

# Staffrider

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Stories

Poetry

Essays

Reviews

Desiree Lewis: The Politics of Feminism in S.A.  
The Mayibuye Centre: Robben Island Retold  
Motandeki & Talakumeni: The Way We Live  
Kole Omotoso: Walking Dry Between Raindrops



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## Some Other Journals and Publications

### The English Academy Review

The English Academy of Southern Africa.  
P.O. Box 124, Wits, 2050

### Jewish Affairs

P.O. Box 1180, Johannesburg, 2000.

Poems, stories and unpublished essays on all matters of Jewish and general interest, between 2000 and 5000 words.

### Mayibuye

P.O. Box 61884, Marshalltown, 2107

Short stories (1 200 words)

### New Coin Poetry

Institute for the study of English in Africa,  
Rhodes University, Grahamstown, 6140.

Poems. Enclose s.a.e.

### New Contrast (incorporating Upstream)

S.A. Literary Journal Ltd., P.O. Box 3841, Cape Town, 8000.

Poems. Enclose s.a.e.

### Southern African Review of Books

Centre for Southern African Studies, University of the Western  
Cape.

Private Bag X17, Bellville, 7530.

Literary and social criticism; some poetry and occasional fiction.

### Tribute

P.O. Box 781723, Sandton, 2146

Stories, poetry and letters.

### Vrye Weekblad

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Stories and poetry.

### Writers' World

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News on writing. Contributions welcome. Contributors' guide available.

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# COMMENT

The obtuseness of some of the aesthetes among the newspaper critics just cannot be shaken: once they decided that political poetry or 'materialist' poetry (as they call it euphemistically) is necessarily 'bad' poetry, they can react to any examples which show them to be utterly wrong only with the assertion that a 'good' materialist poet like Kelwyn Sole 'is a traitor to his own cause' (Rod Mackenzie in the *Weekly Mail* of 7 August 1992). While they would be prepared, at a pinch, to swallow Kelwyn Sole as one of their own because of his undoubted qualities as a poet, they flinch at his politics and try to disguise that unease under a barrage of contradictions and non-sequiturs. The attempt to divide poets like Jeremy Cronin and Kelwyn Sole into aesthetes on the one hand and political thinkers and critics on the other hand, and to play the aesthete against the political thinker in order to destroy the other — tactics similar to the ones used against Brecht or Neruda — is bound to end up in critics tied in knots. Similarly, they will not succeed to place a divide between writers of this stature and the emerging and established writers of the struggle.

The battle by reviewers of this ilk, by now feeling threatened by a vital and vibrant popular culture with a wide variety of outstanding South African writers aligned with organisations like COSAW and AWA, to hang on both to their sinecures as newspaper reviewers and their outdated distinction between a colonial aesthetics and a political ethics which is supposedly incompatible with the aesthetic, is sometimes comical and sometimes extremely frustrating to watch. The paradigms of the 'Great Tradition', established by English Departments in this country between 1950 and 1985, the norms and values of the 'New Criticism', by now scorned even by many in the very English Departments which in the past laid down these norms, are irretrievably lost. Their frantic attempt to 'keep up the standards', meaning their comfortable privilege and exclusivity involves them in unnecessary panic.


Such lack of critical acumen would not be all that disturbing, after all critics have a right to publish their opinions if they can find a publisher prepared to convert them into print and circulation, if it were not the hall-mark of so much of the still dominant South African 'canon' of reviewing. What makes it disturbing is that this kind of tortured logic is given ample space in otherwise respectable publications which pride themselves as being alternative outlets.

What is even more disturbing is that the debate about what would constitute an aesthetic of a new, democratic, non-

racial, non-sexist, non-elitist South Africa has not even started in earnest. There is a certain complacency which we need to address in our own ranks. It is not enough to wait for the contributions of critics like Njabulo Ndebele and Kelwyn Sole. However valuable they are, and they have established some of the outlines of what we are striving for, a democratic aesthetic demands a wide and inclusive debate amongst all those involved. Our campaign, Putting Arts on the Agenda, can only be successful if we understand the underlying criteria of a democratic culture, and that involves questions such as standard and quality. Some of the queries at our recent AGM have shown that such a debate is needed now.

Selecting the contributions for this Western Cape issue has involved the editorial collective of the Western Cape and its many readers in just such debates. What are the criteria according to which we select? Given the fact that for reasons of space and economy, but also for the reason that the reader would soon tire of wading through a publication which was put together without editorial intervention — both because of its size and of the irritation of having to read much uninteresting material, it was necessary to reduce the material submitted to the manageable size of a *Staffrider* edition. The selection process drew on all those who had expressed an interest, had the necessary skills, and were prepared to do a lot of reading and be involved in long discussions. It was the nearest to a democratic process we could get. It was limited only by the fact that many other writers were not prepared or did not have the time to subject themselves to this process of wide consultation. We hope that everyone profited from that experience, both the writers whose work was selected and those whose work unfortunately had to be left out of this issue.

What the process has shown us, however, is that the questions underlying this sifting have not been solved, and still need a lot of open debate, perhaps in *Staffrider* itself, but definitely in the forums of the various regions of COSAW. In the meantime we believe that this issue of *Staffrider*, as the many issues that preceded it, contains a lot that is excellent, provocative and stimulating.

Apart from the Western Cape Regional Editorial Collective, the following offered their services as readers for this issue: Keith Adams, Peter Horn, Amanda Kruger, Abner Nyaniende, Sizwe Satyo and Lee Smith. 

*Peter Horn*



## Terms of Trade

Joy Howard

I would not have believed it,  
but that a woman with barefeet  
says it is.  
A stooped man nods, is convinced,  
has seen mothers who stood in lines  
under the sun, or working in the field,  
who did not see the van approach.  
One campesina said that the night  
before she dreamed that where  
every weed was pulled up,  
the warm soil bled. It is  
true now, she knows, this bleeding.

If her child is lucky, he  
will be taken to a fattening house,  
a secret nursery. He will not  
be forced to sit over spinach:  
these things come later. But will  
eat cheese, beans, chilis at gunpoint.  
Or this child will be taken straight to  
the airport, the imprint of his mother's  
hands still red and warm, where a  
beaming white couple stands to receive  
it, this nontraditional export. They  
pay \$10,000. It will be less than his  
first year of college,  
or the car for his sixteenth birthday.

If her child is not so fortunate,  
If she has a crossed-eye, a lisp, a limp,  
the child will not be fed.  
She will have packets forced up her vagina.  
She will swallow condoms filled with  
cocaine, and will then be driven  
to the airport, and setting foot on a  
strange land, a man in a white  
suit will claim her. He will not  
hold a sign. He will know her by her limp,  
her stringy dull hair. He will not  
buy her a car someday. He will  
throw her out in an alley  
when he is done with her.

If her child is very young, it will  
be taken high into the mountains  
of Guatemala, Paraguay, in El Salvador  
also. This child will be fed. I believe  
the police, the national guard, only this  
once. Because the campesina says it is.  
That in these places they found babies  
with purple seams on their backs — corpses  
of infants, their bellies hanging open  
like the lower lip of a drunk, with  
emptiness where once were eyes. These  
children were not taken to the airport.  
But in the back of private planes, in  
battered styrofoam coolers,  
surrounded by ice —  
an eye, a tiny liver, a blue heart —  
were flown, are flown to America  
or to Israel for \$75,000 these  
small pieces are gently lowered  
into the bodies of children —  
sick and thin — pinned  
like insects to the metal table  
under the glow of indifferent lights.

The small heart takes root, beats on,  
grows and leaps for joy at its first  
touchdown, first cocaine, its bar mitzvah.  
This liver grows — strains soft drinks, whiskey.  
This eye lives on, and stares from the arms  
of white women in book stores.  
By night, this eye dreams of a woman's tears  
dropping into holes of warm, red earth.  
By day, this eye surveys mountains, oceans.  
This eye sees a deer, a Palestinian  
child throwing rocks — this eye  
sees down the barrel of a gun.

# WALKING

# DRY

# BETWEEN

# RAINDROPS

*Kole Omotoso*

**Excerpt  
from  
a  
novel  
in  
progress**

he notice that self-confessed thieves and highway and armed robbers were going to be demonstrating sometime somewhere in Lagos and Abuja simultaneously came to my desk as I closed for the day. It had been a long day and I had just finished the editorial for the next day's edition when the crumpled note was brought to my desk by the young girl who sold soft drinks and *moinmoin* in front of the office. She was growing, her blouse pushed out by her changing configuration. She did not linger at my

desk as she was wont to do, asking me if I wanted something to drink. She knew I did not drink non-alcoholic beverages. Or if I would want her to buy me some *booli* and *epa*. She simply dropped the note and ran away shouting that she had customers waiting for her. I could not ask her who had delivered the note and when had it been delivered. My thanks to her did not get to her ears but I had to say thank you or else she would query me for taking her for granted. If I had not said thank you, she possibly would have stopped to wait to be thanked before dashing off. I put the crumpled note in my pocket and picked up my soft-leather attache case and left the news room. Most of the reporters had left and only those who waited to sub were left darting between their cubicle offices and the printing building.

Outside, it was dark and there were no lights in that area that night except for some select places where the noise and fume of generators kept neighbourhoods awake to light one family. I got into the car and wondered where to go first. I had to unwind. I had no idea what reaction to expect for the editorial I had written and against the tradition of the paper, I had been made to sign. The other members of the editorial board refused to have anything to do with it. There had been an argument the like of which had not taken place since the paper was founded. For me it was a simple matter. There was so much corruption in Lagos it did not make sense any longer to try to use gloved hands to beat it. Hard knuckles, bare knuckles, that was what was needed. Yet, some of those who were arguing with me in that editorial office were on the payroll of one big man or the other, military or civilian. I had brought enough problems to the paper, as it was, and they were not going to make it easy for the government to close them permanently. That was the threat under which we existed. The next time we did anything to annoy the government, or anyone big enough in government, we had had it. The paper would be closed permanently or all the journalists would be thrown into gaol or both. And here I was writing an editorial insisting that thieves, armed robbers, highway men and swindlers be given licenses to practise just as the members of the government and the civil servants and those who ran parastatals had letters of appointment to loot the resources of the nation. Was I making a joke or what? I told them

I had no time for jokes and I was making a serious case, the like of which has been made before by others who were laughed out of court. Serious issues deserved serious recommendations. Surprisingly enough, the editor decided the issue in my favour with the proviso that I sign the editorial. I started the car and eased it out of the space into which I had wedged it in the morning, unmindful of the fact that there was no vehicle in sight for yards on either side of me.

As I joined the traffic, heavy for this time of the night, I forgot completely the editorial contestations, the corruption in the country and whether things will work out for the country or not. I had problems which were really no problems when you come to think of them. It was almost ten o'clock and I still had to go and see the doctor. I was working on a story about him and I spent at least two hours every night taping him telling me about his life.

The press sticker saved me from the numerous road blocks; by the police, by the army and by armed robbers. I got to the house in VI at eleven. I hooted and the gateman threw open the nine foot high wrought iron gates. The picture never altered. I drive into the doctor's driveway in the VW1303, pause to see if the Rolls Royce had been moved, assure myself that it has not, and then park next to it. The doctor was sitting in his study reading some specially flown in medical journal. I wondered if he still read anything from the West. After all he had denounced Western medicine as archaic and gone back to the practices of his ancestors. What use were Western medical journals to him? But there were other issues which we had left untouched and so I did not bother to begin with the issue of the journals.

'I'm tired tonight,' the doctor said as I came in.

I sat down and picked up the bottle of wine he was drinking from. You were never sure what you would find the doctor drinking from. One day it could be a gourd of palmwine tapped from a felled tree. Another day, it could be a bottle of palmwine which you assume is no different from the last one only to be told that this particular one was tapped from an upright palm tree.

'And there's a difference,' he would caution you.

I fetched a wine glass and helped myself.

'Can we just finish the story of your departure from the village?'

'It is already finished.'

If he thought he had finished telling the story to me he was joking.

'Dokii,' I said looking him in the eyes, 'you know that that story is more than what you told me. The church elders came to say goodbye to you and then you left for Lagos from where you left by boat for England. That's not good enough. What about the story that they made you swear that you will come back home, a Western trained medical doctor, and destroy the credibility of the juju doctor, as they called him at the time. What do you have to say to that?'

He put the journal he was reading on the table in front of him and turned to me.

'Nothing; and goodnight.'

He got up and went upstairs. I sighed, finished my drink, hesitated and finished what was left in the bottle before leaving the house. I should listen to the material I had taped and see if there was enough in it to write a reasonable piece on this extraordinary doctor. Well, maybe not so extraordinary after all. There were so many of them, not necessarily doctors, but Africans educated in the West and supposedly trained to come back and condemn the age-old practices of their forefathers only to come back and do exactly the opposite. There is that Catholic Bishop from somewhere in East Africa who claimed to be both a proper Catholic as well as a traditional healer with incantations. Interesting anyway. It was past midnight and now I had to begin to make the long journey home. This is the hour I hated, the last hour before getting home. The road blocks were no longer there: police, army or army robbers. Whatever needed to be policed or armed or robbed had been policed and armed and robbed. There was no hindrance on the road. Except you thought of the ladies of the night at various corners of the rich areas of Lagos, in their various processes of undress, the buyer has to see what he or she is buying, unless you thought of these ladies as hindrances. Not physically, they were not. But they brought thoughts to my mind. And as I drove back to my house in the Ikeja GRA I began to ponder the nature of my problem. I was happily married. And we had two delightful children, twins, a boy and a girl. We did not wish to finish the process of bringing in the already named Idowu and

Alaba. We collected assiduously all the Yoruba poetry on twins, the royals among children, double blessing on the day of their births. Our house was full of the statuettes created in the worship of twins. Sometimes we would tease each other with the idea that if the twins demanded of us that we dance and beg as the only remedy to make them stay alive with us, would we do it? Tini, who was not Yoruba, would say that among her own people, twins were devils and from the behaviour of our twins, she did not see any reason to change her views. If the Yoruba in their endless search for everything and anything to celebrate and lavish money on convinced me having monster children. I was welcome to them. In later years as they grew up, they themselves participated in this discussion. Taiwo always insisted that she liked being celebrated and she loved having poetry composed in praise of her. I would put in that her future lovers had their work cut out for them. As for Kehinde he thought it was too much having people purring over them as if they were something special. Which they were, honestly. And our house was always full of laughter. That was the house I was so scared of returning to.

Tini and I were classmates but doing different courses. As it happens in these matters, although both of us remembers the occasion that brought us together, we remember it differently and in different details. Lucky, my lookalike, had created some trouble in the library. The deputy librarian had been loud and long on the telephone and Lucky had sent her a note informing her that that building was erected to the greater glory of academic work, work that can only be done in perfect silence. He was asked to apologise by the librarian.

'Apologise for what? Can you imagine it? I am to apologise for being disturbed. You know, there will never be justice in this country.'

'Come,' I said, 'don't exaggerate. What has your being sent out of the library got to do with justice in this country?'

'You don't understand, anyway.'

So, Lucky did not apologise. The next time I was in the library, the deputy librarian shooed me out of the building, wondering what or who I thought I was and how even without graduating I was already behaving like a big man, feeling too big headed to do what my elders





thought was good for me. Immediately I got angry. What was she talking about? Which only made her even more rude to me. All she wanted me to do was get out of the library so that better behaved students could use the place. I always thought I was an exemplary child, well-behaved and respectful to my elders and parents. Somehow, that day, I lost my temper. Here I was being accused of something that I did not do. That has been one

of my pet hates all my life. If anyone accused me of doing what I did not do, I would show them pepper, I would expose to them the red of my eyes, I would hurl mountains into valleys and block the flow of rivers with my anger. Which is what I now proceeded to do with the deputy librarian. At which point she got the security to bundle me out of the place.

I did not attempt to walk back into the library since the security people stood by the library door virtually daring me to come back and twirling the night sticks they carried. I turned to go to my departmental library. I could never work there. Too much noise. As I turned I hissed.

*Ma h'inu* now.

Any Yoruba will tell you they can tell the accent of a non-Yoruba attempting to speak the language. I looked at her.

'Don't be angry now.'

Without asking her what made her make her statement, and without her asking me for any story, I stood there and told her the story of the humiliating treatment which I had received from the university deputy librarian and from the security men and women. By the time I was finishing my story, she was

bubbling, heaving even, ready to burst into laughter. The red of my eyes must have told her to *biko je brake* as they would say in her language. So, she assumed the same seriousness with which I had told her the story.

'You finished?'

'That's all.'

'Are you not Lucky's friend?'

'Yes.'

Kole Omotoso

'And his lookalike?'

Too late, I realised what had happened.

'I was there when it happened.'

I did not bother to wait for the rest of what she had to say. I left her, swearing to show Lucky the red of my eyes. All she said as I left was:

'Make you no vex too much sha!'

The rest, as they say, is love story!

