders show us the way to a people's Azania? Why not make them real? The 'weaker brothers and sisters' who view this work will want to identify with the real leaders. Of fictitious leaders they know enough already . . .

We rarely come across an artwork which, like this one, patriotically emerges to declare its position regarding the circumstances which inspire it. As artists we need to be with our people on all the many occasions of struggle, of which the political meeting is only one. In the factories. In the backyards of the posh houses of missus and baas. In the so-called rural areas. On the farms occupied by the boers. Underground in the mines where our people's blood is gold for the mine-owners.

As we identify ourselves with the struggle at all points and on all occasions, we need to be careful of one danger — that of portraying our people as a people without hope, helpless, without determination. Here again we can remember what is positive in Jali's work, and remember his emphasis on the solidarity of the collective group out of which leaders emerge.

Social awareness and a scientific understanding of our problems within the man-made perimeters of our struggle to exist; these are sound bases for commitment. Our aim as artists should be to live within the perimeters of the day-to-day life of our people. and thus to be available to them at all times. Art should never be alienated from the environment which inspires it. It can never belong to individuals. A picture is created by an individual, it is true — but we should not distinguish the aspirations of the people from the artist's creativity. An artist. o a rata kapa ha a rate, must serve the needs of the struggle. ■

Poetry

Keith Gottschalk

THE MOON IS RISING

the
moon
is

RISING

it is 0200 hours
when the moon hits the sand-dunes at Belhar
& the dunes explode
    shatter amber fire
bushes erupt flames

PARAAT PARAAT PARAAT

10 AA Regiment fires tracer at the moon
the Minister of Justice bans all meetings
Wilson & Rowntrees fires all striking workers
the Riot Squad beats up Alexander Sinton High School
armoured cars cordon off sand-dunes

the Special Branch
    think the moon is the Committee of 81
Wilson & Rowntrees
    think the moon is the S.A. Allied Workers Union
General Magnus Malan
    thinks the moon is Umkhonto we Sizwe
the moon says no comment
    it only speaks to the people

AANDAG AANDAG AANDAG

in their command bunker
total strategy is on the agenda
generals & managing directors
talk importantly manipulate threaten

general Constand Viljoen studies the map
the meat workers study their pay-packets
on the map is the People's Republic of Angola
in the pay-packet is poverty
    hunger
    NOTHING!

the general smiles
the meat workers don't smile
from their concrete womb
the generals give birth to blitskrieg
    napalm
    & the armoured dash to Cela

out of the pay-packets
the meat workers give birth to the union
    boycott
    & the strike for living wages

the police roadblock taxis
poke sub-machine guns under seats
    but can't find the moon
police dogs paw the sand-dunes
    but can't track the moon
helicopters of 30 Squadron parabat to the sand-dunes
    but can't kill the moon
Pretoria telexes: detain the Sociology Department
    the moon has escaped

& in burnt-out buses
    in 3rd class train coaches
    inside the factories
    chanting crescendos:

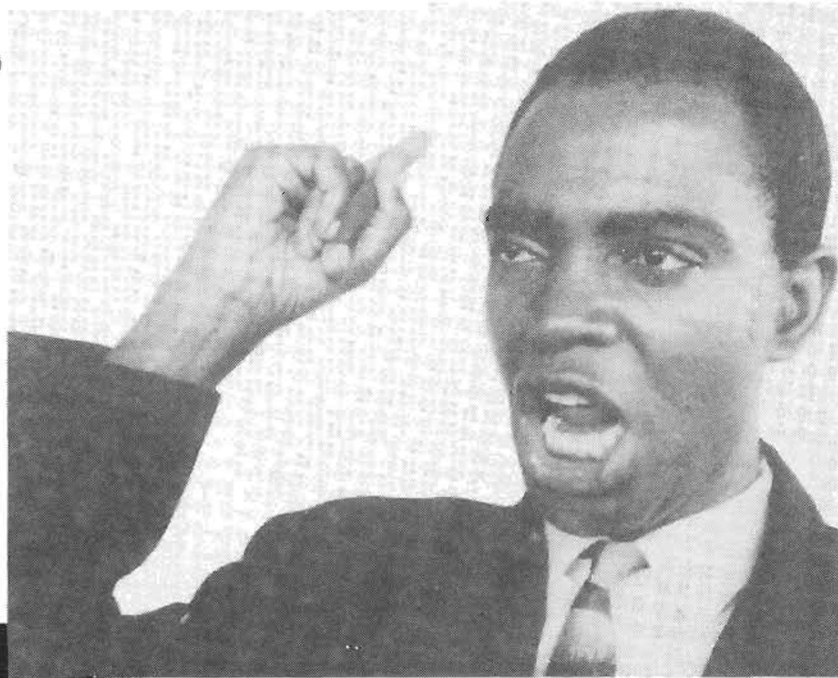
the
moon
shall
rise

AGAIN!

Keith Gottschalk

GAMAKHULU DINISO

DRUM: The Inside Story



By Nelson Ottah

Nelson Ottah was a writer on the Nigerian edition of *Drum* magazine in its early years. Here is a shortened account of his first days on Africa's greatest magazine. The full story appears in THE BEAT OF DRUM, a DRUM/RAVAN publication highlighting 30 pulsating years of the events that shaped our continent.

Drum wasn't much of an office. It was more austere and threadbare, as should be expected, than Mr Ian Pritchard's. My table looked more chopped up than Pritchard's. And my chair had many sharp nails protruding from its creaky joints. I wasn't born into wealth. Quite on the contrary, I virtually fought every inch of the way to, first, get educated and, secondly, to make a profession which, from early youth, I decided should be journalism, despite the hungry-dog-look worn by all those I then knew as journalists.

I was still holding my head with my two hands, contemplating, with grim forebodings, my unwholesome surroundings when my door was literally thrown open with a magnificent tonk. When I looked up, Mr Pritchard was standing hesitant at the door and somewhat lost. I jumped up, wearing a smile which was later described as demoniac by one of the white journalists I worked with on *Drum*.

As suddenly as he flung open the door of my office, Mr Pritchard leaned to one side of it, and in sauntered a lean-looking white man in ungodly short pants and an unpressed short-sleeved shirt, who was incongruously munching an apple. Mr Pritchard, despite the unprepossessing appearance of his companion, was noticeably reverential. He made way for the tramp — that was the immediate image the man presented in my mind — to come forward.

Mr Pritchard and his strange companion did not sit down. They instead chose to walk round me and my table like a brace of medicine men performing a ritual that was unholy for the uninitiated to be told about. I was just beginning to get hot under the collar when Mr Pritchard spoke.

He said: 'Mr Ottah, this's Mr Jim Bailey, our chairman. I told you, when we talked in my office early today, that he would be meeting you later in the day. Jim, this's our new man, Mr Nelson Ottah. He's, I'm sure, ready to talk with you. Do you two mind my leaving you to it?' And Mr Pritchard, without waiting for either a yes or a no answer from either of us, left the room — leaving me alone in the room to single-handedly face the hippie-looking stranger

Mr Bailey, still munching his apple furiously, had, at the time, mercifully decided to sit down. This, his small mercy, cleared the way for my sitting down also.

'Well, how do you feel about it?' Mr Bailey, munching his apple and grinning like a Cheshire cat, shot out at me. I couldn't make head or tail of his question. I had just joined the staff of *Drum* — just about four hours ago — and couldn't have developed any feelings about it either way, unless the feeling that the office of the magazine could so easily pass for the headquarters of the Lagos beggars. But my embarrassed silence did not, in any way, discourage Mr Bailey.

He opened up: 'Look here, let's start to bat, shall we. Let's hear your idea of stories, ripping stories, you're to come in with the magazine during the next few months. Your predecessor wasn't up to the thing. Instead of going for first-class stories that ask daily to be picked up here and there in this country, he went to Ibadan, in Western Nigeria, holed himself up in an hotel, and decided to drink his liver out in there. I understand he was fired by our editorial adviser who wouldn't stomach that sort of thing. What do you say?'

I couldn't say anything. I didn't yet know enough about anything in the magazine to say anything. But, again, my dumbness couldn't restrain my strange chairman. With his head thrown back, he steam-rolled along in a gushing Oxford baritone.

'Look here, I expect you to bring a fresh mind to the whole thing. What's been lacking out here is freshness. Freshness of idea and style. Ian has shown me the cuttings of your writings in both the *Daily Times* and the *West African Pilot*. Your style's good. It has a bite. All that remains is to bend it a little this way and a little that way until we get the thing right. How about a roaring story on Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe's early life? Bob was to take this on. But, as usual, he fell down on the job. How about your taking it on? It would be a ripping story, you know, especially if the old boy could be persuaded to let's have his picture of the period to go with the story. By jove, it would be a first-class story, a knock-out. What do you say?'

I was on a somewhat familiar ground here. I quickly told my chairman that I agreed with him that getting Dr Azikiwe to tell us about his early struggles would be quite a story. I assured him — as it turned out more in bravado than with any sort of assurance — that it would not be too difficult for me to find a way of persuading Dr Azikiwe to set some hours

aside from his crowded life to talk to me and my photographer about his early life and to rustle together (provided he still had them, I made bold to warn my chairman) some pictures of those periods in his life to go with the story.

Suddenly, my chairman, with his head thrown back, roared with laughter. I was taken aback. I had not said anything amusing. I couldn't understand the reason for his laughter. Was the laughter a sign of his abnormality or something worse? But, as it soon turned out, it was his contemplation of the splash the Azikiwe story would make on the magazine that touched off his laughter. He was not mad or something. He was merely celebrating an imagined journalistic *coup* in anticipation.

My chairman, who appeared better informed on the bizarre and weird aspects of the Nigerian life and culture than I was, did not stop at proposing the Azikiwe story. He threw other possible stories at me and grinned more winsomely as he noticed a look of surprise on my face. While he was about this grand festival of his deep knowledge of Nigeria's variegated lores, he asked me whether I had heard of a juju-crocodile in Ibadan to which the natives sacrifice a living human being once every year. I told him I'd never heard about the crocodile or about its taste for human flesh.

My chairman roared with laughter again, with his head thrown back as usual and with his upper and lower gums showing. When he recovered himself, he told me that the crocodile story was told him by a chum of his at the Lagos Bar Beach, and that he himself thought the story worth investigating further.

Despite my doubt, I entered the story in my diary which, as my strange chat with my chairman progressed, was getting progressively filled up with pieces of phantasmagoria that were already enough to drive the most hardened crackpot in Disneyland off his rocker.

My sudden editorial breaking-in session with my chairman was as suddenly called off by him at about 6 pm. At that time, the only two people left in the magazine's office were Mr Pritchard and his assistant, Mr Roy Paulson. The two white men waited for the chairman in order to take him to his hotel in the one and only run-down car owned then by the firm. As soon as my strange chairman had left the premises with his troupe of 'Yes, Jim' whites, I staggered out of my office, through the rickety staircase, down to the street below like General Napoleon's infantrymen on the last lap of the retreat from Moscow. If I didn't learn any other thing from the meeting, I did learn why my predecessor lost his job. This knowledge made it possible for me to work for so long and, according to the unanimous testimony of friends and foes alike, so successfully on the staff of *Drum*.

The rest of the days of my first week on the staff of *Drum* were used up in getting acquainted with those staff of the magazine I would inevitably have something to do with in the course of my duty. Thus, I was introduced to Mr Bayo Akinwonmi, a young and rotund accounts clerk; Mr Joseph Olu Domingo, personal assistant to the general manager; and Mr Roy Paulson, a white assistant to the general manager, Mr Ian Pritchard.

None of the Nigerian staff I thus came to meet and know in person struck me then as, in a purely formal sense, educated enough to rise to any position of authority in the firm. The impression I had of all the Nigerian staff was that they got their respective jobs on one qualification: that none was qualified to ever grow to take over from any of the two white men — Ian Pritchard and Roy Paulson. But, as matters turned out, my impression was wrong. Many of them are today the chieftains of the indigenised Nigerian *Drum*.

One evening, after the official hours, I took Matthew Jafi out to a drinking place. I did this in the hope that Matthew, who always found it difficult to say his mind before a third

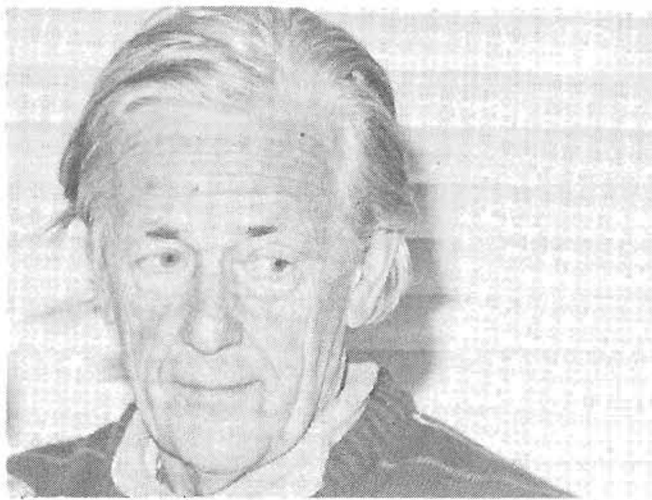
'The manuscript on Dr Nnamdi Asikiwe was a matrix from which I could produce anything, a great man or a mountebank; from which I could create an image of a perfect or an imperfect Nigerian; from which I could bring forth a hero that the Igbos, if not the whole of Nigeria, could follow even down the valley of death.'

person, would open up to me a little if he were with me alone and if I were lucky to loosen his taciturnity with beer — if only he drank. Mercifully, he was not abstemious: he liked his Guinness. To make sure that he would be loosened up, I ordered him a giant bottle of the ugly-looking brew, and we both soon fell to.

Before long, Matthew started to thaw, to become unusually garrulous. The drink was working as I well expected it would. Was it the time to probe Matthew a bit? I asked myself. But before I could act, Matthew, without any preamble, told me that he had three wives and was proposing to marry the fourth one very soon. I didn't quite know what to make of his story. As he stopped the story of his wives to belch — a natural function, but which he performed with his two eyes almost coming out of their sockets and with his entire slim body convulsing painfully — I thought I should start my probing.

I asked Matthew to tell me about Mr Donald Bullock, the magazine's white editorial adviser who was based in Accra, Ghana. I had not yet met him in person. Matthew suddenly went red — if a black man could go red — and dried up. When, in a sharp voice, I asked him whether he had not heard my question, Matthew belched more loudly and whispered: 'Oga, I only discuss my wives and my children with strangers. No more. I lost my job in the *Daily Times* because of what they call "office politics". Since then, I don't discuss office politics. You go meet Mr Bullock and go fear him. Right now, I'm drunk, and I want to go home. Tonight is the night for one of my wives. You go know Mr Bullock when you meet him. That's all, Oga. I'm sorry. But I no want talk.'

And Matthew closed up like a clam. But not before I had taken his measure. Throughout my many happy working years in *Drum* magazine with Matthew, I never permitted myself or anyone else to expose him to what he had himself



Jim Bailey Photo, *courtesy of* Drum

called 'office politics'. I had, during our short beer-session, found to my satisfaction that Matthew, because he had once been bitten by it, was a great enemy of 'office politics': that he would, whenever 'office politics', in any shape or form, was thrust upon him, always behave like a disciple of Brigham Young — that he would always hide where the Devil of 'office politics' would not find him out — which would invariably be between the two legs of one of his many wives.

I had made up my mind on which way to go with the magazine. But this was not the end of the matter. Mr Ian Pritchard had, in an unguarded moment, a moment probably brought about by too much intake of beer, told me that my chairman was as hard as a burr in the matter of money. He added rather uncharitably that the chairman was one of those businessmen who always expected a huge turnover without ever giving a thought to the fact that a huge turnover was always made possible by a huge investment. If it was true, I told myself, that the chairman liked his men to become experts in putting quart into pint, where the hell was I going to get the money with which to finance my proposed political journalism?

I had promised both my chairman and my editorial adviser that I would have a crack at getting Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe to talk to me about his early life both in the country and in the United States of America. I made this promise because I felt and believed that if I could get Dr Azikiwe into the magazine, a way should have been cleared for me to turn the magazine into an increasingly political one. I soon left for Onitsha, in Anambra State now, to hunt down the charming, but difficult, Dr Azikiwe. Probably because Dr Azikiwe had known me as a staff of his *West African Pilot*, he received me without first making me run from this pillar to that post, as was his wicked wont then, before one was ushered into the presence of the towering, charming and formidable ogre.

My interview with Dr Azikiwe was a very short one indeed. He had, he told me, assigned his biographical notes to one Mr Vincent Ikeotuonye. Why, he asked me, shouldn't I approach Mr Ikeotuonye and come to an arrangement that would make it possible for me to get from Mr Ikeotuonye's notes the part of the great man's life history that I wanted? I told him that there was no reason why I shouldn't go and see Mr Ikeotuonye.

But suddenly I paused. I came up with what I thought was a brilliant idea. I asked Dr Azikiwe to kindly give me a note to Mr Ikeotuonye with my request, he wouldn't think I was a fake or worse. Dr Azikiwe wouldn't oblige. 'I'm sure,' he said instead, getting up at the same time, 'Mr Ikeotuonye would oblige you. You may be young all right, but you've made a reputation as a journalist. Run off now to Mr Ikeotuonye. I'm sure he'll oblige you.' The interview was over.

With my heart in the hollow of my palm, I left Dr Azikiwe in search of the reputedly unapproachable Vincent Ikeotuonye. I found him sitting and brooding, with his goatee wagging menacingly, in his sitting-room. I didn't quite know how to explain my visit. But Igbos, even when they are as unapproachable as Mr Ikeotuonye, have a subtle way of putting all their visitors at ease. They do this by embarking upon a long inquiry on the nature of the journey the visitor made, on the health of the visitor's wife, children and other dependants, and on what the visitor would like to have as 'kola' — a word that often means anything from kola-nut, or palm-wine to illicitly brewed gin.

Mr Ikeotuonye's American education didn't stop him from embarking upon this customary long inquiry. And this gave me the opportunity to frame the request I had gone to make of him. With a glass of palm-wine in my hand which I saw as a magical wand that would open all doors, I told Mr Ikeotuonye the purpose of my visit. As I stopped speaking, he savagely grabbed his rather over-grown goatee and pulled it this way and that way.

I felt very sorry for his lower jaw. He might dislocate the poor thing if he continued to give his beard that sort of magnificent tug for any longer moment. Mr Ikeotuonye, unknown to me at the time, was using his beard-pulling to cover the fact that he was thinking very hard, just in the same manner that pipe-smokers use fiddling with their pipes to buy time and use the time they have thus bought to think their thoughts.

Without any warning that he was about to cut up rough, Mr Ikeotuonye yelled: 'If I give you the part of my manuscript you want, who then is going to read my biography of Dr Azikiwe when I finally bring it out? Wouldn't you have destroyed the meat of the book in your profile of the subject in your *Drum*? I'm amazed that a man of your education should be sitting down there and making this sort of request of me. Do you know what you're asking me to do? You're asking me to destroy my life's work. Your demand is impudent. You're no more than . . . '

Before the by now incredibly angry Mr Ikeotuonye could complete the sentence his young wife glided into the sitting-room. Mr Ikeotuonye took to his brooding as quickly as his wife made her grand entry. But with supreme effort of will, I presumed, Mr Ikeotuonye put his brooding aside to introduce me to his charming wife. The presence of his wife was to me an opportunity that should not be lost. In a raised voice, I told Mr Ikeotuonye that quite apart from the fact that I would completely re-write the portion of Dr Azikiwe's life that I would take from his biographical note on the great man, *Drum* would credit the source of the story it would publish to his coming biography and this would, in my opinion, increase the marketability of his book.