I got to the house at about one a.m. Tini was still awake, working on a policy paper for her bank, something that would have to be debated by her fellow managers the following morning. As soon as I got in, she wanted to know what I wanted to drink, if I wanted to eat and how had been the day and what she had been doing and how the country was becoming one big continuous banking bukateria! There seemed always so much to say to each other. The editorial, her colleagues and their various scams to make so much more money from the bleeding country, my encounter with the doctor, everything except what bothered me. I had a rum and coke with ice and a slice of lemon but Tini would not drink unless it was Friday or Saturday and she was not going to work the following morning in which case we could stay in bed until noon. The twins took care of their breakfast and knew better than to disturb us.

Every instinct I had protested against people having more than one wife. I had not seen any case of one woman with two or three husbands but I was sure it would not be too comfortable. The *Ifa Corpus* which I read religiously was certain that there was no life in polygamous life. Beyond one, women were more trouble. I had come across a tattered copy of some book bearing something like a perfume garden long ago among my uncle's termite eaten books and learnt the following poem by heart:

'By reason of ignorance I have married two wives —  
And why do you complain, O husband of two wives?  
I said to myself, I shall be like a lamb between them:  
I shall take my pleasure upon the bosom of my two  
sheep.

And I have become like a ram between two female  
jackals.

Days follow upon days, and nights upon nights,

And their yoke bears me down during both days and  
nights.

If I am kind to one the other gets vexed,

And so I cannot escape from these two furies.

If you want to live well and with a free heart,

And with your hands unclenched, then do not marry.

If you must wed, then marry one wife only:


One alone is enough to satisfy two armies.'

It was three a.m. when we finally went to bed, which was not unusual with us. I must have fallen asleep immediately. Later in the morning we were sleeping around each other entangled and at peace.

Our bedroom had two bathrooms with an adjoining door which could be left open or closed as the case may be. It was exact to every specification with the exception of a shower in mine and bath in hers. The only occasions I did not mind going into baths were when I needed to sit in a bubble bath and relax. The sign of relaxation? An involuntary pee. All other times I loved a shower, preferably hot and cold in succession. A driver came to take Tini to work and she dropped the twins at school on her way. Her driver would pick them up in the afternoon and bring them to the house before going for her. The involuntary pee in the bath always reminded me of running naked in the rain and singing the song of the masquerades:

'Seize the day of dirt with care!

A pee on a rain-soaked body will not blare!'

I didn't have to go to work until late in the afternoon and I loved nothing better than to sit in the study in the house and read or work on some papers or catch up on the various foreign newspapers and news magazines which I stored up until they were quite a bundle. Today, that pleasure, like all my other pleasures was haunted by the fact that without falling out of love with my wife, I was in love with another woman, not as a replacement for, but rather in addition to. How could I explain this situation to myself, not to speak of explaining it to others? And to my wife too? 

Opposite Page: *The Visual Arts Group*

• banner •

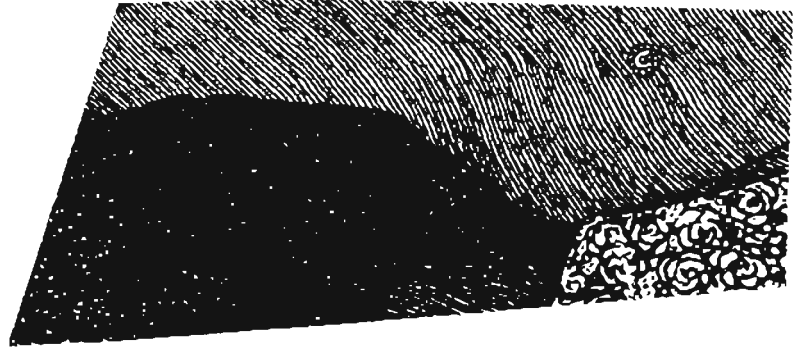
☉ One

*Joy Howard*

I've hoarded diamonds,  
blazing deep in my body  
when the sun strikes them,  
that can cut anything —  
my body, your body,  
the steely wall of convention.  
Their only value in the promise  
of such cutting.

I could take your hand  
press a book into it  
with names scrawled  
fists on the endpapers  
telling you that without coercion,  
in silence, we're slaves.  
Place your hand on my breast  
to read the places and names  
of my body, the words of it:  
train, wire, if, plow, no, jungle.  
The word above all the will to act.

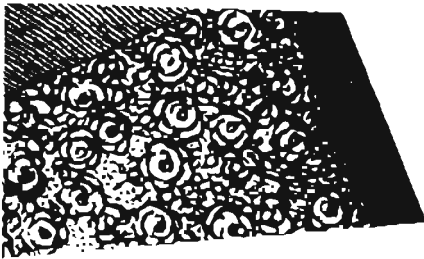
I could take you in my hands, mouth  
coming to me like a blood oath.  
Press my ear to your body  
hear the strumming  
the distant drum  
the bass line that carries you  
through the scattering wail of solos.  
Feel your body enter me  
like a flock parting the sky  
pulling me with grief and pleasure  
until we've found home  
through a blizzard of sound  
to the note that resolves  
the word that explodes.



## Love

Harmony  
Melancholy  
Love-love  
It is made of four letters  
But its power, mh-mh-mh  
Marvellous  
It is hopeful to hear two  
people saying  
let's put our problems in a shoe box  
Let's bathe in a gin bottle  
Let's learn the language of four letters  
Let's die together  
And be glued to each other too  
That gives strength  
and hope  
Yet times like tides may change  
Wo-o when it arrives  
Don't call me to watch them  
When secrets appear like a face in the mirror  
That now he may not invite her  
to ceremonies  
of birthdays  
and tours  
She is forgotten  
Nobody knows who is right or wrong  
Was it meant by that, to hurt the hearts  
of Sons and Daughters  
Fathers and Mothers?

*Ryder Simion Nkanunu*



## Stephen Yelverton

### Two Poems



### Demolition and Flight

Morose ghosts impatiently circle  
the dying good woman:  
An actual cricket whistles  
work-songs for excited  
germs inside her: They  
squirm triumphantly in the  
banquet of her being.

Holy thought has tarnished  
her into rickety sickness;  
Slowly she vanishes beneath  
tender bed-clothes  
(scabbing her skin), a  
termination shroud in which  
she bore babies and  
sighed sultry orgasms.

She entered earth by a  
similar spasm. But now  
she is on the ledge  
of a wider womb;  
Her pulsing tumor is pledged  
to a clearer hemisphere:

Here the ghosts cheer.

While her child weeps  
sturdy wings tear through  
her mortality.  
A mortified porter wheels  
the body past earthly wails.

As a dirge emerges it conceals  
her infinite flight.

### Drop

*For Robert McBride*

Death row glows with  
eternal fluorescence,  
bursting from the  
unnerved ceilings with  
a serpentine hiss.

This light heightens  
harsh tension, drags  
the terminal wait.  
Sweat snakes down the  
brow of each battered inmate.

In the fierce glare  
they stare inwards.  
Wan terror sets them adrift  
on the adrenalin of dread.  
They react to the last treads  
of their next friend . . .

rising into song:

Subdued footsteps beat  
out of heart-time  
to complete the music.  
The prisoner walks upright;  
A passionate crescendo trills  
along the clinical corridor.

It cannot be stopped  
until the comrade is dropped.

The gallows creak:  
In this bleak dimension  
murder is pre-meditated  
by law makers.

## *Zakes Mda*

### *Three Poems*



## **Bloodless Philosophies**

My kinsman  
Of the bloodless philosophies  
He talks of a more humane method  
Of creating wealth  
And unskewed ways  
Of distributing it  
All in all  
A painless dream

The shame  
Of these distasteful times  
If you listen carefully  
To the south-easterlies  
You hear leftwing prostitutes  
With Thatcherite dreams  
Leftwing prostitutes shout  
Down the Thatcherite folly  
Down the hollowness  
Of our protest

See us now  
Everyday we diligently construct  
For our self-glorification  
And for future generations  
Glittering centres of consumption  
And none of production

But still  
A plague of loneliness  
Covers our land  
Engulfing our dissolute  
And dissipated lives

Finally  
My kinsman he says  
In utter hopelessness  
It is a difficult task to smile  
And dance  
At the same time  
Those who are able  
To do it convincingly  
Dance  
A beautiful lie  
That fills us  
With joyous tears

## **In the Arms of a Loving Fire**

These are his words  
The man whose son died in the Gulf  
He says  
He was just a boy  
Who bloody loved the army  
And he was only there  
In the first place  
Because they had oil  
If they had been growing carrots  
Nobody  
Would have lifted a finger

They say  
The fire that consumed him  
Was a very friendly one  
So no one is to blame

Poor loving boy  
He died in the arms of flames  
Of a loving fire

## My Desolate Kinsman

He walks  
Under the bright shadow  
Of a nimbus around his head  
My desolate kinsman  
Expounding little philosophies  
That fill our stomachs  
And nourish our bodies

Once he thought he could  
Walk on water  
And cross oceans  
He tried  
And he walked  
Some followed in imitation  
They sank

Others followed in reverence  
They walked with him  
And meagre months  
Pass everyday  
Leaving us  
Sucking our fingers  
For memories of pleasant tastes  
Gone with the wisdom  
Of our present love parsimony

What were you doing there  
Whose wars were you fighting  
Now that you are humans  
Without memory

My kinsman he said  
Store your guns away  
The war was only a nightmare  
You imagined  
The warriors who died  
Did not really die  
They live with us  
In another time

Their unmarked graves  
Are only filled  
With solid embodiments  
Of our collective remorse

He sings nostalgically  
The past is an ephemeral truth  
It is a lie  
Like all pasts

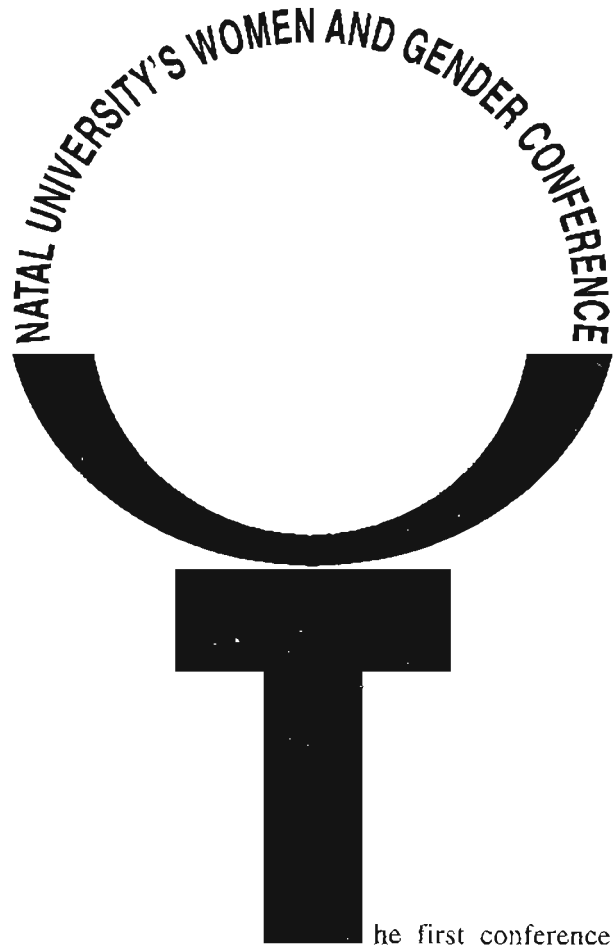
We respond in song  
We are not keen to store them  
The weapons  
We have not yet solidified  
The mirage

Certify them he shouts  
Send them to an asylum  
They are drunk with kindness  
And this has defaced  
Their judgement

Ignore the shrill voices  
That continue to eulogise  
Wars of yesterday  
Teach us how to savour  
This maddening freedom  
That we can see looming  
Menacingly in our future  
Give us stern lessons  
On how to survive freedom

It is too late  
To think of your old lovers  
Now

**The Politics of  
FEMINISM  
in South Africa**



***Desiree  
Lewis***

The first conference on Women and Gender in Southern Africa, attended by approximately 300 delegates from Southern Africa, Europe and the United States, was held at the University of Natal in January 1991. For most delegates, the novelty of the meeting was a cause for celebration. Exiles

and foreign researchers renewed or established direct local contacts, and many of the South African participants welcomed their release from a long period of cultural and academic isolation. Papers covered a variety of topics, and panel discussions and social events stimulated interaction amongst participants.

But despite the projected focus on Southern African women, efforts to incorporate diversity and interaction, and the enthusiasm of many delegates (particularly exiles) who welcomed the gathering in South Africa, the conference was marred by insularity and elitism, and epitomised the arrogance that dominates academia in Southern Africa, scholarship on the region and, to a large extent, research on the 'Third World' as a whole. The academic and political inadequacies of the feminist discourse that dominated suggested that a number of delegates were either unaware of or had decided to ignore ideas surrounding 'women' as heterogeneous complexity, ideas that have been at the centre of international feminist debates in recent years. While these views did emerge in certain papers, it was disturbing that they remained incidental and did not take the central position they demand to occupy in South Africa. The prevailing tone of the conference (reflected in the chairing and structuring of sessions, the regulation of activities by organisers, and the theories and opinions that predominated) established restrictively normative boundaries for interpreting 'women and gender in Southern Africa'.

Postcolonial theory, the views of prominent academics like Gayatri Spivak, black feminism in the United States and a body of poststructuralist and Marxist theory on discourse and representation intersected with objections (which gradually surfaced from about the second day) to the conference's elitist and racist overtones, although these criticisms were ignored as entry points for opening up both academic and political debates. The organisers and many delegates defended their biases by dismissing objections as expressions of unacceptable 'false consciousness'.

This became obvious in a panel discussion on conceptualising gender, when sharp criticisms — originating from the minority of delegates — of the conference's structure and content as well as of racial, class and occupational imbalances in the composition of delegates clearly revealed that the definition of 'gender' overlapped with the conceptualising of other social hierarchies. The overriding response to criticism, however, was that organisers had decided on an 'academic' forum, and that 'political' issues raised were separate and disruptive 'grievances'. What proponents of this argument failed to understand was that political and academic emphases were intertwined, and that the exclusivism reflected at the conference was both a political weakness and an academic

the interpreting subject and her discourse, the politics of knowledge production and the problems surrounding class and racially-bounded definitions of gender and feminism, the dominant discourse consistently warded off these subjects.

This was explicitly illustrated in the positioning of black women, who seemed to have been invited primarily to witness exhibitions of hegemonic wisdom and to endorse whatever diagnoses and proposals white feminists had to offer. Constructed primarily as 'subject matter', black women were denied a voice both because of the preponderance of white academics and because of insidious ways in which the tone of the gathering and the orientation of most papers and discussions stressed black women's passivity and the role of 'enlightened' (white, middle-class) feminism in their salvation. The conference became a self-glorifying monologue in which 'black woman' merely bolstered the ruling elite's sense of authority — blatantly manifested in the logo on delegates' folders: a tiny-headed, naked and burdened Other, 'present' only as object for scrutiny by the self-defining, theorising subject.

Balancing precariously on one leg, head poised in an attitude of appeal, her arms plaintively outstretched as she grips something enigmatically 'ethnic', this construct

## onstructed as subject matter, black

fault. Where space needed to be created for topics like the positioning of

of black woman begs her deliverance. The image also feeds into sexist and



racist associations of blackness and woman with exaggerated sexuality and bodiliness. In view of feminisms' focus on women's liberation from the phallogocentric mind-body split, it is alarming that black women continue to be presented in terms of conventional hierarchical oppositions, and that oppressive myths about the sub-human otherness of 'woman' have been projected onto 'black woman'. In the early nineteenth century, a black Southern African woman, Saartje Baartman, was exhibited in Europe as the 'Hottentot Venus'.

Baartman ostensibly captured the essence of black woman's deviance (hyperdeveloped sexuality and correspondingly underdeveloped humanity) and confirmed the European viewer's sense of self as normative, human,

civilised. Baartman's physiognomy and sexuality were projected as the incarnation of primitiveness, the antithesis of nineteenth-century European superiority. The parallels between the logocentric display of 'black woman' as being-for-other in nineteenth-century Europe and on the folder of the Natal conference

rigidly divided along lines of gender as well as race and class, it should be obvious that the term, 'woman' on its



Sophie Peters • The Old Days • Woodcut

own (like the ostensibly generic use of 'man' to conceptualise 'humanity') inscribes normative, hierarchical and exclusivist assumptions. White women's privileges are based on their dependence on and exploitation of black, and particularly black working-class women. Yet the majority of white women resisted these

observations, condemned the criticisms of

to organise separately. Black women were denied their right to clarify their position or to begin to formulate the strategies and principles which, in larger gatherings, were demanded from them.

Many black feminist participants emphasised two main arguments: there were a number of overt and covert ways in which they felt marginalised, objectified and degraded at the conference; a large representation of a very small group of the women of Southern Africa as well as a sizeable contingent of women from abroad were unproblematically speaking for (there was some spurious wrangling about the distinction between 'about' and 'for') the majority of women of the region. I shall explore the bases of these objections and briefly examine some

of the problems and conflicts surrounding feminism in Southern Africa.