My desperate statement proved a hay-maker. Mrs Ikeotuonye, although she did not know what had gone before, was the first to grasp the meaning of what I had said. She enthused: 'Vee, don't lose this golden opportunity for a free advertisement of your book. Grab it with both of your hands. Mr Ottah must be a very good friend of yours to make you this fine proposal. Vee, don't throw away the opportunity.' Mr Ikeotuonye, although he was thinking even harder, did not return to his beardtugging or to his forbidding brooding. Instead, he even managed a smile, which liberally emerged as a sudden sunshine from the thicket of his beard almost in the same way that a morning sun emerges from behind masses of cumulus. But that was not the end of the matter.

Said Mr Ikeotuonye. 'You know I never saw it in the light my wife has seen it so quickly. Women aren't as dumb as men make them out. Okay, I'll let you have my manuscript on the understanding that you'll re-write the portion you decide to lift from it. And on the understanding that you'll

let me see the re-write. Now there remains the little matter of agreeing on fees I shall be paid for making my manuscript available to you. I understand that the owner of your magazine is a millionaire. How much are you authorized by him to offer me? This wouldn't be difficult to resolve, would it?'

It would, and was, indeed. I did not clear with either Mr Pritchard, the keeper of our magazine's purse in West Africa, or Mr Donald Bullock, my editorial adviser on how much money would be offered Mr Ikeotuonye. And I couldn't have, since I left Lagos for Onitsha to interview Dr Azikiwe. No one, not even me, expected, before I left Lagos, that I would find myself bargaining with Mr Ikeotuonye over how much my magazine would pay him for the right of lifting its proposed profile on Dr Azikiwe from the manuscript of Mr Ikeotuonye's biography of Dr Azikiwe. I was at a dead-end, but I had not the slightest intention of returning to Lagos empty-handed and probably getting the sack for my pains. I decided there and then to play the game down to the floor.

I told Mr Ikeotuonye that I had no authority to make him an offer of fees for the lifting of a portion of his manuscript for my proposed profile on Dr Azikiwe. I did not stop here. I had to throw in a quickly improvised hard-sell technique. In a conspiratorial whisper, I told Mr Ikeotuonye that he was right in his story that I was working for a millionaire. I added that I didn't think it would be difficult, given my employer's enthusiasm in the face of a grand piece of story as the one we would certainly make out of his book manuscript, to persuade my superiors in Lagos to pay more money to Mr Ikeotuonye than he would make me commit myself to paying him should he persist in negotiating with me. He got the message, and quickly passed on his manuscript to me.

I returned to Lagos in triumph. I immediately became a 'crack go-getter' in the eyes of both Mr Pritchard and Mr Bullock. And when my *coup* was communicated to Mr Bailey in Johannesburg, he sent me a congratulatory telegram. My lionization was understandable. Many of my predecessors had come croppers in pursuing the will-o'-the-wisp known as Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. The latest victim of this long-standing pursuit was Mr Bob Nwangoro. But my *coup*, head-turning as it was, was not without a bit of worry to me. I had told Mr Ikeotuonye that he would be adequately paid for his manuscript. Could the promise be kept?

I first consulted Mr Bayo Akinwonmi, the firm's accounts clerk. As moonfaced as ever, the only thing Mr Akinwonmi could tell me was that the issue was so big that it could, in his considered opinion, only be handled by 'our big men' – meaning Mr Bailey, Mr Pritchard and Mr Bullock. But being still very young, being still very much inclined to the optimism that all would always turn out for the best in our best of all possible worlds, I refrained from allowing the thought of whether my promise to Mr Ikeotuonye would be kept or not, to bother me.

A cultural event in Nigeria where Nelson Ottah was based

As I ploughed through Mr Vincent Ikeotuonye's biographical manuscript on Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, it came to be as a revelation that I had before me a matrix from which I could produce anything, a great man or a mountebank; from which I could create an image of a perfect or an imperfect Nigerian; from which I could bring forth a hero that the Igbos, if not the whole of Nigeria, could follow even down the valley of death I decided to give to my Azikiwe story everything that God had given me: imagination, hard work, audacity, refusal to be satisfied with my first, or second, or even third effort, and the will to aim at Flaubertian perfection, even though I knew that I was no Flaubert and that his perfection was therefore unattainable by me.

I think it was the enormous effort that I put into the Azikiwe story in *Drum* that made Mr Tom Hopkinson, who joined the firm as the over-all editor at the very time the story was breaking, write about me later in his book, *Into The Fiery Continent:* 'I felt committed in my mind to the *Drum* staff in East Africa, to . . . Nelson for encouragement, and whatever guidance he would accept in his drive to soar to the summit of West African journalism, dragging – as I hoped – our paper after him . . . '

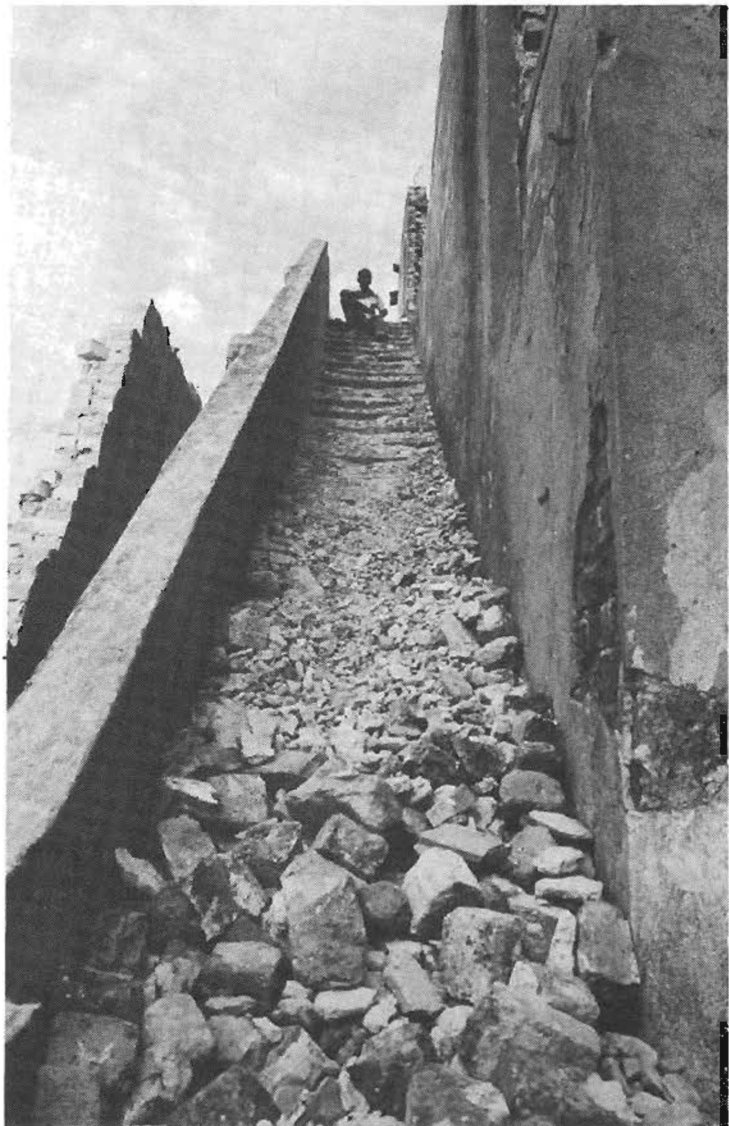
The Azikiwe series completely changed the thrust and content of the West African *Drum*. It also gave me faith in myself. But, on the whole, it did something more for me. It proved to Chairman Bailey that the West African *Drum* would not come tumbling down if the imperious Donald Bullock was shown the way out and an adviser who believed in dialogue rather than ultimatum in his dealings with African journalists, was brought in.

Mr Bullock eventually got his come-uppance, but in a most fortuitous way. He had, in one of his imperious moments, decided to post to my editorial staff a young Ghanaian by the name of Amon Okoi. I did not request the posting of this young man to my staff. And, worse still, the young man was, in my opinion, long on conceit and short on ability. After working with him for one long uneasy month, I requested that he be reposted, back to Accra, Ghana.

On learning of my impudent request, Mr Bullock, with his spouse Janet in tow, descended upon me like a ton of bricks. In a memorable confrontation in my office which, on arrival, he had made his own as usual, Mr Bullock yelled at me that I must sit down and write him a letter withdrawing my request that Mr Okoi should be posted back to Accra or he would himself sit down and write me a letter of termination of my appointment. Flushed with the fact that my Azikiwe series, among other things, had stabilized my position in *Drum* beyond question and that Mr Pritchard would not accept Mr Bullock's dismissal of me, I just sat down on the spare seat in my office cocking a God-damn snook at Mr Bullock and his wife.

Blinded by anger and false pride and ably seconded by his garrulous wife, Mr Bullock sat down and wrote me a letter of dismissal. But when I took the letter to Mr Pritchard, Mr Pritchard smiled in a most sinister manner and told me to return to my desk. As I made to leave his office, Mr Pritchard called me back and told me to either go home or go and have a beer and see him the following day.

I opted for beer drinking. I needed it – but not out of fear. When I came to the office the following day, I was told by Matthew that Mr Pritchard and Mr Bullock had had a devil of a row and that Mr Bullock had resigned his appointment and flown back to Accra, from where he would finally be flying out of West Africa. ■



Karl Sansom

With most of District Six flattened by bulldozers, people are still living there. People who have as yet escaped the vicious group areas removals, shelter amongst the rubble and rubbish.

Karl Sansom at the age of fifteen began documenting the sad demise of a once vibrant district. Here are some of the prints that he has submitted for the forthcoming Staffrider exhibition.

IN THE TWILIGHT'S EMBRACE

A short story by Funda Ntuli
Illustrated by Mzwakhe

Softly, as the twilight that had descended upon the room, she sobbed. In the final throes of an attack of self-pity, she flopped back into an armchair — his armchair. She knew very well that her mind was a hubristic hive of furtive activity. But she also knew that she shouldn't break down like this. For his sake. Her features, of a sudden, relaxed into calm acceptance. But for the twilight, she would still have looked rather jaded and, yes, lately, rather shabby into the bargain But she must be strong — she must not break down. For *his* sake.