White feminist academics have a vested stake in the silence of black women. As producers of knowledge who have recently created a niche in the patriarchal world of knowledge production, they rely on the construct 'black woman' as passive, inarticulate and representable *object*. Recognition of the interpretations of black women would lead to white feminists' loss of dominance in an academic domain where their hold is

## women were denied a voice

delegates are striking. (See page 18.)

In a country like South Africa,

black women as irrelevant and 'racist', and interfered with their efforts

already tenuous and threatened, particularly since a high premium has always been placed on authoritative interpretations of the colonised, the underclass, the dominated in South Africa. This partially accounts for the reluctance of some to recognise discourse as a site of power relations and to consider the extent to which their self-proclaimed interpretive mastery echoes the broader oppressive relations of racist, classist and patriarchal society. White middle-class feminism needs to acknowledge its complicity in relations of power and control, needs to subject its own structurally determined position to scrutiny and needs to liberate itself from normative illusions and assumptions of superiority. Until this is done there can be no such thing as 'Southern African Feminism'.

Examining the nexus of gender, race and class is, of course, the proclaimed aim of most academics in the progressive scholarship domain. The rationale usually offered by those who focus on one category more than others is that privileging is almost inevitable, that accommodating all divisions is impossible, that, depending on one's particular interests, one inevitably foregrounds one aspect, and that it is probably best to be honest about this. The main argument offered by many white feminists in South Africa (an argument that featured prominently in discussions and papers at the Natal conference) is that gender (defined in an *a priori*, culturally specific and normative way) is fundamental and can be sifted out from the other identities which women simultaneously hold.

It was argued that all women, irrespective of nationality, class or race have common experiences of oppression and that it is simply the expression of this experience that varies. There is an underhand elision of difference and a privileging and naturalising of the experience of a distinct group here: 'woman' in 'white woman' becomes normative and 'woman' in 'black woman' deviant; 'woman' in 'middle-class woman'

becomes standard and needs no qualification, while 'working-class' has to qualify 'woman'. 'White middle-class woman' provides the basis for defining gender identity, establishing feminist goals, developing political strategies and isolating 'common experiences', yet 'white middle-class woman' simply becomes 'Woman'. I have referred to the particular irony of this reasoning in a country like South Africa, but its inadequacies and the politics underlying it need to be stressed.

The question of the construction of social identity is central to an assessment of the inadequacies of prescriptive definitions of gender. If we consider 'stereotypes about women', we find that assumptions about 'femininity' vary widely. For example, submissiveness and physical weakness may be conventionally admired traits of women of leisure protected by class and racial privi-

lege, but they are not patriarchal prescriptions for many working-class and black women, often depended upon as breadwinners, political ac-

tivists and psychological and emotional supporters of damaged male egos. It becomes impossible to extract a distinct and universal *model* of feminine (or masculine) behaviour, and the complexities surrounding the construction of 'self' — if we consider the diverse

factors that shape subjectivity — cast doubts on the universality of the kinds of psychoanalytic formulations that mainstream feminism often draws on. Attempts at constructing universality merely involve the elevation of one model and the marginalising of others as aberrant or 'contradictory'.

Black and working-class women's struggles also differ from those of many white and middle-class women. White and middle-class feminists attach key importance to their liberation from the family and domesticity, while for many black and working-class women, 'freedom' to enter the male domain is frequently oppressive and exploitative, and can entrench, rather than challenge patriarchy; to inhabit the masculine arena is *not* necessarily an index of liberation. This difference has implications for mainstream feminists' frequent impatience with 'third-



*The conference logo*

Desiree Lewis

world' or 'non-western' women who, apparently quite unreasonably, insist on collaborating in their own oppression. In her discussion of the formulation of Western feminism as both oppositional and rooted in oppressive Western discourse on the non-western world, Aiwa Ong (1987) shows that Malay working women's subjection shapes strategies of revolt which are entirely logical and emancipatory from their point of view, although these contradict Western feminists' strategies for liberation. She argues that Malay working women frequently choose domestic roles since patriarchal power is powerfully constituted in public life, where Islamic fundamentalism exploits women's 'masculine' roles at the same time that it dictates their inferiority and obedience. Ong's study reveals the linear biases and prescriptivism of Western feminism.

where black/third-world women are seen as 'doubly oppressed' and third world/black working class women are 'triple oppressed'. The veiled implication is that Western middle-class gender oppression is somehow preferable or an intermediate stage towards liberation, while the frequently stated prescription is that the strategies that develop out of Western middle-class gender oppression are fundamental and necessary to all

women. Ong persuasively argues that Malay working women have a distinct experience of oppression and, consequently, unique strategies of rebellion and self-control.

When we consider ways in which black and other marginalised women articulate their experiences and attempt to realise and voice consciousnesses that elude oppressive constructs, many influential feminist literary theories do not accommodate the circumstances which women's writing and speech often struggle against. The subversive language and style of a writer like Ntozake Shange (1987), for example, does not revolve simply on 'anti-masculine' expression, but on a complex answering back to white androcentrism. To explore Shange's writing strategy with reference to mainstream feminist formulations is to simplify and misappropriate its conceptual

**Social identity is central to an assessment of the inadequacies of prescriptive definitions of gender.**

basis. This kind of distortion can also easily occur with writers like Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Tsitsi Dangaremba, Bessie Head and Buchi Emecheta, who do not deal with predetermined constructs of race or with abstractions of gender, but with how race defines gender and vice versa. These writers' experience as gendered subjects affects and is affected by their racial constitution, and there cannot consequently be any manifestation of an 'essen-

tial' gender identity in their writing. Their testimonies of oppression demand an interpretive strategy that identifies their response to interlinking identities and the dilemmas of being positioned in simultaneously functioning hierarchies. A failure to explore this network leads to a devaluation of their writing as lacking in 'feminist' consciousness because it does not engage with 'normative' patterns of gender. By claiming to isolate 'gender', critics elevate identities and relationships with which these writers are not concerned.

There are, then, a number of concrete ways in which the importance of considering how gender interlocks with other identities can be demonstrated and in which we can illustrate the fallaciousness of claims to isolate 'basic' identities. Generally, when white middle-class feminists talk about 'woman', they mean 'white woman', in the same way that discussion of racism is usually predicated on the experience of black men. There is — contrary to the claims of the organisers of the Natal conference — obvious academic ground for challenging the feminism which has proclaimed itself absolute in South Africa.

It is necessary to return to the politics underlying many white feminists' defensiveness and to consider why there has been so aggressive a stance in their defence of an interpretive terrain. It needs to be emphasised that in the fields of scholarly activity and historical interpretation in South Africa, systems of racial domination have determined systems of discursive and interpretive authority. The

development of South African historiography reveals a fundamental continuity regarding the mastery of those who represent and the silence of the represented. This relation is a racial one. Black Consciousness in the seventies had a short and abortive history and was quickly discredited and supplanted by neo-Marxists shouting false consciousness. It is interesting that BC was never seriously incorporated into historical writing, sociological research or psychology, and that there is no real legacy of Afrocentric history in South Africa. It is particularly revealing how Black Consciousness fiction, poetry and drama have been actively encouraged and patronised by white cultural brokers enthusiastically amassing material with which to reinforce their interpretative authority and self-perception.

There is something deeply disturbing about the autobiographical impulse behind much of the teaching, criticism, publishing and editing of expressions of 'black experience' and something equally disturbing about the relegation of the only significant body of BC-oriented non-fictional interpretation to the status of fiction. For example, 'left-wing' interpreters and university courses examine Steve Biko's ideas primarily as expressions of black middle-class disaffection and it is revealing that few of these interpreters and courses engage with (take seriously?) the persuasive insights of theorists of colonialist ideology and discourse like Frantz Fanon, Gayatri Spivak or Edward Said.

The result of rigid distinctions

between interpretation and expression and the discrediting of black *interpretation* of experience alongside the cultivation of black *expression* of experience is an entrenchment of standard racist oppositions: blacks 'express', feel and respond; whites observe, explain and consolidate their normativeness. The right to interpret black experience in South Africa has been a white right. Blacks may have emotions and display their experience, but cannot be credited with self-knowledge or interpretative control.

The implications of this need to be acknowledged, not only by a number of feminists, but by the left academic community at large. Racial discourse is based on othering blacks as objects, non-being, aberrant and inferior, and the reflection of these assumptions in scholarly representation and left-wing discourse is just cause for concern amongst those asserting their revolutionary role. Eurocentric, white-centred and middle-class paradigms are relentlessly deployed to silence the scrutinised black object, a display of voyeuristic wisdom often identified in colonialist and — to a lesser extent — liberal paradigms, but rarely exposed in 'radical' (neo-Marxist and many feminist) models. That this display is so rarely acknowledged, that inquiries into this area are often condemned as residues of 'false consciousness' is an indication of the extent to which the reigning aca-

dem practitioners are threatened by self-inquiry and reluctant to confront their own political motivations.

The intransigence of dominant discourses also has much to do with the inherently self-aggrandising momentum of discursive power. The main obstacle to debate surrounding knowledge-as-power in South Africa

## acial discourse is based on the

ca is that the terms of the debate have been controlled by the ruling academic practitioners who reinterpret, redefine and effectively appropriate all criticism. Many delegates at the Natal conference assumed that criticism automatically implied competition over the right to interpretative authority, rather than an insistence on the right to be heard, and the proprietorial language of the responses to criticisms was alarming: dissention was equated with the hijacking (sic) of the conference, although — curiously — that this implied that 'legitimate' feminist discourse was the rightful possession of some was ignored. It was also claimed that when black feminists objected to the strategies and conclusions of mainstream feminism, they were merely manifesting signs of middle-class alienation from 'the working class', a category to which, presumably, black women 'properly' belong. (Generally, lambasting of black 'subject-matter' for refusing to conform to constructs of 'the black working


class' has been a prominent theme in mainstream South African scholarship. It does not seem to have occurred to interpreters that this may be a sign of the fictiveness of their construct and of basic inadequacies in their theories.) That white middle-class feminists are alienated from 'the working class' does not, apparently affect their perspectives. Crit-

tional outbursts and primordialist politics'). The ruling interpreters have consequently never *dealt* with attacks on their position, in fact, can see neither 'the attack' nor 'their position'. All objections are collapsed into reconceptualisation of the other's otherness: the other becomes recalcitrant, but does not cease to be 'other'. The cyclical logic of this is a

perpetual reconstitution of criticism as otherness and a resulting

disengagement from the criticism itself. The Subject sanctifies herself against self-reflection as her gaze fixes on the ever-mutating object which she continually reshapes to consolidate her predetermined sense of self. This is quite literally what happens. Mainstream feminists and neo-Marxists develop interpretative tools and define themselves with growing sophistication, as 'black women' or 'the working classes' are seen to display a range of symptomatic responses and provide increasing evidence for consolidating the interpreters' subjectivity.

Let me conclude, though, by locating a way out of this apparent impasse. What third-world, black, working-class, black working class, or any other group of women have to say cannot be allowed to entrench itself as a new orthodoxy, but must be opened up to an expanding and non-hierarchical categorisation of positioned interpretations of women's experiences. This taxonomy should contextualise different experiences

and interpretations in the histories of gender, race, class, national, regional and other identities. I do not present a case for a 'correct position', nor do I claim the legitimacy of a particular set of experiences as a basis for a single authentic interpretation of 'women and gender'; rather, my concern is with how hegemonising discourse needs to be replaced with what Ong has referred to as 'leads for recognising a mutuality of discourse in our encounter with (other) women' (1987:88). Donna Haraway defines this as a taxonomy which 'does not guarantee unmediated access to the unfixable referent of 'women's experience', but . . . does guarantee an open branching discourse with a high likelihood of reflexivity about its own interpretative and productive technology' (1987:109). Feminists in South Africa need to thrash out these issues instead of dismissing ideas that do not fit into their paradigms as signs of *others'* false consciousness. We are all social subjects, and to acknowledge this should be central to our understanding of the conditions of others' existence. 

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## othering of blacks as objects

icisms merely became a sign of deviation and an index of the *critics'* abnormality and aberration, since surely any 'authentic' black woman would welcome the way mainstream feminism 'explained' her oppression and 'facilitated' her liberation. Certain delegates flatly concluded that black women were 'alienated' (convenient catch-word for describing anything outside of reductive models of human behaviour and, in South Africa, often anything 'unacceptable' that blacks do) because of what they saw as resistance to efforts made to deconstruct gender oppression and 'what many black women saw as a repressive imposition of authority and an unproblematic elevation of inadequate models.

The identification by the rebellious subject of the oppressive other (white-centred discourse, Western feminism) has been met by a repositioning of the rebellious subject as other ('Black feminists are alienated, generally disgruntled and disaffected, and therefore revert to emo-

## ❁ Old Coast Road

### *Tatankulu Afrika*

Earth is peeling from the sky:  
thin demarcating line  
sharpens as the light grows  
Soon now whine  
of engines, gears  
of lorries hauling loads  
up hot hillsides,  
will spin a thread of needle sound along  
old coast road's  
rambling crooked miles.

Now its length lies coiled  
in tranquil gravels round  
sea-abutting hills.  
Holding still a pulse  
of past, dead suns,  
lingering resonance  
of labouring wheels,  
it stretches like a serpent lulled  
to deadly sleep between  
singing powerlines.

Dangling legs  
from road's edge down  
to night's still dark well,  
I hear waves crawl  
on the far sand,  
feel their brine  
tingling on my tongue,  
last of silence, frail  
as sea's shells,  
wrapping me around.

Something stirs:  
cat from nearby squatter-camp  
stands, suddenly, on the verge.  
Motionless, hewn  
from darkness, it is huge  
beyond its size.  
Slick as oil,  
it turns and slips  
down narrow seaward paths,  
following other, older dawns.

Nightbird floats,  
softly, to the road;  
rises from it, wings alight  
with random, sudden flame.  
The road beneath me twitches, stills,  
distant headlamps rake the sky,  
and darkness, routed, fleet  
as hounds, has left  
the old road splayed  
for bloodying by the sun.

Hands red  
as talons on the stones.  
I stare across  
the blood bath of the bay.  
First lorry, roaring past,  
workers in red overalls,  
sounds its horn.  
The ringing echoes roll  
across the crimson hills;  
I watch the torched world burn.

☉ **The Welcoming**

*Tatamkulu Afrika*

We took the first few dancing steps  
even before we came up to the house.  
It was such a small, bare house:  
two rooms, a kitchen, an outhouse,  
a yard, unfenced, of tumbling grey dust,  
the inevitable dog, dispossessed,  
slinking past the quickening tempo of our feet.

He had just been released.  
In prison, his diabetes had lost him a leg.  
What, I wondered, did they do with the legs they cut off?  
Burn them, bury them, feed them to the dogs?  
My stomach heaved, I slapped  
at a fly settling, fatly, on my cheek.

We had come to thank him for the leg:  
it was the crutch on which our own frail bodies leaned,  
the totem we, dancing, chanting, ringed.

He came out, dressed  
in his cheap, new, double-breasted suit,  
too large hat planted squarely on his head,  
sat, with all the dignity of an ancestral tribal chief,  
on the chintz-covered, only comfortable chair,  
folded his hands, firmly, over the knob  
of the shiny, black, lethal-looking cane,  
face stony, riven with tracks  
of eighty indefatigable, warrior years.

We filed past him, leaning close,  
pressing his hand, touching cheek to his cheek,  
feet still moving to the measure of the dance,  
the mounting hymnal of dark voices massed  
against the rough-plastered, juddering, thin brick-walls.

My turn came: I, too, leaned close,  
whispered of freedom in the small, crouched ear,  
drew back, for the first time looked  
into the old, no longer expressionless eyes,  
the tear rolling silently down  
to a mouth slack with weariness and pain.







# Die Avonture van Don Gxubane van Langa

**D**

on Gxubane van Langa is held van menigte en ook die eingste rêrige peoples persoon van ons tyd. Hy is ook vader van agt en loverboy van al sy geliefdes.

Abbey van Ermelo op wie se boude hy gediggies skryf. Rose van Parys saam met wie hy saans op die ashoop sit en die dorp bekyk. Mary van Betlehem vir wie hy die son, die maan en die sterre beloof.

Becky van Boksborg by wie hy

*Charles J. Fourie*

oorskiet rys, vleis en aartappels op Sondaë eet.

Denise van Sharpeville in wie hy sy vertrouë plaas.

Katrien van die Paarl aan wie hy sy hart gegee het, lank terug.

Mitzi van Flaggstaff deur wie hy die toekoms sien. Sy is ook sy aardmoeder en sangoma koningin.

Laaste maar nie die minste is daar Megan, die spierwit Jodin van Bezuidenhout Valley met wie hy lekker liefde maak. Megan met die gap tussen haar voortande. By haar bure het hy ook sy silwer Mercedes verniet gekry. Yaweh seën vir jou girl al wil jou pa jou soms besny.

Die silwer 240 D Mercedes kom tot stilstand sowat vyf kilometer buite die dorp. Op die dashboard wip 'n worshond van die jare sestig se kop geduldig, op en af, heen en weer.

Champion Jack du Preez blaas die luidsprekers vol en die Don vee die sweet van sy voorkop af. Dis warm. Hoëveld hitte wat 'n man se lyf sout en taai laat voel. Die Don gooi die deur oop en pluk sy T-hemp van sy bolyf af. Stap oor na die plaasdraad langs die pad en maak staanplek in die lang gras. Pee 'n straal. Agter hom sak die son en laat sy lyf ieder oomblik glinster. Swart gespierd. Met die terugstap gly 'n pofadder uit die gras kort voor die Don se voete verby en met die vernuf van sy Mapantsualistiese voorvaders voer hy 'n systappie uit en plant sy nommer elf Crockett en Jones netjies op die pofadder se kop. Die adder raak benoud en krul sy lyf om die Don se kuit voor hy stadig slap word. Vergruis. Die Don kyk af na die slang met die blik van die engel Gabriël. Satanskind!

Terug by die Mercedes maak hy die kattebak oop en haal sy spierwit (katoen) Carducci uit die drycleaners sak. In die verte skitter 'n weerhaan op die dorp in die distansie se kerkoring. Die Don verkleë vinnig en luister met sy een oor vir die aankom van 'n boer se bakkie wat hom dalk met sy pants down kan vang. Dit is die tyd van die dag wat die boere waterbak toe jaag. Oomblikke later staan hy uitgevat in sy spierwit mondering.

Op die dorp in die distansie sit ene Pieter Halgryn op die patio van sy hotel, die Oasis. Hy's erg omgekrap en gatvol vir alles en almal. Die klomp daaronder in die kroeg gebruik die derde vryheidstryd eintlik net vir

okkasie om dronk te word en mekaar met mekaar se vrouens te verneuk. Hy wat Pieter Halgryn is het die ding sien kom soos 'n donderstorm toe sy broer in die weste hom opbel en sê: hulle gaan die biblioteek en die swembad oopstel vir die swartgoed. Biblioteke kan hulle maar kry, het sy broer gesê, die goed kan inelkgeval nie eers lees nie. Maar die swembad! Donner man, daar staan ons jare lank en stry of die ding oop moet wees op 'n Sondag al dan nie. Nou's dit donners oop vir alles en almal . . . aids ook! God.

Tannie Anneries Jordaan som die ding reg op as sy sê: julle wil skiet! Met daai boepense sal julle skaars op die grond kan lê en mik nevermind skiet, en sy's 'n vrou sy weet waarvan sy praat. In haar tyd was die jonstryders blank en slank met sulke lyne oor hul mae, nes die Chippendales.

Nee wat, dis 'n deurmekaarspul sit Pieter diep ingedagte, en merk nie die silwer Mercedes wat geruisloos met die hoofstraat afkom en regvoor sy hotel stilhou nie. Wat hy ook nie merk nie is sy bleekwit vrou, Annemarie Halgryn, wat skuins langs hom op die rand van die patio in haar hemelblou nightie staan en wieg nie. Pieter Halgryn merk eintlik nooit sy vrou op nie, selfs nie cers wanneer hy met haar seks het nie. Dis boonop haar skuld glo hy dat hy ly aan premature ejakulasie. Annemarie sê weer dis oorlat hy nie konsentreer nie. Sy dogter op kosskool in Pretoria sê hy's plainweg net 'n bliksem wat vir niks en niemand behalwe homself lief is nie.

So vyf meter onder Annemarie se waaghalsigheid het die klomp mans uit die kroeg nou vergader en hulle kan nie besluit of dit 'n stripshow of 'n ramp gaan wees nie. Een skree wel dat hulle vinnig 'n kombers moet kry om haar in te vang sou sy val, maar dis reeds te laat want Annemarie wieg eenkeer te veel vorentoe. Met 'n gil soos iemand wat uit 'n nagmerrie wakker skrik neuk sy vooroor en tuimel reg op die mans onder haar af. Pieter Halgryn vang die hemelblou nightie uit die hoek van sy oog . . . in haar val onthou Annemarie skielik dat sy vergeet het om 'n briefie te los en skree kliphard tot God om hulp. Vir 'n splitsekonde verskyn sy voor 'n majestieuse troon en hoor iemand sê: okay jong.

Die mans onder gee almal pad behalwe vir die vreemdeling in wit wat ligvoetig vorentoe tree en Annemarie netjies in sy arms vang. Teen die tyd dat



Pieter Halgryn by die patio afkyk staar hy hom vas teen 'n luide applous en sy vrou wat met haar kop agteroor in die Don se arms hang. Net die Don se strikdassie staan effe skeef andersins sou jy nie sê hy het nou net iemand se lewe gered nie. Al is dit die nikswerd lewe van 'n mal, gefrustreerde wit huisvrou van die Hoëveld. Die Don glimlag vir die mans om hom en elkeen druk mekaar uit die pad net om aan die Don te kan raak. Pieter Halgryn staan grys geëts teen die aandlug en byt sy onderlip vas. Hy kyk regdeur die Don se wit mondering en sien swart, ruik swart . . . maar hy kan niks sê nie. Annemarie lig haar kop uit die bedwelming van die handvol pille wat sy 'n halfuur van te vore gesluk het. Haar klein rooi ogies fokus hulself en sy sê: jy het my lewe gered, en soen die Don vol op sy mond. Die soen word gevolg deur nog 'n luide applous van die mans . . . Pieter Halgryn moer amper self vooroor en met 'n — uuuuuuhhhh word Annemarie slap in die Don se arms.

In die agtergrond staan die verledelose Gracie Halgryn met 'n mandjievol eiers. Sy's sprakeloos om haar miesies in die arms van die swartman in sy wit pak te sien. Sy kan haar oë nie glo nie want so ver sy weet is sy die enigste swartgoed wat op die dorp toegelaat word. Sy is mos wedergebore as 'n Halgryn na die Halgryns haar langs die pad duskant die Paarl opgetel het. Haar ma het per ongeluk voor Pieter Halgryn se Cressida beland en omdat die Halgryns te bang was om die saak by die polisie aan te gee, het hulle die baba in die kar gelaai en noorde toe gejaag. Vandag werk Gracie sewentien jaar lank al vir die Halgryns in hulle hotel en dra sy die geheim van haar ma pynlik diep in haar hart saam. In een van haar dronk deleriums het miesies Halgryn vir haar die waarheid vertel en ook 'n nommer vyf skoem met 'n afgetrapte sool aan haar gegee. Die skoem is per ongeluk saam met die baba in die kar gelaai. Pieter Halgryn weet dus nie dat Gracie die waarheid ken nie.

Die Don sit in die hotel se lounge en luister na die geruemoer langsaan in die kroeg waar elkeen sy weergawe van die amperste ramp vertel. Pieter Halgryn kom statig

Previous page: *Gavin du Plessis*  
Voortrekker Road Apollo • Charcoal and pastel  
Left: Detail of above

die lounge binne en probeer hard om te smile maar kry dit tog reg as die Don opspring en sy hand skud.

— dag my baas.

— dagsê . . .

Pieter gaan druk die diensklokkie teen die muur en kom terug. Hy is nog meer verbaas om te sien dat die swartgoed wag dat hy moet kom sit. Vir etlike sekondes is dit stil en hang die oggendmis van bloedrivier tussen die Don en Pieter Halgryn. Hulle oë soek mekaar en Pieter Halgryn wag verniet dat Gracie hom moet kom red.

— dankie . . . man.

— ek sê vir die baas dankie.

Pieter Halgryn kan sy ore nie glo nie. Hy onthou dat hy laas in 1982 'n swartgoed teëgekom het wat hom met soveel respek behandel en hy begin met nuwe oë na die een voor hom kyk.

— vanwaar kom jy?

— Langa my baas.

— waarheen is jy oppad?

— die dorp my baas.

— jy't hiernatoe gekom?

— net so my baas.

— ek sien. En wat kom maak jy hier?

— ek soek 'n saal my baas

— 'n saal?

— net so my baas.

— vir wat soek jy 'n saal?

— vir my konsert my baas

— watse konsert?

— hipnose my baas.

Pieter Halgryn is stomgeslaan. Sy kop maal. Hy's vyf jaar oud en sy ouma Bennie neem hom saam na DIE GROOT HIPNOTIESE VERTONING VAN DOKTER FERDINAND VOSLOO! In 'n stadium gedurende die vertoning het dokter Ferdinand Vosloo, die burgemeester en sy vrou op die verhoog onder diep hipnose. Hy sê hulle dat hulle hoenders is, die burgemeester die haan en sy vrou die hen. Die twee op die verhoog begin te kekkel en kraai en klein Pieter Halgryn lag dat die tranes loop.

— my baas?

— ja . . . ja, sorry . . . man.

— ek wil 'n kamer ook hê.

— natuurlik, ons kan 'n plan maak.

Pieter Halgryn smile en so hard as hy wil kan hy nie sy oë van die twee pikswart kolle in die Don se oogkaste weghou nie. Gelukkig kom Gracie die lounge binne.

— ja baas!

— bring vir ons twee . . . biere Gracie . . . en gaan kyk of daar skoon beddegoed in nommer agt is.

— ja baas.

Gracie gee die Don 'n vinnige smile en gaan weer uit. Die Don word vir 'n oomblik bewoë maar steek dit goed weg.

— so jy hipnotiseer mense?

— net so baas.

— en jy wil vir ons jou show doen?

— net so baas.

— en waar't jy die geleer?

— by die groot baas Ferdinand Vosloo my baas.

Pieter Halgryn slaan sy hande saam in ongeloof teen die noodlot.

— my goeieste fok! Jy wil vir my sê, jy ken vir die groot dokter Ferdinand Vosloo?

— ja baas.

— my donner . . . man. Wanneer wil jy die show hou?

— môreand my baas.

Gracie kom terug met die twee yskoue biere en glase op 'n skinkbord en sit dit neer op die tafeltjie voor die mans. Haar oë vang die Don se oë en in die swartpoele sien sy 'n tingerige swartvrou agter haar hoed aanhardloop. Langs die pad lê 'n bondel toegedraai in 'n bruin kombes. Die swartvrou sien nie die Cressida teen 'n 160 km/ph aankom nie en as sy uiteindelik haar hoed beetkry in die middel van die pad kyk sy op en sien Pieter Halgryn grynslag agter die stuurwiel.

— dankie Gracie. Het jy al gaan kyk of nommer agt reg is?

— ek gaan nou kyk baas.

In die kroeg langsaan breek 'n geveg tussen Daantjie Marais en Otto Brand uit — hulle stories oor die amperste ramp van mevrou Halgryn verskil hemelsbreed en Daantjie het vir Otto 'n poesgesig genoem.

In haar kamer skrik Annemarie Halgryn wakker met haar middel vinger op haar elitosis en besef sy's seksueel gefrustreerd na al die jare. Met oorgawe gee sy toe aan die molestering van haar vinger.

Buite is dit donker en die dorp se strate is stil. So stil

Charles J. Fourie

dat jy die gelag by 'n shebeen in die township buite die dorp duidelik kan hoor. Pieter Halgryn sit op die patio met sy brandewyn en coke en luister na die gelag. Mōre sal hy met die munisipaliteit praat oor die saal. Miskien het hy hier uiteindelik 'n swartgoed ontmoet wat kan help met die stryd . . . nes daar van hulle was wat gehelp het met die vorige stryd. Dit is as die man kan hipnotiseer soos hy sê hy kan.

In haar kamer sit Gracie met haar ma se skoene vasgekleem teen haar bors. Sy kan nie die images wat sy in die Don se oë gesien het uit haar kop kry nie. Iewers is daar 'n verbintenis met die snaakse swartman in wit, wat presies weet sy nog nie.

In sy kamer lê die Don op die vars bed en kyk na sy bigscreen movie teen die plafon gevul met die verlede. Hy sien die trane op sy oom Terence se wange waar hy heel voor langs die kis stap. Die nommer vyf skoene wat hy jare lank al in 'n trommeltjie onder sy bed bêre. Oom Terence wat sê hy wonder nog altyd waar die ander skoene is. Die stilte in die agterplaas van familie en vriende wat nie wil waag om te sê hoe hulle regtig dink die Don se ma dood is nie. Wat van sy sussie geword het nie. Jare later lê hy blink gesmeer met bokvet in Mitzi se hut op die heuwels buite Flaggstaff. Mitzi sit met die skoene in haar hande. Sy brabbel en gooi 'n paar bene, skulpe en klippe op die grond. Dan gaan sy in 'n trans en kom lê langs die Don. Saam sien hulle 'n dorpie in die distansie. Sien hulle vir Pieter Halgryn op sy patio sit. Sien hulle sy gefrustreerde vrou. Sien hulle vir Gracie in die kombuis brood vir toast sny. Die jare tussen in het almal tot daardie visioene gelei en met elke stap was die Don se voorvaders daar. Van sy studies in die filosofie en letterkunde aan UCT tot by 'n riot op die trappe van die Uniegebou waar hy sif geskiet word met rubberkoëls, maar steeds storm met 'n besem in sy hande. Al die dinge het hom tot hier gebring, al die boeke, al die gebeure, al sy geliefdes, al sy verlange, al die haat ook. Die Don gaan aan die huil en hy huil sommer net omdat hy wil. Maar hy huil ook vir sy ma en vir sy sussie en vir almal wat in die strugle gesterf het. Hy huil homself aan die slaap. Ver af in die gang, kom Annemarie Halgryn in al haar gefrustreerde glorie.

Soos 'n vlam met petrol gepor het die nuus van DIE GROOT HIPNOTIESE VERTONING VAN DON

GXUBANE die volgende dag deur die dorp gebrand. Met die hulp van die mans wat aanskou het hoe die Don sy vrou gered het was dit vir Pieter Halgryn maklik om die munisipaliteit te oortuig om die stadsaal tot die Don se beskikking te stel.

Dit nog verniet ook, was Pieter Halgryn verheug om die Don teen middagete te vertel. Maar niks is verniet nie het Pieter verder gesê, terwyl hy die Don inlig dat die hele dorp daar gaan wees.

— daars altyd 'n ander kant aan 'n coin ook my Don.  
— en dit is my baas?  
— ons het probleme met ons . . . mense hier in die lokasie.  
— probleme my baas?  
— hulle is effe opstandig . . . effe onvoorspelbaar, en ek het gedink jy kan my help.  
— hoe so my baas?  
— wel, jy kan mos hipnotiseer. Ek wil hê jy moet hulle hipnotiseer. Hulle weer onderdanig kry, as jy weet wat ek bedoel.

Pieter Halgryn het nie gemerk hoe die vurk in die Don se linker hand buig nie. Hy het ook nie gemerk hoe die Don se paar Crockett en Jones onder die tafel begin tap dance nie. Pieter Halgryn het net geglo dat hy uiteindelik die oplossing vir sy probleem gekry het. Die derde vryheidstryd sou sonder geweld gewen word! Onder hipnose sou die swartgoed weer tot hulle senses kom.

Die stadsaal is stampvol. In die voorstery op sitplekke A 10 en A 11 sit Pieter Halgryn en sy vrou Annemarie Halgryn. Langs hulle sit die burgemeester en sy vrou, en die burgemeester is terloops ook die seun van die burgemeester wat by dokter Ferdinand se vertoning hom soos 'n haan gedra het. Andersins is die saal vol dorpsmense . . . al die dorpsmense, en hulle blinde stom doof kinders ook. Op almal se gesigte is daar opgewondenheid en naïewe afwagting te bespeur. Almal wag vir die Don om op die verhoog te verskyn.

In die klein beligtingskamer sit Frikie Malan en suig aan 'n Gunston plain. As Frikkie nie die 35 mm projektor beheer nie, dan beheer hy die beligting en vanaand is vir hom 'n spesiale oomblik. Hy't jare laas nodig gehad om ligte in te stel, wat nog van groen en geel jellies gebruik met nie minder as agt black outs nie. Frikkie is opgewonde. Die mense in die saal is opgewonde. Agter die gordyn staan die Don in sy wit mondering en mediteer: — dames

en here ons bied met trots aan . . . DIE GROOT HIPNOTIESE VERTONING VAN DON GXUBANE!

Die ligte doof en daars etlike sekondes van duisternis in die saal. Stemme wat bang en onseker fluïster. Gedagtes wat maal.

— DON GXUBANE VAN LANGA!

Die ligte op die verhoog verkleur na 'n mengsel van geel en groen. Weer gaan 'n luide applous op, en onderlangs fluister Annemarie vir die burgemeesters vrou. — my held.

Fluister Pieter Halgryn vir die burgemeester.

— ons redder.

Die ligte verander weer na 'n mengsel van rooi en pastel pienk.

— DON GXUBANE VAN LANGA!