Her face lighted up. How well she remembered small things about him! She re-lived those moments when he would point out to her little things that, at the time, appeared to be of no consequence. Oh! How careless we are, how utterly careless! She remembered when he had drawn her attention to the all too well-known fact that all references to the divine are written with a capital letter at the beginning. 'Why is this so?' And, without waiting for an answer he had continued: 'You see, all societies have to have some sort of concept of the Supreme Being. Which is why our people would only use their fists to point at the sky. This is where the Great, Great One was and still is believed to reside. To point with a finger would have amounted to sacrilege. So you see, our religion could not have been inferior to others. Okay, now let's look at the practices that are said to have been pagan in our faith . . .' And he would drone on, in that vein. At times she sensed that he was offended (though he would never say so himself) because he thought she hadn't been listening How could she tell him that she knew him too well; she knew his ideas inside out. She heard and understood. If her attention had seemed to wander, it was because she worried about him.

Her worry, as it turned out, had not been misplaced. They had come, as they usually do, in the early hours to take him away. They had thoroughly searched the house. With his books they had been particularly meticulous. Looking under their daughter's cot, one of them had exclaimed jubilantly. She knew it was that banned volume of Alex la Guma's work with the pamphlets inside. Ah, those pamphlets! She had always fretted over those pamphlets! It was one thing for him to lie in bed and to air his views on industrial strikes, but to actually distribute pamphlets telling people not to go to work!

From then on, as they would say in their language, things had gone *broekskeur* for her . . . and for him.

> 'All societies have to have some sort of concept of the Supreme Being. Which is why our people would only use their fists to point at the sky. This is where the Great Great One was and still is believed to reside. To point with a finger would have amounted to sacrilege.'

She knew that she should put on the lights but felt lazy. It was not completely dark yet, and she felt she had a little time to relax. Such is the powerful pull of reminiscence. She called into the bedroom to ascertain that her daughter was happy. The young one answered that she was playing with her doll's house. Her daughter. His daughter.

He had certainly been fond of their child, had even suggested in jest that the child took after him, and that she could only hope to acquire her 'own child' the second time around. But as for now, 'This one is mine.' Would there ever be another child? But she must be strong, for his sake.

Nkululeko. His greatest friend Nkululeko had seen her over the darkest hour, had found her that job with the liberal whites who called her 'dear' and made her uncomfortable because they went out of their way to show her that she was one of them — an equal. Also she was finding out that with some of them, much as she could be accepted because she was human, she could never be considered an intellectual equal. They didn't know how many of his books she had read. She was especially exasperated by the condescending Mrs Wishard who often punctuated her discussions with 'Don't you think you could be wrong, dear?'

All this she had taken in her stride and she had swallowed her pride. And now, to add to her woes, she had heard a rumour that Nkululeko was an informer. Okay, that was unconfirmed, but she knew for certain that she now felt embarrassed in his company. Lately there was this look in his eyes — a look she had often encountered in men's eyes. She hadn't bothered about it then, knowing that she was married to him. But even now she knew the look to be dangerous. Nkululeko no longer considered her merely as his jailed friend's wife.

She stood up to switch on the light. Again she was reminded of him. This was a ritual he loved going through when he got back from work. He would kiss both of them, mother and daughter, then he would switch on the lights. Only then would he settle in his armchair, trying to catch snatches from his newspaper whilst genially supervising the ministrations of a daughter who was only too happy that her daddy was back from work.

She walked into the bedroom and found the child asleep on the floor. How very like her father she was! She picked up her daughter and gently laid her on the bed, covering her with a blanket. She would feed the child later. Now she must cook.

As they left the bedroom she heard a knock on the front door. She opened the door to find Nkululeko beaming at her. He had that look in his eyes.

Nkululeko. She invited him to come in. They sat down and talked. Nkululeko did most of the talking. As he spoke she became more and more embarrassed. Nkululeko took a watch from his pocket and offered it to her as a present.

She didn't quite know what happened afterwards. She remembered being in Nkululeko's hot embrace and her timid responses to him. She remembered the dazed feeling. Yes, this she remembered very clearly. Then she had jumped up to mouth words fit to make him feel ashamed for the whole of next year.

As she banged the door after him and his watch, the child started crying in the bedroom . . .

Yes. She would have to be strong, for his sake.

The child cried louder and announced urgent hunger. She must provide something for the child to nibble at while she cooked.

She realized that she had to be strong for the child's sake also. Yes, in the months ahead, no, years, she would have to be very strong. For his child? Was that correct? No. *For His Child!* ■

BABY COME DUZE

The days of Mbaqanga

An excerpt from an article in the anthology *Umhlaba Wethu* (*Staffrider* Series, August 1982), collected and edited by Mothobi Mutloatse.

My full name is Edmund Mtutuzeli Piliso — Ntemi — strung on later and is an abbreviation of Ntemekwana.

Right now, Ntemi Piliso is my professional name . . .

I was born in Alexandra in 3rd Avenue, number 76 where I'm still staying up to now — on 16 December 1925. It's an historical day — during that time it was known as Dingane's Day but now it's called Voortrekker's Day or something . . .

My father was John Piliso and my mother's name was Emily. Both are late.

I was eleven years when my father died, somewhere around 1936 after we had gone to stay for a while in Orlando East. After his death my family returned to Alex because we owned a stand then.

My mother struggled because she had to do the white folks' washing to educate us — seven of us children. I was the third in the family.

The way I was introduced to music is interesting. A chap from Cape Town, by the name of Casablanca, came to Alex with quite a few instruments. I remember he had a clarinet, two alto saxophones, trumpet, trombone, tenor sax and a set of drums.

He himself was not a musician — he was only interested in forming a band which he would manage. I reckon that's why he had bought the instruments.

Some of the chaps in Alex — Boy Masaka and myself included — approached Casablanca with a view to learning how to play the instruments. I chose a trombone — I wanted to play it because I was inspired by the Glenn Miller Story, a film which I had seen.

Ntemi Piliso *Photo, Mabu Nkadimeng*

Well, like a young chap, what inspired me most was the showmanship of the trombone section in the Glenn Miller band. But when I got to Casablanca the trombone had already been occupied by somebody else.

So, Casablanca gave me a clarinet.

While the other chaps were busy blowing — I was more interested in knowing how to read music. Later on Casablanca engaged a music tutor for lessons on Sundays.

The guy he had employed to teach us music was one of the teachers at Alexandra's Holy Cross Catholic School . . . a Bopape. I can't recall his first name . . . He's late now.

However, he got discouraged during the process because the other chaps were not really interested in music lessons. On the other hand, I was so involved with the rudiments he taught

us that I improved on my own. I knew what to work on — without a tutor: the rudiments helped a lot.

I used to practise every day — all day! I wasn't working at the time . . . I was in my early twenties then.

I can say Mr Bopape didn't stay more than six months with us, having been discouraged by the other chaps who didn't attend lessons because all they wanted to do was to blow by ear, you see.

I taught myself to read music seriously. I thought it was the correct procedure . . . I just thought that the best thing to do to become a good musician was to read the music. As I said, I studied on my own at home.

By the way, there is one point I didn't mention earlier: I did not play clarinet for a long time . . . While we were busy playing music by ear, in the meantime taking lessons, Casablanca got convinced that my inclination was greater than the rest of the chaps.

So, he gave me an alto sax because it is more powerful than a clarinet. This was also meant for me to lead the band in the reed section.

Well, in the end I was the one who was teaching the other chaps the rudiments of music.

By that time we were known as the Casablanca Band, named after our mentor Casablanca, and stayed together for about two years.

The band comprised two altos, tenor sax, trumpet, trombone, second trumpet, drums, and string bass. Trombonist was Dingane — he's late. Altoist was Boy Masaka — actually his name is David Mope. David Sello on alto sax, and myself on tenor sax. I was also leader of the band.

On the trumpet was Robert Pule who has since died. Reggie and Forty Mazibuko were on the drums.

We played what today is called Mbaqanga. I used to transcribe music from records and arrange it to be played by ear by the chaps — numbers like Tuxedo Junction.

That's what we used to do with current numbers of that period, performing in Denver, Alex, and at two halls named Kwa-Sidzumo and Kwa-Mphahlele. Those were what we call speak-easies . . . you know, rowdy sessions.

We used to get away with it because we made friends with the rowdy chaps — in order that they should not attack us!

Truly speaking, the money was not good at all. Mostly we were doing concerts for the love of music. We had no responsibilities then.

Under Casablanca we did not record anything. We were just performing, and disbanded when Casablanca himself got arrested and jailed.

'You know, children used to sing a song in the township about Baby Come Duze, and this gave me an idea about a record with a swing beat. 'Baby Come Duze' the children would always sing . . . I improvised it in such a manner that it caught up with the public.'

At that stage I began to have other ideas. I wanted to play with more experienced musicians.

The years that I enjoyed the most in my career was with my own band — Alexandra All Stars, otherwise known as Ntemi's band.

This is because we made several records at Troubadour. And that's also where we cut this record, Baby Come Duze . . .

You know how we recorded this number? Actually, we improvised — like it is done today — and I arranged this song for the band, to make it swing in such a way that it hit the market hard.

It was strictly instrumental — with no lyrics . . .

I gave it the title of Baby Come Duze. You know, children then used to sing a song in the township streets about Baby Come Duze, and this gave me an idea to make a record with a 'swing' beat to it.

'Baby Come Duze,' the children would always sing . . . I improvised it in such a mannner that it caught up with the public. And I can safely say it must have sold more than a double gold disc — more than 40 000 copies.

You know, at that time we didn't know a thing about royalties from record sales. We signed a contract of some sort, nje.

After recording Baby Come Duze, we did a foolish thing by going to another recording company — I can't mention it here — and made more records. Like Nice Time Baby — our first number there.

We didn't realise then that by having gone to the second company, we had automatically forfeited our royalties at Troubadour. So one of the chaps at Troubadour got a brainwave.

This chap said to us: 'Hawu, you have gone to studio X, eh?'

We answered back, 'Yes, we went to studio X because we were broke.'

'So,' said this chap again, 'you have forfeited your royalties.'

We didn't know a thing: it is only today that I know that composer's royalties cannot be confiscated.

I think we went to studio X after being influenced by some talent scout. At that time we didn't see the danger of changing record companies.

We did not receive anything, royalties-wise, for Baby Come Duze. Not a cent!

At studio X, they made us also sign a contract, but instead of on the basis of royalties, I sold my composer's rights, unknowingly! And they used to give me five pounds just to put down my signature, whereas I was selling out my rights.

What I got was called, I think, composer's fee — instead of royalties. ■

Lionel Davis *'Unhappy mother'*

P. Hollow *distract*

P. Hollow *Microcosm*

FULL CIRCLE

by Ahmed Essop

Illustrated by Wm. Smiff

Captain Mason, who was in charge of State Security Headquarters, looked at the two young men standing before his table in Room 600. Kistan was tall, dark, his gaunt face bearded; Farouk was of average height, fair, well-built, hair long and wavy.

'So you two are against the state?'

The two men did not answer.

Suddenly Captain Mason jumped up from his chair, went round his table and screamed, 'Why don't you answer? Are you against the state or not?'

'We are,' Kistan said, taking a step back in fear.

'Then why didn't you answer at once?'

The captain was a thick-set man dressed in a light blue uniform. His pale face was clean shaven, his brown hair short, his small blue eyes hooded by the wings of his eye-brows. There was something about his appearance that seemed to have the impress of his vocation: hunting opponents of the state. To this end he was tenaciously, unswervingly devoted.

The captain returned to his chair

'Right, now tell me what grudge you have against the state?'

'We don't like it,' Farouk said quickly.

'Is it a piece of cake that you don't like it?'

Farouk smiled faintly.

'If you ever smile again in this office I shall smash your face,' the captain said, glaring and breathing like a dragon. He stood up.

'Tell me specifically, you understand, specifically.'

'It is not democratic,' Kistan said.

'What! Not democratic! What do you know about democracy? Why don't you go back to India and look for democracy there. Do you know where you will find it? On the faces of starving millions . . In the human maggots in the streets . . In the filth in open sewers . . . '

The office door opened and the officer who had arrested the two men came in. He saluted the captain and stood aside with folded arms.

'Let me tell you,' the captain continued, 'that we have the most democratic state in the world. A democratic state is one that provides stability, food, houses. Do you live in poverty? Are you hungry? Are you without clothing? Filth! Rats! Scorpions! You had the audacity to enter Wetonia and address meetings about democracy and instigate . . . '

It seemed that the captain, in his impassioned rage, would blow himself up — and the entire thirty-storey building in which they were.

Then he abruptly stopped speaking, took a cigarette from the table, lit it, and sat down on his chair.

'Now, listen to me,' he said, in complete reversal of his former tone and manner. He was now a calm, polite, reasonable counsellor. 'I am an outsider. I can see things in the way you never can. On the one side is the state, on the other side there's you. To me you are innocent children who cannot appreciate what they possess until they lose it. You have jobs, homes, food and happy families. You are short of nothing. But you are not satisfied. You must meddle in matters that should be of no concern to you. What have you got in common with those people in Wetonia? Nothing, I say. Look at what is happening in Africa now that the Indians and Europeans have left. There is starvation, war, chaos. Indians belong to a civilized race; Europeans belong to a civilized race. Do you think the state is against Indians? You are mistaken. Be a little patient and you will receive everything you desire. All sorts of privileges. I am telling you this confidentially. I know what is on the drawing-boards for the welfare of the Indian community No one in the world is going to do so much. Now, what do you say? Take my advice. Forget all your political agitation. Live happily and if you have any problems come to see me '

The two men listened impassively.

'I can see you are understanding, in-

telligent men. If those barbarians in Wetonia were to take over the state they would kill you first because you have no weapons to protect yourselves and because you are part of a minority. I wouldn't like to see the two of you suffer Now go, but if you persist with your activities in Wetonia I shall have no option but to lock you up under Section Ten, and you know what that means.'

Captain Mason came to the end of his speech. He stood up and addressed the officer, 'Take these two gentlemen safely back home to Elysia.'

And then the revolution occurred. It was a quiet, bloodless, very civilized sort of revolution. Miraculously, a peace agreement between the government and the guerrilla-opposition encircling the country was reached. One morning many planes were seen leaving the airport never to return; in their plush cabins were all the important officials of the old regime. Of course, the President, the Prime Minister and the other members of the cabinet, as their status demanded, were seated in the first class section. Most of the planes went west; a few north.

Very soon after the revolution Colonel Neva, the new head of state, decided to visit State Security Headquarters. It was a sentimental sort of visit, for it was here that he had once, many years ago, been interrogated and tortured. He now wished to see the old place and declare it a national relic that would remind the citizens of the new state of the previous despotic era.

Colonel Neva and his entourage went in shining limousines. His own metallic-red Rolls-Royce, flanked by a police escort on roaring motor-cycles, headed the procession. He was a short corpulent man with a shining large forehead lending dignity to his appearance. He was dressed in military uniform. When his car came to a halt he alighted after his body-guards had opened the doors of his limousine. He stood on the first step leading to the entrance of State Security Headquarters and was about to climb the steps when an officer came up to him, saluted and said:

'Sir, there is an official of the old regime on the thirtieth floor who has not left.'

'What! Is he defying me?'

'I don't know, sir. He says he will only speak to you.'

'What is his name?'

'Captain Mason.'

'Captain Mason! He has the audacity to remain after what he did to me and those countless others? Come, it is time for revenge.'

Colonel Neva and his entourage

'To me you are innocent children who cannot appreciate what they possess until they lose it. You have jobs, homes, food and happy families. You are short of nothing. But you are not satisfied. You must meddle in matters that should be of no concern to you. What have you got in common with those people in Wetoria?'

entered the deserted building and were swiftly whisked up to the thirtieth floor in a lift.

Captain Mason was sitting at his desk, examining some documents. When he saw Colonel Neva with a gun in his hand enter the room he rose immediately, went up to him, saluted, and said, 'At your service, sir.'

'What!' Colonel Neva said, taken aback.

'Colonel Neva,' Captain Mason addressed him very calmly, 'I have been, all my life, first and foremost, an officer of the state. You can rely on me, at all hours of the day and night, to be ready to protect the state.'

'What do you mean? All those who were part of the previous regime, according to the peace agreement, have left.'

'Colonel Neva, you will recall that I had the privilege of interrogating you many years ago. But you will concede that it was a completely impersonal action on my part. I was carrying out my duty. My duty is the very highest an official in my capacity can conceive of; it is, to ensure the security of the state. Therefore, the question of my failure to depart with members of the previous regime does not arise, since I am a guardian of the state. I am certain,' Captain Mason continued, giving Colonel Neva a cunning glance, 'that you will also appreciate that many supporters of the previous regime are part of the new state and can give trouble. There will also be others. Therefore, if you will allow me, I intend to carry out my duty.'

Colonel Neva, not having a subtle enough mind to see the flaw in Captain Mason's argument, was moved by the courage of the man in remaining at his post in spite of the danger. A courageous man himself, he admired courage in others. He smiled faintly, and for a moment reflecting on his own position — precarious as was the nature of all military regimes — replaced his gun in its holster.

'I appoint you, Captain Mason,' he said, 'head of the state security services of the new state. Henceforth, this building shall be known as the Central Bureau of State Security.'

Not long afterwards Kistan and Farouk were brought into Captain Mason's office by officer Matela. The captain had just finished reading an informant's report on their activities in Victoria.

'Here again, you pigs!' the captain thundered, seeing them. 'Up to your old tricks again!'

He rose in fury from his chair, went towards the two men and punched each one on the shoulder. Kistan fell on the floor, Farouk against the wall.

'Get up! Get up! Before I crush you with my boots!'

The two men stood upright quickly. The captain returned to his chair after glaring at them.

'Now tell me, what do you want in Victoria? What have you got in common with those people? Why are you inciting them to rebel against the state?'

'Democratic rights,' Kistan said hastily.

'What? Democratic rights for that scum? Let them go back to Europe where they came from and claim their rights there. They came to Africa and fleeced it, and now they think Africa owes them democratic rights. Look, do you know what I feel like doing to people like you? I feel like squeezing your throats until your eyes are inverted . . .'

The captain fumed. He rose from his chair as if he meant to carry out the threat. Then he looked out of the window at the blue sky and sat down again.

'Listen to me. I am talking to you as a friend now. I don't know what you two have against the state. It seems to me that you are against all the states and all the governments in this world. That is ridiculous. The whites you are instigating to demand all sorts of democratic rights are the scourge of the earth, hell-dogs who have laid waste Africa and the East. Have you not heard of slavery? Imperialism? Hitler . . . ?' ■

REWARD OUR SWEAT

by Leonard Koza

Illustrated by Percy Sedumedi

The stuffy Township air was polluted by the shrieking voices of bitchy women protesting about the latest rent increases. Men and women stampeded in the dusty gravel streets, running around to discuss their grievances. They were to find out later that it was not any one individual's problem, but a social phenomenon.

The more enlightened tenants approached their elected civil leaders to air the problem. The civil leaders were pressurized to call a mass meeting in the local civic hall. Posters were erected at every keypoint, including bus stops and trees along the streets. It was really the talk of the township. Everybody was emotionally moved, including school children. The question everybody asked was: WHAT ARE WE GOING TO EAT?

The rent increase came at a time when most of the people had been jobless for most of the year. 'There are furniture, clothing and grocery accounts to pay, and some of us have television sets bought before inflation,' said Mrs Davids to Mrs Arendse, whose husband had been given notice and was still jobless.

'My husband used to earn good money as a cabinet-maker, but now he has to be content with a casual job at five rand a day twice a week,' said Mrs Arendse.

Slowly shaking her grey-haired head sideways, Mrs Davids softly replied: 'Many a time have I asked God what have we done to deserve all this suffering. I'll be glad if God could reveal why we must suffer like this. My children feel they can never fulfil their schooling ambitions under these circumstances. The desire to learn is there, but when they see how their parents suffer it stifles their spirit.'