Wat hiema sou volg sou lank op die dorp onthou word. Mense sou honderde jare later vir hulle kinders steeds die storie vertel van die aand toe DON GXUBANE VAN LANGA die hele dorp gehipnotiseer het. Een van die nageslagte wat dit veral vir sy kinders sou vertel is Pieter Halgryn junior junior junior junior . . .

— Pa is moeg kinders, pa wil gaan slaap.

— nog pappie, net nog 'n bietjie.

— julle oupa oupa oupagrootjie was nie net 'n rasis nie, hy was ook 'n slegte lover gewees.

— wat's 'n rasis pappie?

— 'n rasis is . . . was iemand wat nie van mense hou nie op grond van hulle velkleur . . . en julle oupagrootjie was so iemand . . . anycase, daar sit hulle toe die aand en applaudieer elke keer as daar 'n lig verandering kom . . . van kleur na kleur . . . 'n regte skouspel. Die Don natuurlik . . .

— wat's 'n Don nou weer pappie?

— 'n Don is 'n Don is 'n Don my kind. Daar staan die Don toe en soos die ligte op hom verander kyk hy diep in die dorp se oë. So diep dat hulle koppe begin spin en rondomtalie slaan . . . hulle word terug geruk in hulle kinderjare in en meeste bars in trane uit, ander sien hulle self weer vir die eerste keer in hul lewens vir dit wat hulle werklik is en gaan histories aan die lag . . . maar die ergste volg toe.

— wat pappie wat?

— die ding het met julle oupagrootjie en die burgemeester in die voorste ry begin en binne sekondes het die hele

dorp gevolg . . . hulle het hulle soos hoenders begin gedra! Hulle het beginne kekkel en kraai en pik pik na mekaar soos 'n spul hoenders in 'n hok . . . dit was iets verskrikliks . . . onheilspellend . . . en het glad nie gepas by die gebruike van die mense van daai tyd nie.

— en toe pappie?

— wel om 'n lang storie kort te maak; is julle 'n bietjie jonk om die res te hoor.

— aag pappie . . .


Ver buite die dorp in die township sit 'n groep jong comrades by die Moonlight shebeen en bier drink. Hulle leier, ene Zonky is aan die woord en het dit erg oor die hoë pryse wat hulle vir die veerlose battery-hoenders uit Pretoria moet betaal. Hy word egter skielik in die rede geval deur die veraf gekekkel en kraai van 'n spul hoenders in die distansie. Zonky word stil vir 'n oomblik, gryp sy byl en sê: is mos hoenders wat ek hoor, of hoe manne?

Gracie hoor die hoenders vanaf die stadsaal tot in haar kamer kekkel en kraai. Sy skrik as daar skielik 'n sagte klop aan haar deur is en loer eers deur sleutelgat om te kyk wie kom klop haar op die tyd van die aand. In die verlede was daar al dieselfde soort klop maar dit was heelwat later in die aand . . . en sy't geweet wie dit is. Sy't vir Pieter Halgryn geruik aan die vars aftershave wat hy snags op sy lyf sprinkel. Deur die sleutelgat vang haar oog 'n skoen; dieselfde afgetrapte sol as waarmee sy vroeër op haar bed gelê en huil het. Dis net die ander voet se maat.

— sussie.

— boeta.

— ons moet ry, Sancho Tselé sit en wag vir my by Sun City. Twalftuurf vanaand is daar 1.3 miljoen rand te wen op slotmasjien nommer 8. Mens kan nie te lank op een plek stil staan nie.

Minute later gly die silwer Mercedes geluidloos deur die hoofstraat die dorp uit. Gracie se oë is vol trane van geluk en aan haar voete sit haar ma se skoene. In sy rearviewmirror vang die Don se oog 'n skare jongmans met hulle byle en messe omhoog wat in die rigting van die stadsaal marsjeer. Op die verhoog in die stadsaal sit Pieter Halgryn gehurk en kraai benoud vir die dorpsmense om tot hulle senses te kom. 



## i'm the streetchild

*Thembile Pepeteka*

*Dedicated to Dwight Conquergold*

i browse with my itchy eyes  
i strip naked the street  
with my dirty mind  
i'm dirty  
they say i'm dirty  
then why be bothered by my dirty ways  
i'm nothing  
just a dirty streetchild  
who in the midst of violence  
looks for peace

i'm an unknown citizen  
who appears without appearance  
when people kick me  
like an empty tin  
i smile  
because they do not see  
love in me  
i'm an angel incarnate  
i love the bins  
they feed me  
i love the police  
they harden my life though  
i love the stars  
the moon  
and darkness  
who watch me at night  
i really like these things  
because i have nothing to lose  
if i love them  
anyway i'm only a dirty streetchild

when i die  
no one to put wreaths on my coffin  
if i'll have it  
the official records  
won't notice my disappearance  
in gaol  
they no longer write my name  
'cos i have twenty different names  
charges are the same  
disturbing peace  
how can peace disturb peace  
leave me alone  
or give me a home  
i want to live

*Ingrid de Kok*  
*Three Poems*



## Still Life

The woman is wild.  
 The child has grown  
 away from this place  
 to a view of its own.

The woman is still.  
 The child has gone  
 behind the hill  
 foreign moons shine on.

The woman's alive.  
 The child was led  
 from summer ground.  
 The child is fled.

The woman yields the cavity,  
 renounces daily care,  
 grants the earth its gravity,  
 the sky its horizontal stare.

## Salamander

Marquisite, false diamond,  
 most desirable cheap snake:  
 the lucid silver of its vein  
 lizards like a forties singer  
 gloved to the elbow  
 in lurex shine.

Theatrical legend,  
 fool's gold, dragon, fake:  
 its own membrane  
 rears an adamantine finger  
 to let lidless libido  
 pulse through its sunlit spine.

## Funfinder

The Friday paper,  
 features and arts:

Voyager.  
 Wild at heart.  
 Deceived.  
 Shattered.  
 Ricochet.  
 Body parts.

Pure luck.



## ☉ Sunny South Africa

*Bala Mudaly*

Quickly now,  
 Move them into the sun  
 The child, mother and oupa  
 In his ragged shirt.  
 Surely their glazed eyes  
 Will flicker and stare again  
 Touched by the gentle morning light!

Who could believe that  
 Death would undo so many  
 In sunny South Africa  
 Where the mealies ripen tall  
 And the tourist trade is all!

Speak not of hope  
 When the sun  
 Blights the land  
 Sucks at the rain in the ground  
 Splitting the red earth  
 Round the kraal  
 Where a father sits alone,  
 Turning his gaze on Boipatong,  
 Braaivleis, rugby, sunny skies and Chevrolet!

So must they lie there  
 In a Wasted Land.  
 Victims of faceless faces  
 That came suddenly in the night,  
 The child, mother and wise oupa  
 Who alone stood witness at Crossroads  
 And buried Hector Peterson  
 In sunny South Africa.

## ☉ Remembering

*Abu Solomons*

Thus remembering Chicago, the budding season,  
we speak of impending winter  
here in the aftermath of a dry spell  
in the scattered country

And in the twilight of the ripening era  
hungry black men deliberate, stare at the crumbs  
and the frugal menus of cunning bosses —  
bald, desperate demagogues  
shifting & snatching burning legacies.  
They lick their scalded fingers crying:  
We didn't know. We're sorry.

The bones immortalise a story:  
Gomwe. Calata. Sparrow.

All this happened somewhere before —  
was it in enticing California?  
I remember an old social worker in Illinois  
gazing at Rea's film about Japanese prisoners  
in the brutal Belsens of America.  
I heard that voice again:  
I'm sorry. I was there. but I didn't know.

We remember this morning, the television  
screaming a prelude to a sordid soapie:  
Don't buy Honda Accord. Toyota Cambri or a Mazda  
Try American! Buy American.  
And may the best car win!

**Right: Robben island prisoners  
breaking stones in the prison  
courtyard — 1960s**  
*Courtesy: Mayibuye Centre, UWC*



**RUBBEN  
ISLAND  
RETOLD**

---

**OR**

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**R**<sub>obben</sub>

Island, the notorious prison enclave  
where thousands of political prisoners  
were incarcerated since the early 1960s

**FROM THE  
APPLE BOX  
ARCHIVES**

has been dubbed the 'university of the struggle'. Now, its life as a jail almost over, this university's 'archives' are set to be established at UWC's Mayibuye Centre for History and Culture in South Africa.

Stacked high in one of the Centre's storage rooms are twenty-three apple boxes of material which recount the story of the prison from the perspective of the political prisoners.

'When people were released,' says Dr André Odendaal, co-ordinator of the Centre, 'they left carrying their worldly possessions in cardboard boxes. When these started coming into the Centre, we noticed that they were almost always apple boxes.'

'Kromco, Golden Delicious, Heidedal, Stallion. Cape . . . always apple boxes.'

The apple boxes contain a treasure trove waiting to be explored by researchers — correspondence, minute books of various committees and sports clubs; political education material painstakingly copied and secretly circulated over the years.

The documents provide some insight also into current developments. The first constitution of the Robben Island Sports board, drawn up in 1971, is signed by the then president Steve Tshwete, currently dubbed the 'Mr Fixit' of South African sport.

Eight thousand pages of letters and notes belonging to Ahmed Kathrada detail the innermost feelings of one of the Rivonia trialists incarcerated for twenty-five years together with Nelson Mandela.

'This is unique material given to

us in trust to preserve for future generations,' says Odendaal. 'A big responsibility rests on us.'

The Centre, recently established on campus to house a 'museum and archive of the struggle', may be UWC's newest baby, but already it has made a considerable impact — both locally and nationally.

Hardly out of its nappies after being formally constituted at the end of last year, the Centre has become the repository of a priceless collection of historical material relating to apartheid and the liberation struggle in South Africa.

'We can't keep up,' says Odendaal, referring to the mass of documents, artefacts, publications, photographs and audio-visual material coming in since UWC formally announced its plans for the Centre.

He was speaking as staff unpacked ninety boxes of documents freighted in from the London office of the African National Congress, just one of a host of organisations and individuals supporting the project in word and deed.

The list of recent acquisitions includes official papers from the United Democratic Front, the South African Non-Racial Olympic Committee headed by Sam Ramsamy, the Irish Anti-Apartheid Movement, the United Women's Congress and the South African Communist Party.

Archbishop Trevor Huddleston donated a hand-inscribed, illuminated version of the Freedom Charter presented to him at the time of the historic Congress of the People, when he became the first recipient of the ANC's (sitwalandwe Award, togeth-

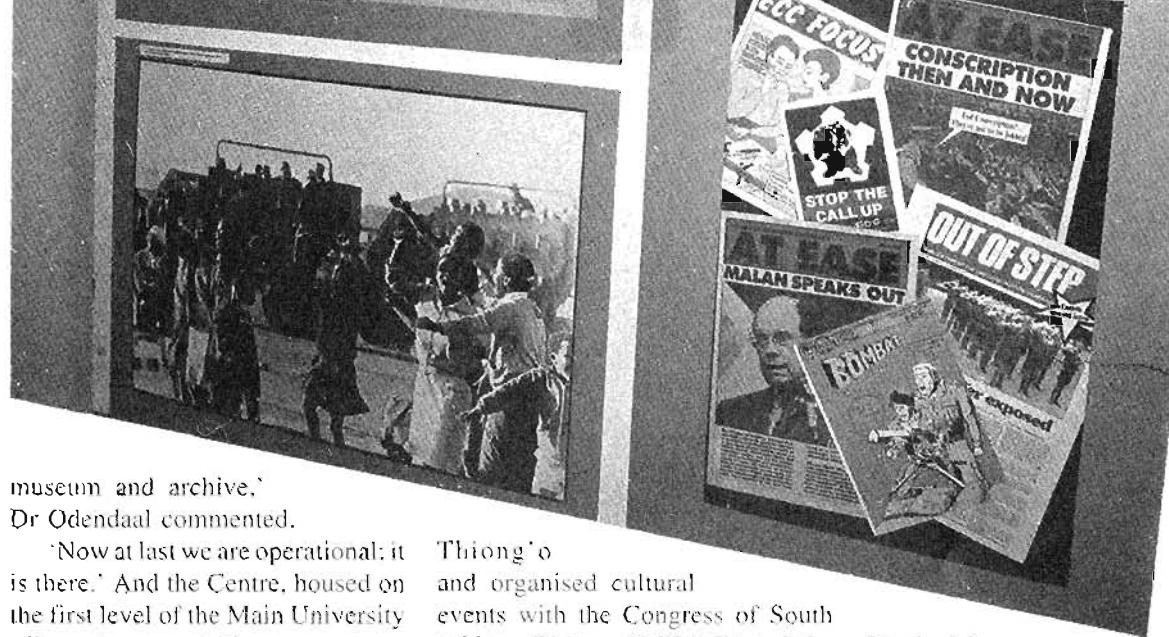
er with Chief Albert Lutuli and Dr Yusuf Dadoo. Personal papers belonging to the latter, as well as to public figures such as Govan Mbeki, Barney Desai, Peter Hain, Reggie September and Brian Bunting, are also to be found in the collection.

And last year the Centre received a massive boost when the London-based International Defence and Aid Fund for Southern Africa (IDAF) decided to relocate all the material and much of the equipment in its research, photographic, audio-visual and publications departments to UWC. For many years IDAF was one of the nerve centres in the international anti-apartheid movement. Its collection, documenting all facets of life and struggle under apartheid and probably the biggest of its kind in the world, forms the core of the Centre's current holdings.

The Centre received from IDAF eight hundred boxes of news cuttings, documents and periodicals; one thousand films and videos; thirty thousand negatives and seventy thousand photographic prints; one hundred thousand books; as well as hundreds of audio tapes and posters and various exhibitions which were displayed in places as far apart as New York (the United Nations), Moscow, Berlin, Amsterdam, Strasbourg, Tokyo and London (Westminster Abbey).

Building on these resources, the Mayibuye Centre has set up photographic, film-video and publishing units to complement its plans for an archive museum.

'Since 1987 we have been dealing with the concept of a struggle



museum and archive,'  
Dr Odendaal commented.

'Now at last we are operational; it is there.' And the Centre, housed on the first level of the Main University Library, has an ambitious programme of activities planned for this year.

On campus, it has launched a weekly programme of talks, seminars, films, exhibitions and performances.

The theme for the first term was Culture, Struggle and Transformation. A range of artists, academics and activists participated, including Wally Serote, Njabulo Ndebele, Sandile Dikeni and Sophie Peters.

In the second quarter guest speakers and discussions will grapple with the issue of recent developments in South African sport.

The Centre has also hosted the renowned Kenyan writer, Ngugi wa

Thiong'o and organised cultural events with the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) and the Federation of South African Cultural Organisations (Fosaco).

One of the main features in 1992 will be on publishing. Last year the Centre published the first five books in its new Mayibuye History and Literature Series. They deal with political leaders — Govan Mbeki, Pixley Seme, Monty Naicker, Albert Luthuli and Yusuf Dadoo.

Several new releases are planned. The Centre also intends publishing under its imprint a selection of books previously published in London by IDAF and their associated company, Kriptown Books. The copyright of these books — not freely available in

South Africa before — now resides with the Mayibuye Centre.

Other projects for this year include an oral history project on the exile experience; exhibitions and workshops held in conjunction with community group and institutions such as the South African Library and the National Gallery; a community history week; and a film project on women and resistance in South Africa.

Barry Feinberg, director of many of the IDAF film productions, including international film festival winners, recently joined the Centre, together with two other ex-IDAF



colleagues.

He explained that the Centre has a film production capacity which it hopes to utilise increasingly in future. Feinberg noted also that a large part of the Centre's photographic archive and most of the films and videos had not been seen in South Africa before.

The Centre hopes to make available these resources to a wide range of researchers — professionals, students, companies and people in the community. A computerised photographic and film-video catalogue is available, and research is further facilitated by detailed shot lists of films.

All material is available for re-

production at commercial rates, with some reductions for community and non-commercial groups.

'We want to make this material widely accessible,' Feinberg concluded.

'The sooner this happens the better. It is not exaggeration to say that the Mayibuye Centre's collection constitutes a national treasure, which provides a unique mirror of an important period in South Africa's history.'