The rent increases were also discussed at schools, colleges, training institutions like hospitals and the university which Township children attended. Even at factories and many other commercial houses workers were forever discussing and analysing the effect the rent increases would have on the worker. It was clearly evident that the people were becoming concerned with the common plight. Many were becoming so reckless that they discussed very delicate and volatile issues openly and straightforwardly.

During one lunchtime a small group was discussing the situation. They had fried fish and chips and hamburgers in front of them and a few litres of Coca Cola. Old, young, married and unmarried, male and female were enjoying their lunch when the factory messenger, Pieter, said to the crowd: 'My ou girl is regtag ge-worry oo' die rent increase. Die ou werk mossie met die result dat hulle nou net op my depend.'

Looking him straight in the eyes, Mymoena, a machinist, said: 'Orals gaan dit maar soe. Djy moet sien hoe word die mense uitgegooi by Macassar Township. My ma-hulle is lucky dat daa' darem drie kinnes is wat werk en dan doen my pa oek nog some odd jobs soes gardening en die witmense se huise paint.'

All the time the munching was continuing. 'Loep haal nog fish and chips,' said Mymoena as she handed a two rand note over to Pieter who immediately jumped on the factory scooter to go and fetch it.

'Kan ek vi' my 'n pakkie cigarettes koep?'

'Hou vi' jou bedonnerd. Dis kla ganoeg as ek vi' julle nog fish and chips koep.'

'Maa' ek ga' vir jou weer Vrydag betaal. Asseblief 'Moena'

He was asking so gently that Mymoena couldn't say no. When he disappeared, she said to the others: 'Foeitog, hy kry swaar. Hy sê mos sy mahulle depend net op hom. Dis funny nê os mense kry soe swaar nê, maar os kan nog altyd smile maa' die whities skiet makaar as hulle problems heavy raak.'

Pieter was back within minutes and the fish and chips was still nice and hot. Opening up the parcel in front of her on the table, she said: 'Moenie skaam wies nie. Ies mense iet. Ons moet 2 o'clock vi' os wee vrek werk tot 5 o'clock as daa' nie overtime gaa' wies nie.'

Unfolding a paper, Pieter said to Mymoena: 'Ek het somma vi' my 'n Herald oek ga-koep. Hoep nie djy's kwaad nie.' Paging through it he said: 'Ek het gewiet daa' gaan iets in wies van die mense wat kla oor die rent increase. Soe ja, daa' gaan 'n mass meeting wies

innie Civic Centre vanaand. Ek is klaa' daa'.'

Grabbing the paper from him another worker, Ganief, asked: 'Wat maak Cape Town Spurs en Glenville?'

Annoyed, the girls stormed at Ganief: 'Jou tief! Die mense is ga-worry oo' rent, djy fok met sports. Dis omdat djy nie laaities het nie, jou drip.'

Ganief was so shocked that he raised his arms apologetically. 'Sorry mense. Ek is sorry, man.' It was only then that Ganief realised how serious the situation was. It was the first time since he had started working there that the girls had pounced on him so viciously.

Re-reading the report Mymoena noticed it mentioned that the people of Macassar were also dissatisfied with rent increases, which were said to be higher than those for other Townships. Turning to Pieter, Mymoena said: 'Djy moet my vertel van julle meeting. As ek 'n ryding gaan kry, kom ons miskien oek Tiervlei toe vanaand vi' moral support.'

Smiling broadly, Pieter answered. 'Die mense in Tiervlei sal dit appreciate. O ja, dis mos nie mee' Tiervlei nie, dis mos nou Ravensmead.'

'What are these people trying on us blacks?' said Mymoena, laughing loudly. 'Do they think because they renamed the place we'll forget it was ours before they came? Our people had everything before Van Riebeeck came with his tobacco and wine barrels.'

The other girls laughed heartily with her. 'Hoor nou vir Moena. Dié Moena is soe vol politiek, sy gaan nog Robben Island toe as sy nie uitkyk nie.'

Peeping from behind the newspaper, Moena remarked: 'Solank ek net ga'n vir die waarheid is ek nie ga-worry nie.' She continued with the reading of the newspaper.

Ganief yawned and stretched his arms out. 'Wat baat dit hulle ga'n meeting hou as die rent opgaan, gaan dit net op en niemand kan die witman keer nie.'

'Al kan niemand die witman keer nie,' Mymoena answered 'kan hy nie vir o's keer om hom te laat wiet dat o's nie satisfied is nie. Onthou net dat die meeting a sign is dat o's nie gekeer kan word nie al het ons weak mense soes djy.'

The other girls interrupted. 'Vertel hom, Moena. Vertel hom. Hy dink ons wietie dat hy die een is wat die girls soe' brand by die voorman.'

Looking at them surprised, he said: 'Ek ga'n die witman vra wie die girls so brand by hom.'

Ganief was really sorry that he uttered those words because they shouted at him with one voice: 'Loep sê! Loep sê! Loep sê in jou moer in.'

Pieter, a friend to all, was trying hard to forge some peace between Ganief and the angry factory girls. Pieter knew too well that one can never work in peace if the girls hate you, because the one poisons the other. Ganief made one last bold stand: 'Julle is nou so against die witman, maa' julle werk in sy factory vi' 'n living. As die witman nou die factory toemaak, dan starve julle.'

Folding up the newspaper gently and handing it over to Pieter, Mymoena said: 'Ienage factory beteken niks sonder sy workers nie. As al die factory girls nou moet decide om op strike te gaan, dan wat kan die witman maak? Ons workers hou die factory op en daarom word ons onne' die belt betaal. Die workers word vandag exploit en as djy wil, kan djy dit ook virrie baas gaan sê. Ons het anne dag ons eie property innie Kaap gehad toe moes ons uit deur die Group Areas Act.'

'Even at factories and many other commercial houses workers were forever discussing the effect the rent increases would have on them.'

Mymoena was still talking to Ganief when Pieter, who was slowly charging himself, interrupted: 'Ons het oek property gehad in Mossie-nes en toe moes ons uit sodat die witman vir hom 'n Parow Noord kan bou. Nou is ons in 'n housing scheme.'

Mymoena continued: 'Djy kan vi' ons afstaan virrie witman, maar remember, justice is justice en hoe langer djy jou duim op 'n bottle hou die groter is die damage as hy bars.' The other girls all shouted: 'God slaap nie! God slaap nie!'

The only thing Ganief could do was to leave the rest-room before a fight broke out. The girls were now all supporting Mymoena because she spoke their language, which is suffering and oppression. They patted her on the back, complimenting her for taking a firm stand. Some even said: 'Moena, as hulle jou notice gie, dan loep ons almal en Ganief makeer ge-moer word.' Though she differed with Ganief, Moena still pleaded with the girls, saying: 'Ganief is nog 'n youngster. Vir hom is R35 a wiek baie geld. Os moet hom regbring, man, sodat hy kan understand wat gaan aan.' The girls didn't agree with that and just said: 'Nei, hy moet ge-moer raak, dis al.'

Luckily the hooter went off and so one of the most stormy of lunchtimes came to an end. Though stormy, the lunchtime had been fruitful, because many of them were now aware of certain things in society with which they had never bothered before. Mymoena gave them new inspiration to see things in a totally different light.

After lunch it was just work as usual, as if nothing had happened. The girls were sweating behind the buzzing machines while Ganief came round with his grease-gun to oil certain delicate parts. Ganief was not only shy, but seemed more scared than anything else. He looked at one of the girls, namely Marie, and asked her· 'Is jou machine all right, darling?' Giving him a broad smile and a thumb-up sign Marie said: 'Fix-up.' To Ganief this meant a lot because he was being ignored by all the other factory girls. To them he just didn't exist and he was quite sensitive about it. Though only a top machinist, Mymoena had more influence among the girls than the black supervisor and the white foreman. A person with the characteristics of Mymoena seldom stands a chance to become supervisor. Usually the girls were all smiles when Ganief came around. Some of them even used to comment jokingly: 'Die machine is alright. Djy moet net vir my olie.' Ganief would then laugh aloud and ask: 'Waa' moet djy ge-olie raak?' All the girls would then burst into laughter when Ganief was asked: 'Wiet djy nou nog nie waa' om vir mý te olie nie?' Pointing a finger at the girl, Ganief would then say: 'Djy's lekka oo'lams maa' ek ga' nog vir jou man vertel van jou.' The girl would then say: 'Dan kry djy op jou moer want ek ga' vir my man vertel dat djy vi' my gevra het of djy nie vi' my kan olie nie.'

This was the pattern before, but after lunchtime there loomed a sombre atmosphere which even worried Auntie Diana the supervisor. 'Wat ga' aan met die meisies, vandag? Is hulle miskien te dik ge-iet, of wat?' she asked. When Auntie Diana got no reply, she decided to ask Mymoena whom she knew had a great influence over the girls. On her way to Mymoena she delayed at a machine which was giving trouble and it was also then that the hooter went off for tea-time. The girls were glad because they could then talk to Mymoena before the supervisor would. Auntie Diana went to consult one of the mechanics in order to get the machine running after tea break. The girls swarmed around Mymoena at the urn, so that she nearly burnt herself with boiling water as she made her own coffee and tea. Mymoena was herself bewildered.

Mymoena sat on an old wooden box with the girls sipping steaming hot coffee around her. They were so excited that they all spoke to her at once. Mymoena just shook her head saying: 'Ons kan saam sing, maa' nie saam gasels nie.' The only thing Mymoena could hear was *Auntie Diana het gesê* or *toe sê Auntie Diana.* Scratching her head, Mymoena decided to ask Marie who was quietly sipping her tea in a corner, reading a picture story.

Patting her lightly on the shoulder, Mymoena asked her what was going on. Sipping her last bit of tea and after marking the page of the book with a half-smoked cigarette, she closed it and looked up at Mymoena, saying 'Auntie Diana will wiet hoeko' die meisies soe moody is ná lunch. Sy het vi' my confidentially gesê dat Ganief in haar presence die manager vertel het van lunch-time se argument wat die meisies gehad het.'

Looking quite puzzled, Mymoena said: 'Maa' lunchtime is mos ons'n en ons kan discuss wat ons wil.' Pressing her finger to her lips Marie said: 'Remember 'Moena, ek het maa' net vir jou gesê. Moenie praat nie want ek wil nie

trouble hê nie. Auntie Diana gaa' kwaad wees want sy het net vi' my vertel even Ganief wietie dat ek wiet nie.'