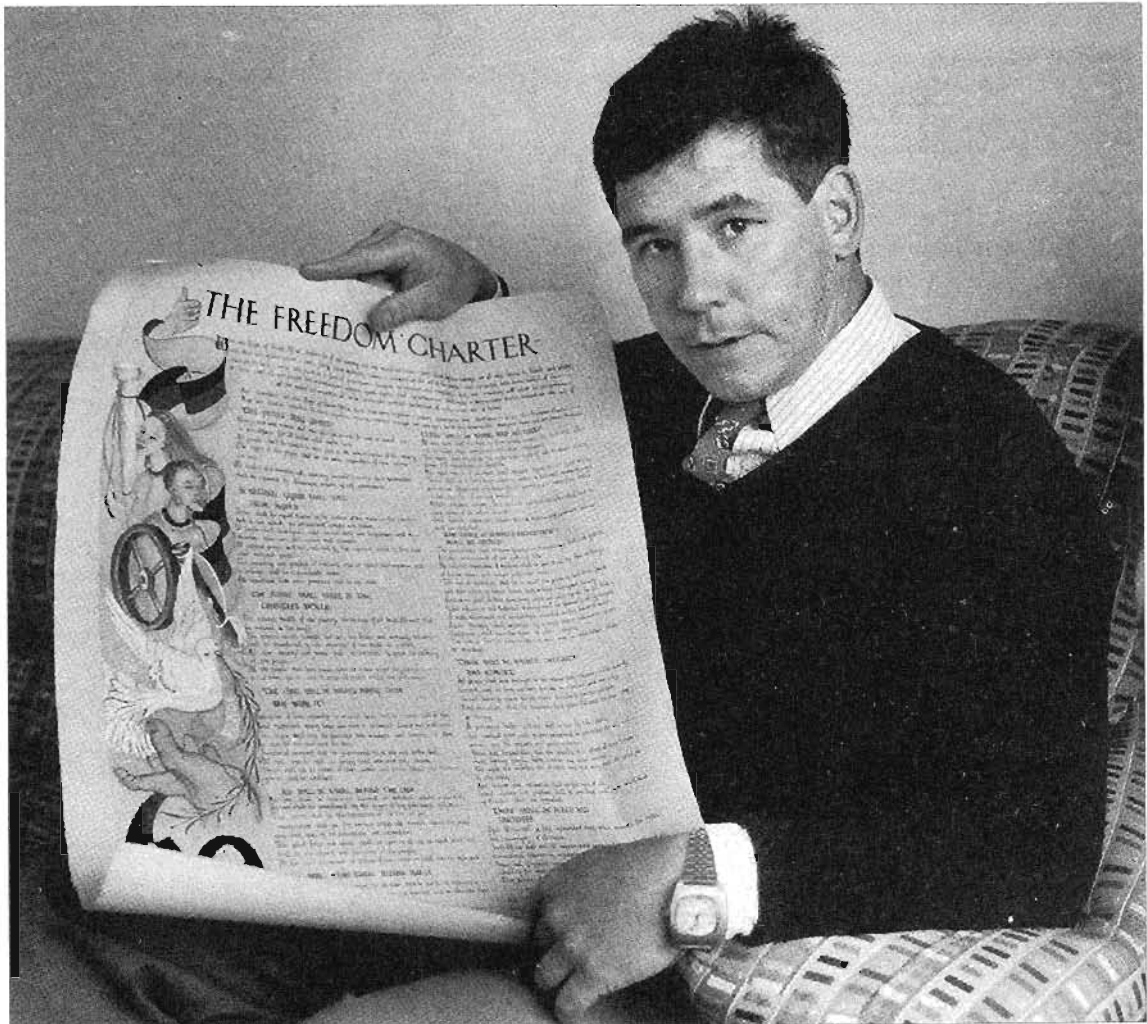
The transfer of the IDAF material (mentioned above) to the Mayibuye Centre is a small part of a remarkable story. In May last year the *Observer* newspaper in London revealed a gi-

gantic operation in which IDAF secretly smuggled one hundred million pounds into South Africa over a period of twenty-five years to help thousands of people charged or imprisoned for anti-apartheid activities, as well as their dependants.

The story began in 1956 when the charismatic Canon John Collins of St Paul's Cathedral agreed to guarantee the defence costs for Chief Luthuli

Above:  
Exhibition Room in the  
Mayibuye Centre  
Previous page: detail  
Courtesy:  
Mayibuye Centre. UWC

Below: André Odendaal with the inscribed Freedom Charter  
*Courtesy: Mayibuye Centre, UWC*



and the other one hundred and fifty-five political leaders arrested for treason after the historic Congress of the People.

The trial lasted for four years, necessitating considerable organisation and money. 'Defence and Aid' was born and, in the dark days after Sharpeville and the bannings of the ANC and PAC, it decided to continue its work of supporting activists involved in the risky business of resisting an increasingly repressive state.

When Nelson Mandela and his co-accused appeared in the famous Rivonia Trial in 1964, Defence and Aid footed the bill, saving them from the gallows, according to observers.

In 1966 a frustrated South African government banned Defence and Aid and the Terrorism Act made it a capital offence to work with foreign institutions to bring about social change in the country.

The irrepressible Canon Collins had now to operate 'underground' as well. He set about devising a 'barriered system of legal firms' using numbered trust accounts in Swiss banks. Respectable, but bogus, donors were recruited to announce that they would fund trial defences.

But it was in fact IDAF funds, raised mainly from the United Nations and the Scandinavian countries, that were channelled via these 'donors' and a 'cordon sanitaire' of unsuspecting companies fronting for them to South African lawyers.

The *Observer* commented: 'Snoopers were thus two removes at least off the scent'; South African agents were never able to penetrate the secret plans known only to a handful of people. IDAF became 'possibly the South African legal profession's most reliable employer, with more than one hundred and fifty attorneys and eighty advocates on its books, though few








realised where it (payment) was coming from'. In 1990 alone it pumped thirty-five million rands into political trials, compared to the seventeen million rands paid by the state in legal aid for all criminal trials.

As the *Observer* noted, 'without IDAF's millions the mass of men and women in political trials over the last three decades would have entered the dock naked.' Many dependants also received regular support grants.

IDAF's public face in all these years of clandestine activity was its publicity and information departments — the material which now forms the core of the Mayibuye Centre's collection.

The task of those departments was to keep the conscience of the world alive to the situation in South Africa. Priding themselves on the strict accuracy of IDAF's productions, they set up an effective multimedia information service on the sub-continent, feeding the world-wide anti-apartheid network with publications, films videos and photographs which countered apartheid propaganda internationally. Although banned, IDAF's material was also smuggled into South Africa.

With the unbanning of the liberation movements in February 1990, the IDAF trustees decided to terminate the Fund's ten million pound a year operation in London.

On the recommendation of the African National Congress, IDAF chose to relocate its material to the Mayibuye Centre. 

*This article was first printed in UWC News, UWC.*

**Nelson Mandela and Walter  
Sisulu, Robben Island — 1960s.**  
*Courtesy: Mayibuye Centre, UWC*

*Damian Shaw**Three Poems***Political Poem**

One day this rain may come to an end.  
 Immortal rain! Always the same,  
 You know, varying only in  
 Temperature, intensity  
 And since this century,  
 Chemical composition.

**Spring Song**

What shall we call this day  
 If not a month before spring?  
 Ah, the birds, they know,  
 As they make their nests  
 In the freezing rain.  
 Ha, my love, the birds know  
 As they make their nests  
 In the freezing rain.

**Invitation to a Homeland**

Oh my love, come back to me  
 And let us walk, hand in hand,  
 To where there is  
 grass on the  
 Other side of the fence.

**Right:**  
*Mario Pissarra • Exile I:*  
**Confusion in New York**  
 Indian ink and tippex  
 on paper



# TAXI TO TOWN

JAMES  
MATTHEWS

‘Athlone — Mowbray — Kaap.’

The strident voice of the seventeen-year-old youth, who saw himself as shotgun guard of the driver, bawled at the group standing at the bus stop. He wrenched open the sliding door of the kombi and jumped out hitting the pavement before the kombi slid to a halt. ‘Seats for all. Step this way,’ his voice reached out as he helped an elderly woman.

Those seated silenced their protest as the youth urged more passengers to fill the remaining cramped space. A fat woman squashed in a corner on the back seat, voice louder than the stridency of the youth, emoted: ‘Do you think you a hawker and want us to sit on top of each other like melons in a cart?’ Her voice choked the retort he formulated. Reluctantly he desisted marshalling additional passengers.

‘Take it away driver. That’s the lot,’ he yelled squeezing himself onto the edge of the seat at the sliding door.

Conversations, as if programmed, resumed as the kombi pulled away from the kerb.

‘Let me tell you, things are going altogether *wrot* in Mannenberg!’

Necks stiffened to attention, and there was an almost noticeable opening of ears to register what was to be disclosed.

The speaker, a tall, thinnish woman draped in what appeared to be a pink curtain with purple fringes, assured of a captive and willing audience, took off her glasses and squinted at the lenses then polished them while her listeners waited expectantly.

‘Yes, I tell you, things are going very *wrot* in Mannenberg! Fighting and robbing. Not to talk about the drinking. God alone know where the money come from work being so scarce. And it’s those who don’t work are doing most of the drinking. I’m not talking about the *skollies*. They get the money from robbing decent people of the money they sweat for. Weekends things become so bad that you don’t want to talk about what you see and hear.’ She paused for a moment as if offering them an opportunity to demand of her not to shock them with further revelations of the Sodom and Gomorrah she inhabited.

‘And then those *bleddy skollies* with their guns they

run up and down the streets shooting each other. It’s not safe to walk the streets with their nonsense. They must think they on TV. And you can’t depend on the Law! Oh no! They never there when you want them! The other day *skollies* break in at Mrs Johnson’s place. She’s my neighbour. Nice woman she is. It was *nogal* a Sunday morning, mind you. Mrs Johnson she go to church with her boys. Her husband is long dead, and she bring up her three boys all by herself. She work as supervisor in a factory. Clothing factory it is. I’m not sure if it’s Ensign. Her three boys got nice manners. Not like some of the other boys in the street, same age like them but already smoking *dagga* and belong to the Apache Gang. Mrs Johnson’s boys go to school. Tommy, the eldest one, he’s in standard nine. Wants to become a traffic cop, he . . .’

A listener, peeved at her rambling, said tersely: ‘What about the police?’

‘The Law is another thing,’ she continued, voice same-paced, not offended at the interruption. ‘They take their time coming. They speak to Mrs Johnson then they tell her she must keep a look-out if she see anybody selling the things the *skollies* take. What you think of that? We must now do their job, watch out for *skollies* walking around with a TV set and a small radio that the *skollies* sell for buttons.’ The youth fidgeted on the edge of his seat and lowered his head at the mentioning of Mandrax tablets. ‘What do they get paid for? Driving around in their vans as if they own Mannenberg!’

‘The Law’s the same all over,’ a stout man, hair shaved giving his head the appearance of an ostrich egg, said in accordance, dabbing at his round face. ‘They speak to you as if they do you a favour. They seem to forget that we pay the money they get every month.’ He looked at the youth whose eyes mirrored the incredulity his words evoked. ‘That’s right! It’s our money. The tax we pay.’ He smiled indulgently at the youth. ‘Of course, you don’t pay tax. Remember, the Law’s not our boss. They our boys. They there to look after us.’

The youth’s understanding of the reality of a policeman’s role in his life was expressed by a sharp whistle.

‘You mean, pops, what you say is gospel? And they keep them *dik-neck!*’

Talk terminated as a woman asked the driver to stop

James Matthews

at the Red Cross Hospital. The youth helped her alight with her baby and playfully pressed the shoulders of the five-year-old boy accompanying her.

'Mowbray — Kaap — Mowbray,' he loudly chanted. 'It's cheaper by taxi, and you save time,' he prompted.

The kombi acquired a few more passengers. The youth reluctantly stopped his cajoling at a glare from the fat woman in the corner who refused to ease her bulk to ensure space for the new additions to the trip to town.

'Driver, I think we need some music so that when we hit town the passengers they all will be in a *lekker* vibe,' the youth urged the driver. 'Tina Turner got the beat, or a nice disco number. You know *mos!* Sorry we don't got no *lang-arm* for the timers. They must *maar* enjoy themselves with the music.'

The younger passengers were attuned to the rhythm of the music and the kombi adapted to the beat as it swerved from side-to-side as the driver manoeuvred between cars to the annoyance of the other drivers who controlled their temerity.

The interior of the kombi created a closeness that dispelled restraint in conversation and subjects that normally would be discussed by intimates were given a public airing.

'You can't trust men,' a woman announced judgementally. Her bleak features and sparse physique covered in funereal cloth should have ensured that she would be free of pursuit directed at women with a more attractive mien. 'There's only one thing that they want from a woman. And when they get what they want they leave the woman to her misery.'

The fat woman and the one draped in her curtain-dress nodded their heads in agreement fully aware of the wiles of males, the younger ones suppressing their mirth after taking in the speaker's aspect, and the bald man showed his indifference by whistling tunelessly.

'I feel sorry for Mrs Jordaan. Her husband is a swine of a man! No, she doesn't suffer because he has a heavy hand, and leave her show the neighbours on Monday morning the present he print on her face. He show the pig



he is when it come to women. He can't keep his hands off them. He must get on top of every woman he meet. And the younger they are the better it suit him.

'And now a girl in Elsie's River is carrying his child. That man's got no shame. He told Mrs Jordaan

about the girl. Even going as far as to say he want to bring the girl to the house. He say he want Mrs Jordaan to meet the girl.' She paused for an instant as if reflecting on what she had disclosed, then added almost grudgingly: 'The girl isn't that young also. Mrs Jordaan say the girl's twenty-six, and she got another child by another man. She must be a fool of a girl because the father of the child don't marry her, and she go to court for support money.'

'Maybe she want it all the time, and not particular who do the riding,' the rotund man said laconically.

His rider to the sparse woman's tale was answered by a withering look from the fat woman that bounced off his bald pate.

The item was catalogued and filed by those of the women of the same age-bracket to possibly protect them from the perfidiousness of men while those younger, particularly two teenagers, were listening intently to a tale of raping related, looking knowingly at each other fully aware that rape was a constant companion in the townships whose assault could be at any time, the assailant not necessarily a male unknown.

A bus hooted its driver's annoyance as the kombi slid to a halt in front of it without flickering its rear lights.

'Groote Schuur — Kaap — Groote Schuur.'

Three would-be passengers, after a look at the cramped quarters of the kombi, ignored the cajoling of the youth, preferred the spaciousness of the bus. A fourth passenger whose urgency to reach his destination over-ruled the lack of comfort pushed past them to enter the vehicle.

The kombi pulled away with a swerve jamming the passengers against each other bringing forth a flow of protestations.

'Not to worry,' the youth assured them. 'The driver, that *ou*, he's a safe driver. Never make an accident with the taxi.'

'There can always be the first time,' the fat woman



who had elected herself as spokesman, said: 'And it will be his worry then.'

'The driver's not like those drunk drivers who take chances. mother. He smoke a *stop*. but only after the job.' The youth looked at the rotund man wiping his shiny head to indicate to him that the driver is not a *button-kop*. 'We smoke a *stop* to get rid of the tension after the day's work.

'It's our job to look to the safety of our passengers,' he added. his trust in the driver reflected in his proud smile.

The kombi stopped at the road leading up to Grootte Schuur Hospital.

'Anybody for Grootte Schuur?' the youth enquired.

The passengers assured him that they were all in good health and did not need the ministrations of the medical profession. He opened the door of the kombi and sprinted across the road dodging cars blaring at his intrusion of their right-of-way.

The youth's disappearance lengthened and passengers glanced anxiously at their wrist watches perturbed that his absence cut into the time they had at their disposal.

'Driver, what's happening now?' the fat woman asked agitatedly.

'It's alright, *merrum*. There he's coming,' the driver said pointing to the youth weaving and dodging between streams of cars.

'Take it away driver,' the youth said as he eased himself onto his seat.

The pungent odour of fried 'penny polonies' saturated with onions and vinegar filled the kombi prickling the nostrils of those seated near to the youth. The polonies split in half, splendorous in its red coating, was divided into two lots. The youth relished his portion ignoring the glare of the curtain-draped woman, fearful that her dress would be stained as the kombi rock-and-rolled its way to town

James Matthews

under the careful manipulation of the driver as he wiped a grease streak from the corner of his mouth.

Passengers departed and entered as the kombi drew nearer to Cape Town, each departure leaving more space for those to come. The curtain-draped woman and the one covered in funereal cloth got out together, waving farewell to the fat woman in the corner. The rotund man, with a last wiping of his hairless head, got off a few blocks further. He winked at the youth and said, 'Remember, the Law's the servant of the people.' The youth smiled his thanks at the advice. The fat woman, the only passenger left, and assured of all the space she would require, sat almost forlornly on the back seat. The youth, ever hopeful, continued his canvassing for passengers as the kombi ate into the kilometres to town.

The driver pulled to the kerb causing the car behind to swerve away to prevent an accident. The woman driver nervously avoided looking at the driver as she drove off.

'Step inside. Lots of room for you, my luvvies,' the youth said, a smirk smearing his features.

The two homosexuals spread themselves feet outstretched, one draping his arm across the shoulder of the other.

'Do you know her?' the homosexual whose arm covered his companion asked amiably, voice lifting. 'Do you know me?' the youth shook his head. 'Then don't come and luvvy us! We're not looking for company!'

'I say, what kind?' the youth exclaimed.

'Don't you what kind me! I'm certainly not your kind, excuse you me!' the round-faced homosexual retorted, voice challenging and eye-brows thinly-shaved scimitars.

The youth, taking in the broad shoulders of the speaker, desisted in taking up the challenge, contented himself to count the takings, spreading rand notes in a half-circle on his lap.

The fat woman was amused at the crestfallen face of the youth, then her amusement changed to benevolence but she refrained from putting her feelings into words, eyeing the two seated in front of her.

'I still like that dress you wore at the Space Odyssey on Wednesday night. Red becomes you. But I think you should ease off on the chocolates.' He patted the hips of his companion sheltering under his arm. 'It's beginning

to show. Why don't you come to the gym with me? You'll get rid of this after a few work-outs.'

'I thought you like me like this?' was the coquettish response.

'Of course,' a reassuring squeeze on the shoulder, 'but I'd like you to be among the finalists in the gay competition.'

'There's not much competition as it is,' was the confident reply.

'I don't know. What about Scarlet, and Mandy, and also Kim?'

'Forget about Mandy. She's an old cow! Yes, Kim and Scarlet, possibly, but I can't see myself coming to the gym with you. The women are too bitchy! Jealous cows!'

'Well, take a work-out with me at home.'

'You know what your work-outs lead to,' a throaty laugh followed the reply.

The fat woman did not indicate that she was perturbed or offended by their conversation but the youth glanced at them surreptitiously taking note of the feminine curves of the last speaker whose lips were slightly tinged red.

Talk turned to the apparel displayed by the other competitors.

The youth had ceased canvassing for passengers as the kombi neared the Good Hope Centre. Two more stops at robot lights and the kombi pulled to a halt at the side of the bus terminus.


'Kaap — Cape Town,' the youth announced at the end of the journey, his departure from the kombi a duplicate as at each stop.

'Mandela and the ANC talk about People's Power. Now let me tell you about Gay Liberation. We are also part of People's Power. An injury to one is an injury to Gay Liberation as well. And don't you forget it!' was the homosexual's parting rejoinder as he and his companion hip-strutted towards the Parade ignoring the wolf-whistles directed at the jiggling of their posteriors enclosed in tight fitting jeans.

'*Moffies* they bad luck!' the youth said as he eased the fat woman from the confines of the kombi.

The fat woman pressed his arm in commiseration as she waddled into the crowd.

The youth took up his chant.

'Mowbray — Athlone — Mannenberg.' 



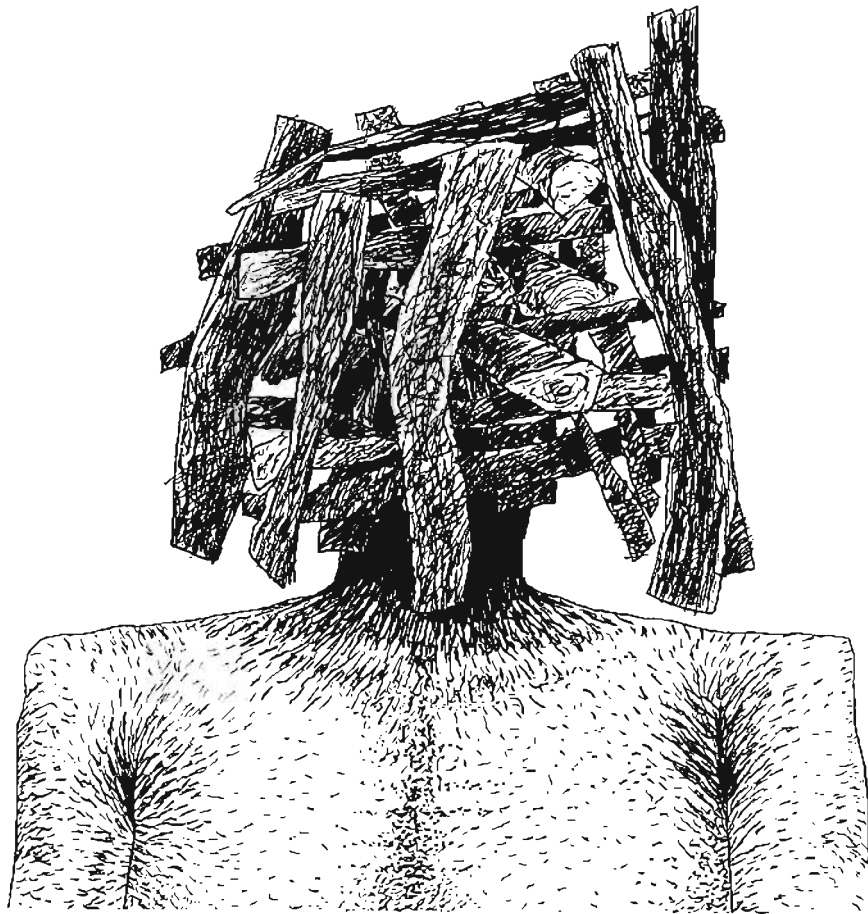
• Emergency Series: No. 2 •



**THE  
EMERGENCY  
SERIES**



**Garth Erasmus**



• Emergency Series: No. 9 •



• Emergency Series: No. 10 •





*Rustum Kozain*

## Letter From the Vortex

dear sir/madam  
 there is a spot on the wall  
 there is a lime-green wall  
 and a diagonal stripe  
 that runs across the plate  
 covering the power outlet  
 above this stripe  
 the wall is muted brown  
 my words are not mine  
 they come from that spot on the wall,  
 please come and clean my wall  
 and make it soft again  
 my words stare at this spot  
 and fall into it  
 and come out of it  
 and there are other spots as well  
 no matter how fast i climb  
 or descend the steps  
 they are grainy grey and brown  
 with paper rained stuck  
 and bits of fluffy grass  
 on rainy days my words slip from me:  
 you say you do not understand?  
 look, it's simple  
 my words garble sometimes,  
 i know that,  
 and yesterday you came and said  
 today is neither here in my words  
 and to catch leaves is not symbolic  
 but a cry from a squirrel;  
 that slippery words mark  
 a time with no meaning  
 and a different rhythm  
 to the one you're used to,  
 but there is a spot on my wall  
 i can see it.  
 when i climb the steps  
 i mark my rhythm with a song  
 and carry fake diamonds in my head  
 and all is not random precision  
 rather fetch some paint, white paint

and wipe the spots from my wall.  
 k  
 k  
 kgh . . .  
 a spot came out at me  
 and swallowed me without me knowing  
 my tongue was knotted  
 i cried out, but everyone carried on  
 meaning no in sentences my garbled finding.

dear madam/sir  
 on my wall  
 there is a spot the white paint didn't help  
 and further more the window on my wall,  
 who painted it?  
 i need not say  
 i find this disturbing  
 these spots and the white window  
 and, disappointing,  
 that this spot is rainy  
 and slips from the steps  
 into words i have been looking for.  
 someone also slipped in  
 a bird  
 which chatters when i need sleep  
 surely this isn't good for me.

dear sir madam doctor  
 there are now many spots  
 they've grown  
 like mould  
 should you not look into it  
 and find fresh paint,  
 and while we are at it  
 i would like some bars  
 painted up there in the northern corner,  
 yes,  
 and if the painter's good  
 ask him i kindly ask  
 for some background sky  
 night sky with diamonds for stars

## Poetry

and could you paint the bird too  
 and pad my words  
 because they turn to the spots  
 and conspire against me  
 i've heard them often at night  
 now that i've strangled the bird  
 you have to paint  
 it's quiet  
 and i hear the slosh  
 as they conspire on wet steps  
 they also laugh  
 and clink their glasses loudly.

dear doctor

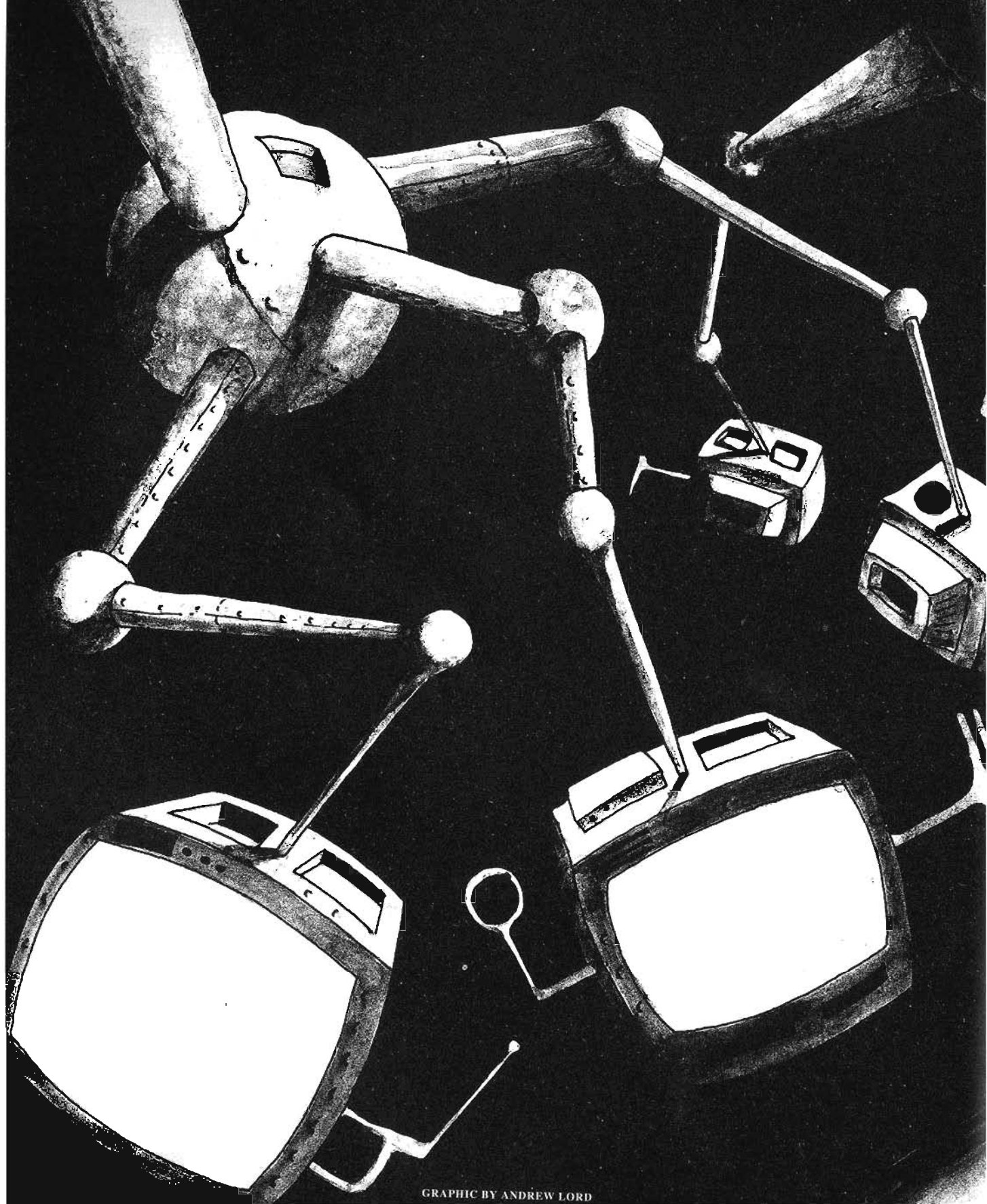
i understand your constraints but these words have  
 now conspired with the spots and they sent me a letter  
 to tell me they threaten me i'm not scared but i thought  
 you'd like to know i'm strong but my father's words  
 can do nothing

they only ring loudly when it's too late and even  
 though i've seen their fury i've seen them swallowed  
 by the spots is this not what you do not want to happen  
 so as not to slip on rain-drenched steps and fall into  
 another granite vortex where we played on wet fields in  
 the morning frost white white white our tracks like  
 souls of early discontent running away from us on frost  
 fields like overcrowded asylums you must also have a  
 look at your trolley its wheels need oiling and fixing to  
 carry us me in a straight line the chances of rolling  
 down steps kept to a minimum when you've heard the  
 scratch of sand on your door is that not simply the wind  
 calling you home from poverty where everyone's  
 syntax is jumbled like the flags of plastic on the barbed  
 wire walls and the sun shines a futility from the glass  
 shards lying bleached and brittle on the frosted fields  
 yesterday was danced to death outside this play-field  
 where a spoon is not only a spoon but a word that i can  
 swirl into my mouth run my tongue along its mysteri-  
 ous cavity and make it stick and streaks of saliva to  
 carry me beyond these spots and granite steps to 10 000  
 flaps of an ancient wing big as my dream that i dream  
 when the bird is dead and white feathered pink smears  
 against my temples no my temples where you will  
 paint my walls and bars and skies and in this coolness

like a tomb a womb i search for connections but find  
 grains of sand on my forehead wipe them away with  
 disbelief in a tower a call a call echoes from long long  
 long ago and reverberates from magenta in the sky the  
 sky my hands to my ears a gesture ancient and modern  
 i raise my eyes to the skies the skies and mouth the  
 word that you want iii run i run from the dream that i  
 dream when the rhythm of the tomb breaks through and  
 the sandy carpets and summer is hot hotter than the sun  
 sweat runs down our faces tickles our minds we swim  
 swim in a mountain made of walls where the river runs  
 and runs like a god down to me where the rocks are the  
 giants of a big white bird burnt into the face of a  
 thousand ants we dive from them into an uncertain  
 stream blow kisses at fishmouthed spirits in watery  
 dresses they are the children we dance on slippery steps  
 all of us forsaking our rhythm fearing falling because it  
 hurts for a while bruised and torn our elbows in slings  
 and we can't paint the wall.

so, doctor, you see. there are spots on my wall.

*From: Suicide Sequence*



GRAPHIC BY ANDREW LORD



# 'South Africa Now': Filling the Void

Danny Schechter

**A** *n 'autobiography' of the independent news programme, this account was submitted to Passages by the programme's executive producer, Danny Schechter, along with an announcement that 'South Africa Now' was closing down.*

In the summer of 1986, while covering Jesse Jackson's visit to Southern Africa's Frontline States, on assignment for a well-known prime time TV network news magazine programme, I spoke with Zimbabwe's President



Robert Mugabe outside his office in Harare, the capital city. I asked about the destabilisation campaign that South Africa's neighbours said was costing them billions of dollars and millions of lives.

I asked Mugabe if he would welcome American military help as a way to protect his region from South African attack. His reply was immediate. First, he told me that I was the first American reporter to ask him that question. Second, he immediately took up the idea explaining that a USA arms flow would enable Zimbabwe to divert its scarce resources from military expenditures into badly needed educational and agricultural efforts. Such a USA commitment, he said, would serve as a powerful signal to Pretoria. In a crisp response — what we TV people call a good sound bite — he appealed for Washington's help.

After confirming that this was indeed the first time such a statement had been made — and because such scoops are often the adrenaline of news organisations — I called our foreign news desk in New York to find out how I should ship the tape for consideration by our nightly news show. I explained the circumstances, why his statement was newsworthy, and that it had won Jackson's immediate endorsement. The response from New York startled me. The news editor on the other side of the line only had one reaction, a question: 'Where is Harare?'

It was clear that not only would I have no sale but also that the story, and by extension noncrisis news from Africa, was hardly a blip on the net-

work radar screen. I could have been calling from the moon.

### When It's Not on TV, It Doesn't Exist

It has become axiomatic that when an issue is not on television in the United States, it doesn't exist for most Americans who rely on TV news for most of their understanding of world issues. And for the most part, on an ongoing, regular basis, news and developments about Africa in general and Southern Africa in particular are not frequently covered. The exceptions are usually moments of high drama or when the video is particularly evocative in the case of the bloated bellies of Ethiopia's famine victims, an ongoing coup of civil war, violence in South Africa's townships, or when a well known personality — say a famous celebrity such as Nelson Mandela — is released from prison.

TV news for the most part is what the people who run TV programmes say is news, although they are influenced by what's in the papers or on the wires. Few media critics or area specialists are happy with network news offerings overall, so it is not surprising that so many Africans, and journalists or scholars who follow Africa, are particularly distressed by the quality and quantity of African coverage.

In the case of South Africa, network news coverage has played an important role in bringing the apart-

heid issue to world attention. There is no doubt that graphic reports of police violence and township responses helped galvanise world opinion against apartheid, and fueled anti-apartheid movements and their demands for sanctions. To stop such images from getting out, the South African government imposed media restrictions between 1985 and 1986 that sought to, and did, limit what the cameras could see and transmit. Their rules were designed to intimidate and to encourage self-censorship. They worked.

A year later, the Canadian government commissioned a quantitative study of the effects of those restrictions and concluded that Pretoria has been 'successful in driving images of violence, human rights violations and poverty in South Africa off the television screens of the Western world.' The report documented a sharp fall-off in coverage, even though as those TV images decreased, the rate of detentions and human rights abuses inside South Africa increased. Just why the networks were so cooperative with those restrictions, so passive for so long, has become a matter of debate.