Lighting a cigarette, Mymoena said: 'Moenie worry nie. Dankie net dat djy vi' my gesê het. In any case wat die meisies discuss het, was the truth. Hulle kan die meisies niks maak nie want enage factory-hand is entitled vi' sy of haar lunch en daa' in kan djy mos praat en maak wat djy wil.'

Raising her finger to stress a point, Marie said: 'Djy's reg, Moena, maa' ek wil hê djy moet note vat dat Ganief wil jou laat mark as die ringleader.' Mymoena returned to the other girls still sitting in a circle sipping their tea. They all asked her what Marie had said, but Mymoena just said: 'Sy praat ook van Auntie Diana.' Suddenly their attention was arrested by the roaring engine of a vehicle. It was none other than Pieter with the factory's scooter. He jumped excitedly from the bike, scratched in his kitbag, took out some pamphlets and distributed them among the girls. They were so excited about the contents that they scratched each other to get hold of copies. Holding a copy in her hands Mymoena said: 'Ek wil graag na die meeting kom maa' ek hoop net nie my man werk laat nie.' The other girls were just as excited and were all promising to be in Tiervlei that Monday evening. For Mymoena it was not that easy because they were staying in Macassar while most of the other girls stayed in Tiervlei, Elsies River and the surrounding areas like Uitsig. Pieter disappeared into the factory's offices where he had to collect and deliver mail. The hooter interrupted a very exciting tea-break as the girls all rushed to their respective machines. Mymoena felt better because at least now she'd know what to say if perhaps she was again approached by the Manager or Supervisor.

The machines were running as if they'd never stood still for they were well greased by Ganief, who didn't have any tea-break. They were making such a noise that it was impossible to hear any one coming. Some girls were still discussing the contents of the pamphlet when one of the girls shouted: 'S-o-u-t! S-o-u-t! Daa' kom die ou.' The manager went straight to Ruwaida, one of the girls, and asked her what it was she was folding up when he came in. She couldn't argue, because he had seen her throwing away something. He hadn't seen her leaving the machine unattended, otherwise he would have asked about that too. Ruwaida's presence of mind saved the day. She said to the manager that she was throwing away a tissue, and she took out another one to wipe the sweatdrops from her nose. When the manager saw her wiping the sweatdrops from her face he was so impressed that he patted her on the back saying: 'Good, girl. You won't be sweating for nothing.' Ruwaida just smiled at the other girls who were giggling as the manager walked away. The manager spoke to Auntie Diana and he pointed at Ruwaida. Auntie Diana came straight to Ruwaida and whispered in her ear: 'Die ou's nogal impress met jou. Hou dit so,' and she gave the thumb-up sign as she crossed the floor to Mymoena who was awaiting her since the hooter ended the tea-break.

'Ai, Mymoena. Ek is so bly dat jou machine nie mee' lol nie.' Scratching her forehead, Mymoena said: 'Solank die machines net reg ge-olie word, is die wêreld reg.' Wiping the moisture from her spectacles Auntie Diana said to Mymoena: 'O, maa' die ou is so impress met Ruwaida dat hy nie nog verder deu' die factory wou loop nie.' Mymoena was boiling inside because that is not what she wanted to hear. According to Mymoena the time for impressing managers and supervisors was long past. Putting her spectacles on again Auntie Diana said: 'By the way ek wil al voo' tea time met jou gepraat het maa' toe briek die machine.' The excitement within Mymoena was nearing bursting point. Auntie Diana continued: 'Ganief het gloe 'n talk gehad met die ou.'

Mymoena interrupted: 'Watte ou?'

Touching her shoulder, Auntie Diana said: 'Die manager, man. Wag dat ek klaa' praat. Ganief het glo virrie ou gesê dat julle squeal oor die rent increases.'

'Wat het dit dan met die Manager te doen?'

Auntie Diana disliked being interrupted because it meant she had to start all over again. 'Gie my blêrrie kans om klaa' te praat, man. Djy wiet ek kannie voo' almal praat nie. Ganief het die ding ge-discuss met die manager in case julle wil miskien mee' geld hê. Die ou het hom iets beloewe.'

Wiping the sweat from her forehead, Mymoena answered: 'As hulle vi' ons

discuss het omdat ons die rent increase discuss het, dan is ek nie bang nie want daai is onse plight.'

'Maa' Moenatjie, ons is almal ontevrede met die rent increases maa' ons moenie raas daa' oo' nie.'

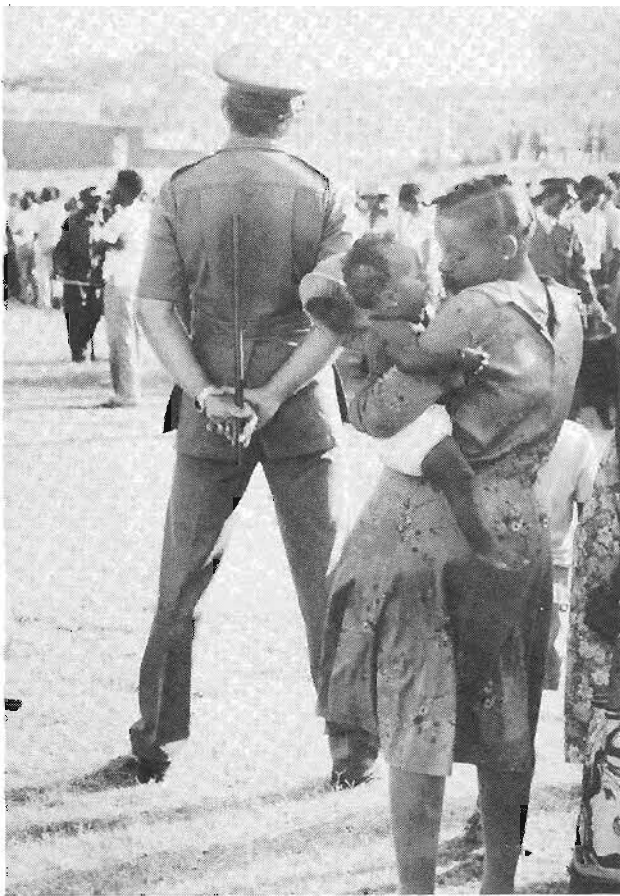
'Kyk hierso, dis ons mense wie se rent soe hoeg ge-increase word en dis ons mense wat swaa' kry en struggle om 'n living te maak. Ons gaa' net raas en praat daa' oo'. Os mense moet swoeg en sweat innie factories en die managers en directors liewe in luxury. Fok man, en dan word ons expect om ons bekke te hou?'

Auntie Diana was sorry that she had discussed the matter with Mymoena. Quite annoyed, she said: 'Dis daarom dat djy nie kan supervisor word nie.'

Cheeking her back, Mymoena said: 'En dis daarom dat os nie kan increase kry nie omdat mense soes djy supervisors is.' Auntie Diana was so upset that she walked away without hearing Mymoena's conclusion: 'DIS NOU TIME TO REWARD OUR SWEAT.' ■

Photo Diary

TESSA COLVIN, GEORGE HALLETT



Durban *Tessa Colvin*

Birmingham U.K. *George Hallett*

Durban *Tessa Colvin*

Shafika wa Metwalli

A PLAY DIRECTED BY LAILA ABOU-SAIF

Illustrated by Mzwakhe

Shafika and Metwalli is the dramatic adaptation of a ballad about a brother and sister in traditional rural society at the turn of the century.

It is the story of Shafika, a country girl who falls in love, is seduced and forsaken. The traditions of her village life drive her eventually into the brazen world of the bordello. It is the story of her brother Metwalli whose sense of family honour drives him to seek her out and avenge his name with her death. The play blandly records his suspended sentence of six months' imprisonment.

The play recounts their predicament and invites each member of the audience to make the judgement of Shafika's tragic death according to the values of our contemporary world.

SYNOPSIS

The action commences with Metwalli's ritualistic murder of Shafika. All that follows is the re-enactment of how the death came about. The storyteller introduces the ballad in a song and beckons the audience's attention to the judgement they will be asked to make.

Metwalli, an officer in the Army, discovers Shafika has become a prostitute when he finds her picture carried by one of his men. The action then moves back in time to tell how Shafika, shy and constrained by her family, is encouraged by her friend Badria to meet her sweetheart Diab at the local festival. The lovers meet and articulate their passion in a touching shadow drama accompanied by a chorus of religious incantation.

We next find Shafika deserted and distraught. Rejected by her callous seducer she seeks Badria's advice. As a pregnant unmarried girl, Shafika has no choice but to leave home and so we next find her on the streets of Assiut. A pimp procures her into a brothel and she is taught the ways of pleasing men. Here the pimp is played by the same actor as her false lover, Diab, and Badria now assumes the role of the brothel's madame. We see Shafika become the darling of the house.

Meanwhile Metwalli, appalled by his discovery, confronts his sad father with the news of his daughter. The old man tries to dissemble by telling Metwalli she is dead and seeks to turn Metwalli away from his dreadful resolve. However, Metwalli gathers together some companions and goes about his preparations for his crime. We hear Shafika calling from the windows of the bordello, enticing customers from the street. Metwalli replies with tragic irony that he is coming.

The final scene is enacted in the bordello. We find Shafika in the company of two carousers. They have been sent by Metwalli to prepare for her death. They taunt her with an insult to her father and she turns aside with the bitterness to defend dignity. Metwalli enters dramatically and ruthlessly cuts her throat. A hysterical and deranged Metwalli acclaims the Pyrrhic preservation of his honour.

In the original ballad of *Shafika wa Metwalli,* which is known all over the Egyptian countryside, Shafika is only mentioned once, when she is about to be murdered by her brother. She is allowed to exclaim 'let me repent at your hands.' Other than that, the ballad is a tribute to the courage and suffering of Metwalli who sought to revindicate his honour in the only possible way for an honourable Egyptian

male: by washing in the blood of the woman who was responsible for dishonouring it. The fact that Shafika may have been a victim in this tragic tale, which still occurs to this very day, never matters to the balladmongers who made this incident famous in their song. *Shafika wa Metwalli* is an archetypal example of the dominance of the male ethos in Egyptian consciousness.

This play, and the re-writing of the ballad is an attempt to impose the feminine ethos.

The first thing to say is Ah, and
Ah again and Ah a third time before
we begin the story
Let us invoke you Oh Zein
The most beautiful words on honour
have been spoken a long time ago
Let us repeat them tonight
but in a completely different way
approach, my people and hear what we have
to say
Be provident, Oh Prophet
And grace us with your attention
Oh Hussein

Justice, oh you just
Reason, oh you reasonable
Justice is the law of the
heavens.
Is the rule of the reasonable
Therefore, those who reason amongst us
must ponder who is the offender, who
the victim?
Here we are, here the court, the judge,
the offender
And here you are people of vision
To see again
What made Metwalli kill Shafika
And to judge
Who the victim and who the victimized?

Is the girl in the picture his sister?
Can it be possible?
Shafika was honourable and pure
a good girl
Yes — it is her picture
But we must first ask, what has
transformed Shafika?
Let us discover the reasons.
Like all young people who fall in love
and live for love
Shafika was swept by those nights of
love
Little did she know what lay ahead

The virginal hearts of the young light up the world
And Shafika was happy with the world
Living those nights of love
not letting
a second escape
Torn between longing and bewilderment
She weakened
In a moment of longing
Selling all that was precious
Was it, I wonder, that sweeping tide of love
That destroyed
Or the lover who abandoned her
And threw her to the world?

What can a girl do
After honour is lost?
Her lover forsakes her
To confusion and pain
She must run away
That is the only way
To a forsaken hole
To love among wolves
Who will devour the remains
The leftovers, of her Lover
Ah, my sorrow
What is there remaining
Of Shafika?
A pained smile, which fools
Only the drunk?

Bring forth tears, my eyes,
And weep for Metwalli
His blood is like a volcano
Boiling, boiling
His officer called him in —
He felt sorry for Metwalli
And gave him a holiday
Metwalli
Left the army
To seek his father, and his sister
To find out the truth
Metwalli returned to his home
But there was evil in his eyes
'Open the door, father,' he cried
'I am Metwalli!'

The boy's heart is hard as stone
The father's heart is shattered
The old man's heart is broken
What can he do? Both his children
are in danger
Both belong to his heart.
Better to die than to see his children
like this — divided
The father is fearful of what lies ahead
Ah, my sorrow, I am afraid it is treachery!

Cry for the life that is lost to the
winds
Cry for the wound that cannot find a balm
Cry for the heart that has been scorched
with fire
Cry for the rose thrown in the mud
Cry oh you respectable people, good
people
Where have the beautiful nights gone?
Where Shafika's happiness?
Cry for the girl?
Why did she lose her way?

The Card Game
Girl
The girl was swept by her longings
Boy
The boy showed her the way to love
Girl
The girl said, my heart keep still
Lucky Seven I saw the boy and made
him love me.
Boy
Ah from the boy, I let him enter my garden
Boy
Ah! from the boy, I let him pick my flowers
Old Man
I turned grey from a night of love
I was abandoned to the lovers ■

MAMA NDIYALILA

Continued from page 9

ours. When he was detained our parents sat back as if the police had done the right thing in taking him away.'

Maba listened, her mind racing back to that morning when she and Mr Mosa had driven to the police station. Then she nodded, 'Yes, Uyeza, we have come to the moment of truth. Funny that it should come after the gala night of *Ghetto Boss!* Fine, let us meet at school tomorrow. Courage!' She raised her clenched right fist, and Uyeza returned the salute.

When Maba went to Sifuna's car, she found herself missing a heartbeat — again. Was this going to be *the* night?

She told Sifuna about the march.

'And to think that the news editor, this very morning, was saying we were giving too much publicity to the classroom boycott! I came close to exchanging blows with him,' Sifuna told her, gently placing his free left hand on Maba's right knee. 'You were superb. Just too great for words, Sweetie. And this calls for a private celebration, just the two of us.' He engaged gears and drove off.

'I reckon,' he said, taking his eyes off the road and glancing at her with a smile, 'my place is just ideal. My parents have gone visiting and won't be back until tomorrow afternoon.' He leaned over and kissed her lightly on the right cheek.

Almost inaudibly, Maba said: 'I think it is time you learned more about me, Sifuna. It is very personal.'

Sifuna vowed: 'I swear, I won't tell.'

There was a long pause before Maba declared: 'I'm — how can I say it — I haven't done it previously.'

Sifuna nearly lost control when he heard this news, which excited him: 'You mean, Maba you mean, that you're a virgin?'

Maba kept quiet, looked straight head of her, and meekly retorted: 'Yes Sifuna . . . please be gentle with me.'

'I will. I will, Maba. You don't know what this means to me.'

Would he remember his promise?■

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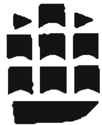

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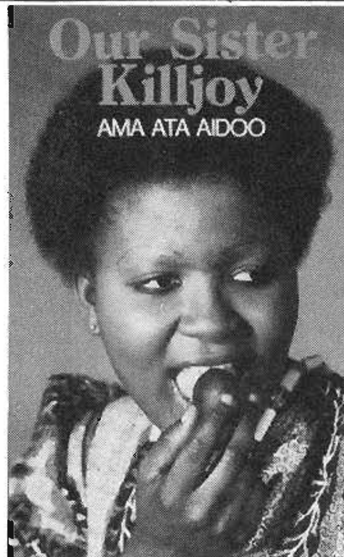

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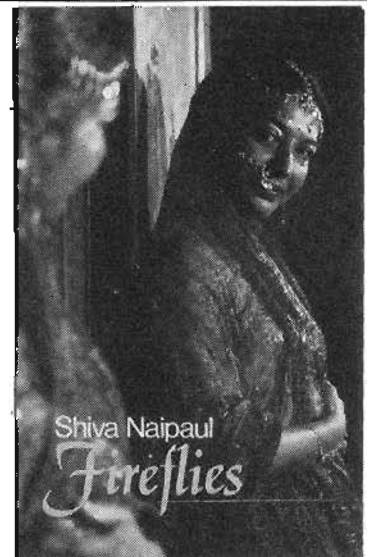

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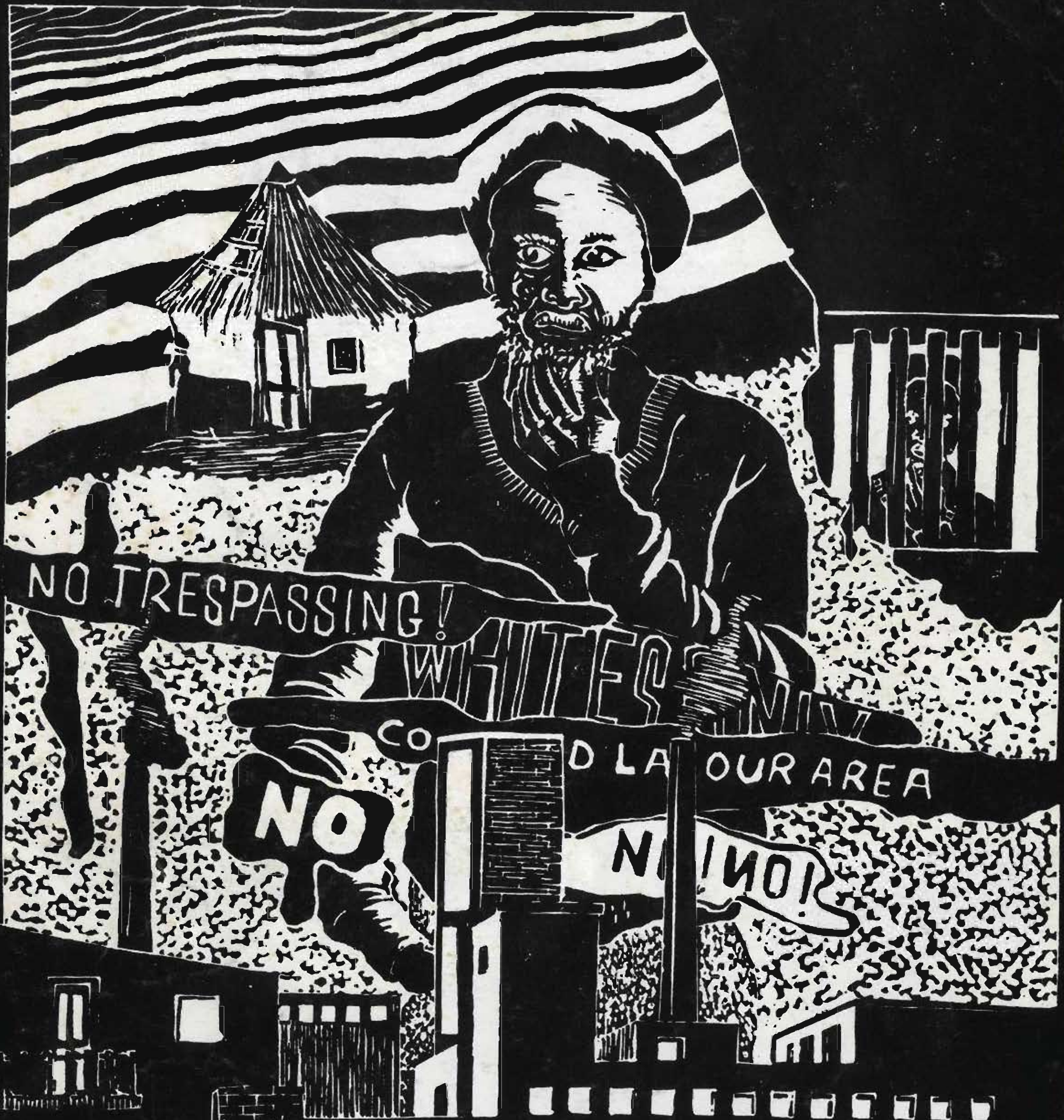
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