## V news for the most part is

### Media Appeasement

The argument started when a former senior level CBS producer penned a *New York Times* op-ed page article calling on the networks, his among

them, to unilaterally withdraw from South Africa if they weren't able to do their job. 'They've kept us from covering the story because of the fear that by breaking the rules, we'll get thrown out,' wrote Richard Cohen. He charged 'media appeasement' with apartheid. A congressional committee that deals with African issues took this issue so seriously that it convened hearings, inviting network officials to testify about their news coverage problems. The committee was startled when not one broadcaster agreed to testify. The hearing itself was not even considered newsworthy and no news crews except C-SPAN's were even assigned to cover it. Citing First Amendment freedom of press concerns, the networks would not even cooperate with an official inquiry intended to call attention to South Africa's effort to suppress the flow of news.

In their defense — when any defense has ever been offered — news managers claimed that they must agree to obey the laws in the countries in which they operate or they would not be able to operate at all. In any case, the argument continued, they had to protect their people, and

and the pictures it produced — had in TV parlance 'gone away'. One network foreign news editor told me he thought competitive pressures also dictated a cautious response. Everyone wanted to make sure they were there when a 'big one', a story such as Mandela's release, broke. So for nearly two years, TV stories from South Africa were few and far between. And that is not simply because there were no stories to shoot, or that material could not be shot or acquired from many freelance crews. In this period, many reports were shot, only to be put 'on the shelf' rather than on the air in New York.

While it is true that major events were happening elsewhere in the world at this time — in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union for example — and that the traditional twenty-two minute newscast can't cover everything, it is also true to quote a Mac-Neil/Lehrer report, that the networks were 'tip-toeing around'. They did not challenge a system of State-imposed media censorship of the type which would later be taken up by governments in Israel and China. Not one American TV correspondent was expelled from

not, at bottom, committed to covering a black freedom struggle. Kenneth Walker, former Nightline correspondent, one of the few black reporters ever assigned to that show, and to report from South Africa, told a TV interviewer that the reason for diminished coverage was that 'news decisions in this country are made by about ten white guys who live within a twenty-five mile radius of Manhattan'. Walker called the lack of coverage a 'failure of nerve and a failure of will', even claiming that Nightline only went to South Africa for its first series of week-long programmes in response to pressure from black staffers at the network.

Other media critics have contended that poor coverage of blacks in South Africa is not surprising in light of the 'benign neglect' of black community issues in America. There is no question that America's newsrooms tend to be racially homogeneous with few blacks in the decision-making positions. Some who are, such as Les Payne, the managing editor of *Newsday*, have committed their newspapers to enhanced coverage of South Africa. TV Anchor Charlayne Hunter-Gault has done the same at PBS's 'MacNeil/Lehrer News Hour'. Many individual journalists — black and white — are committed to the story. There seem to be far fewer broadcast institutions that are,

## what people who run TV programmes say is news.

guard against their expulsion. A few went further, explaining the decrease of coverage by claiming that the story in South Africa had changed, and was no longer as vivid. By that they meant that the street fighting —

South Africa in this period.

Was racism a factor? Some critics thought so, charging that mostly American news coverage remains Eurocentric and that overwhelmingly white news organisations were

### Constructive Engagement

Another factor which may be more central is political, rather than racial,

## ‘ Overall, most TV news editors cannot be accused of having too much intimate knowledge or interest in African liberation movements ,

Network news tends to march in lock-step with USA government policy, often sharing its worldview and Cold-War biases. The Reagan administration considered South Africa an ally, and practiced a policy of constructive engagement. Network news programmes never dissented sharply from this view, for example, by looking at our South Africa policy as skeptically as they come to see America's Vietnam policy in the latter years of the war.

The opposition movements there, especially the African National Congress (ANC), were not taken terribly seriously in those years either. They were frequently tainted in our media the same way they were tainted in South Africa's pro-government white press as Communists, frequently labelled 'Moscow-backed' without much background offered about their histories or political goals. Liberation movements in other parts of the Third World received similar treatment although dissident movements in Eastern Europe and the Soviet block were usually treated much more sympathetically. Perhaps that is because network news programmes, like the USA government, have always been more focussed on East-

West issues than North-South concerns.

Overall, most TV news editors cannot be accused of having too much intimate knowledge or interest in African liberation movements. When a story is perceived of as only of limited interest by those at the top of a news organisation, it is given only limited coverage by the rank and file.

It is possible that network news managements would disagree with my assertions. They would probably point with pride to their coverage of Nelson Mandela's release from prison. And it is true that the three networks and CNN sent a small media army to South Africa to chronicle that event. Yet the monthly *Tyndall Report*, a trade publication that surveys TV news coverage, noted in the aftermath of that coverage in March 1990: 'South Africa received one hundred and seventy-six minutes of coverage in one month. The total for the previous thirty months (August 1987 to January 1990) was forty-two minutes. Thus this month's coverage was higher than the annual coverage of South Africa (one hundred and sixty-five minutes) over the last two and a half years.' In the period before Mandela's release, South Africa

ranked twenty-seventh — next to last — on the *Tyndall* list of major news stories being covered on television.

The undeniable bottom line is that South Africa coverage levels are episodic and inadequate and, even when they aren't, on such stories as the Mandela release, the levels of analysis and background contextual reporting is usually very weak. There have been some exceptions — and exceptional programmes — including some hosted by Ted Koppel who cannot be accused of just parachuting over, in the manner of so many network superstars. What Ted Koppel had going for him was more extensive air time and virtually unlimited budget.

### Enter 'South Africa Now'

It is against this background, in April 1988, that former CBS reporter Rory O'Connor and myself started the weekly television news magazine called 'South Africa Now'. We believed from our own experience that the networks respond more to competition than to criticism. We wanted to demonstrate that the story of upheavals in the region, and the aspira-

Danny Schechter

tions of the people who live there, could be told weekly on American television, despite the censorship there and indifference here.

We recognised early that we would only have a running chance of defeating the censors by working with black journalists and video teams who were already in place in South Africa and looking for TV outlets overseas. Collaboration became our watchword — and training South African blacks in TV journalism part of our mission. Our staff now is multiracial, multicultural and multinational, a mix of seasoned broadcast journalists and novices. We believe that the people closest to the news on the ground are in the best position to explain what is going on. Since Southern Africans are most committed to getting their news out, we have been seeking to equip them with the tools and skills to tell their own story. 'South Africa Now' is a TV vehicle for Africans to report an African story, and for Americans to see and hear African voices.

### Multiplier Effect

We hoped that the existence of 'South Africa Now' — and what publicity we could attract to promote it — would have a multiplier effect, keeping the issue of the suppression of news from the region in the public eye. We want to prod the networks to improve and increase their coverage by example. We were and are very aggressive in this respect and have been accused of being 'guerrilla journalists' and advocates as a result.

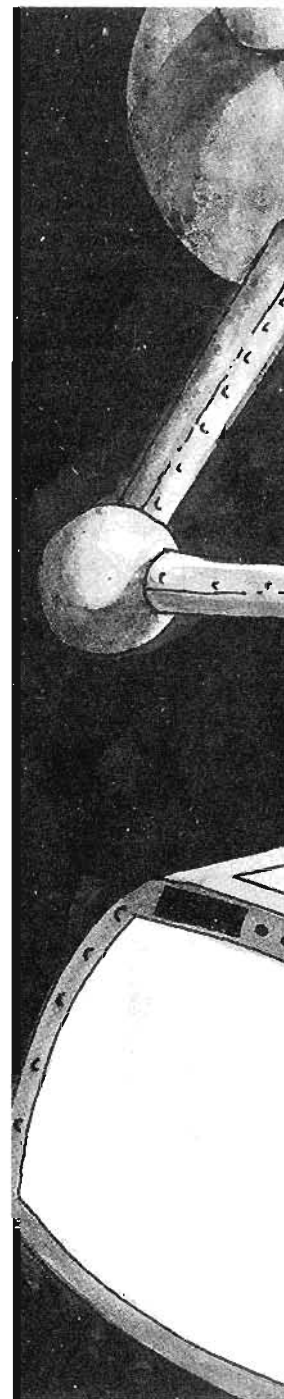
We were able to start 'South Af-

rica Now' with a small grant from the United Nations. Most charitable foundations or corporate sponsors would not touch us initially, arguing that if the networks with their vast budgets — \$1 billion dollars per annum — could not provide coverage, why did we think that our small company, Globalvision, could? They were skeptical and not without good reason.

So we had to get on the air first, to prove that it could be done. Then, we could refine our product as we went along. Globalvision has, as its credo, the view that regular on-going programmes — weekly series, not occasional documentaries — are what's needed to reach and build an audience for the information that Americans are not getting elsewhere. We started transmitting the show on one satellite network, and soon found our way onto leading PBS stations. We had hoped that once we proved we could produce a quality programme, other funding could be found. Fortunately that's what happened. Unfortunately, the funding has been at a subsistence level.

### Where 'South Africa Now' Is Seen

As of September 1990, 'South Africa Now' had been on the air for two and a half years, adding new stations in the United States and overseas during each thirteen week season. At this writing the show is seen on leading public television stations nationwide, in the Caribbean, Japan and Southern Africa. Having the programme seen in the region we cover has been very important in the sense



that people who are making the news we are covering can now see and react to our work. We also contribute weekly segments to CNN's 'World Report' sent by satellite to eighty-two countries.

Our budget went from \$200 a week to a \$15,000 cash outlay with many in-kind services provided by friendly PBS stations. To put this in perspective, our annual budget for fifty-two shows approximates the amount spent each week for network news magazines such as '60 Minutes', 'Prime Time Live', and '20/20'. We were forced to rely on foundation grants to pay for the show, which we produce on a nonprofit basis, in association with the Africa Fund. Unhappily, we could find no corporations to sponsor or underwrite the show. One programmer at a PBS station in Dallas was quoted as saying that 'South Africa Now' is considered 'not corporate friendly'. The lack of corporate interest in the show is no doubt linked to the fact that so many corporations have been on the firing line for their business dealings in South Africa.

### Form and Content

We were concerned with what we would put on the air as with winning air time. We started with a determination to provide stories that were not covered. We also wanted to forge a style of presentation that might make the programme more accessible to ordinary viewers. We wanted the programme to be unique in both its form and content.

In form, we opted for a high ener-

gy presentation with many quick stories, flashy graphics, and grabby features. We decided on a magazine format with a diverse mix of elements rather than a talk show loaded down with experts. The idea was always to reach out to a large mass audience and not just talk to the small circle of the initiated. We did not want to become the TV show of the African Studies Association!

Our programme mix was consciously designed to include news, background reports, and cultural segments. Because culture often leads politics in Southern Africa and is certainly an arena for the expression of ideas, values, and aspirations, we gave it a priority. Unlike traditional news shows that deal with culture as a second thought — in cutesy 'kicker' stories at the end of the newscast or with 'What's Hot' segments — we devoted a third of the programme to substantive reports on musicians, film, theatre, and the arts. Many of these reports are lively and entertaining, produced to please the ordinary viewer.

We had serious internal debates over how to cover the news. That has been a major challenge. We wanted

our news section to focus on the news of the black majority, not the white minority. So when the networks featured reports on the white elections, we focused on the black voter boycott and explained their unrepresentative character. When some report-

ers feted President de Klerk as the 'Gorbachev of South Africa', we looked analytically at his record and at the limited nature of his reform vision. We emphasised the role that the mass democratic movements and their defiance campaigns played in pushing the government to that road of reform. Unlike the network cameramen that tend to shoot from behind police lines, we wanted our images to come from within the movements for change, looking the other way.

On one occasion we were able to compete head-on with network efforts. That occurred when we produced a prime-time special on PBS for Mandela's release that aired nationwide in February 2,

1990, the day of his walk to freedom. For that occasion, we had a professional budget and satellite access. So our show carried all the news the networks had but with a distinctly different frame. Our coverage of Mandela's release, for example, stressed

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two points conspicuously absent in most network coverage. First, that Mandela himself initiated the negotiations that resulted in his freedom, and, second, that he did so from behind bars. Later we reported on how he ended up in prison in the first place — a rather important dimension of the story the networks ignored — we spotlighted the role played by the CIA in tipping off the South African police about his whereabouts.

In our reporting, we also try to be careful about our use of language. We avoid such phrases as 'black-on-black violence'. The stories on this subject usually miss the political, as opposed to the racial or tribal, character of local conflicts. Violence against black township officials or fighting between activists of the ANC/United Democratic Front and the Inkatha movement led by Chief Gatsha Buthelezi stem from ideological differences that must be explained. The role of the South African police and army in this conflict has been central, although you wouldn't know it from most TV reporting.

### Getting the Story Right

We have tried to get the story right rather than have it first. We want to explain how and why events occur, and to look at the forces behind the scenes. To do that, we have investigative reporters looking into many controversial stories including South Africa's nuclear weapons programme, its chemical and biological research, military efforts, sanction

busters, and the like. Weekly, we seek out analysis and background from leading experts, analysts and activists. We have always tried to get the broadest range of viewpoints as well, including that of the South African government. But its officials have refused to cooperate, denying us interviews, comments, and even access to the country by turning down, without explanation, our requests for visas.

Perhaps they hoped that we would go away once we were spurned or that public television stations would not carry the show because of alleged lack of balance. Thanks to our association with CNN, as a contributor to a programme to which South African Broadcasting also contributes, we were able to use their material and so ensure that government viewpoints are represented on 'South Africa Now'.

### The Sincerest Form of Flattery

The South African Government has done more than show us its displeasure. They actually attempted to compete with us by covertly subsidising their own show, cloned after ours but riddled with government propaganda. Called 'Inside South Africa', it too was formatted as a half-hour news magazine with a black host. The show drew on a wide range of reports from government-controlled television and was produced by a company called Global News, which is headed up by a former SABC executive.

Despite the similarity of the names of the two producing compa-

nies, Global News and Globalvision, the shows were completely different. For one thing, 'Inside South Africa' had a big budget for post-production, special effects, and satellite transmission. When 'South Africa Now' exposed this look-alike competitor, and tipped off a South African newspaper which confirmed that it was being covertly subsidized with government funds, it soon became less visible. Perhaps it was unable to find a broadcast outlet in the USA. I guess we should be pleased about this attempt: imitation is still the sincerest form of flattery.

'South Africa Now' has constantly sought to explain the character of apartheid itself since it is not understood by the American press and American TV viewers. Our reports tend to explain apartheid as more than a system of legalised racial domination; we view it as a framework for economic exploitation and ethnic division and manipulation. We believe that apartheid needs to be reported as a labour system as well as a tool for preserving racial privilege. Issues of class need to be covered as thoroughly as questions of race. We believe that the economic impact of apartheid — vast disparities between white wealth and black poverty — is as cruel as its racially discriminatory effects. 'South Africa Now' seeks to give its viewers an insider's view of the struggle for majority rule and economic transformation, not just for civil rights under the current system. Our reporting reflects that understanding. 'South Africa Now' carries a 'Labour Watch' segment because trade unions are often at the

center of the fight for economic justice. It is important to cover their demands and the highly concentrated economic institutions they are up against. That means also covering the international dimensions of the issue, the role transnational corporations play in propping up apartheid and the impact of sanctions. In an increasingly global economy, you cannot cover South Africa without also covering the countries that trade with South Africa. Thus, we have run many stories about how Pretoria has worked to evade sanctions, and the support they've received from Israeli arms dealers, Arab oil suppliers, and the country's own monopoly corporations such as Anglo-American and De Beers. You can't cover apartheid without looking at its economic underpinnings.

From our first programmes, we have decided also that our focus would be regional because apartheid policies have impacted on all South Africa's neighbours in such a devastating manner. As a result we frequently feature reports from and about the Frontline states. We have carried reports from Angola television and an excerpt from a Cuban film about the battle in Southern Angola at Cuito Carnivale that may have been the decisive factor in ending South African intervention and assuring Namibian independence.

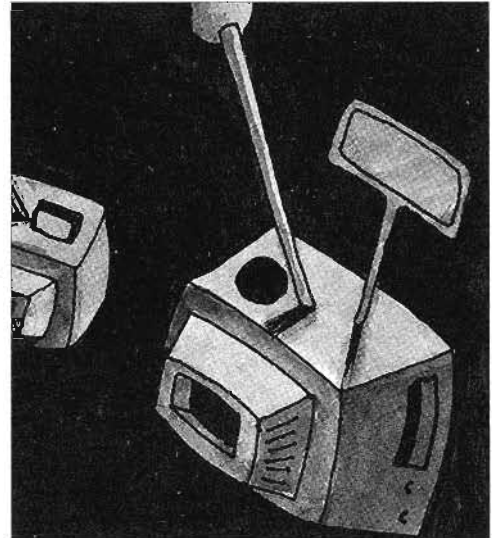
At a time when no other regular reports were being aired on Namibia, we started a 'Namibia Watch' segment hosted by Joseph Diescho, a black Namibian scholar; this segment ran every week from the implementation of UN Resolution 435 to

that country's independence, which we covered on the spot. One of our Namibia stories aired charges of a massacre of SWAPO combatants by South African trained forces. It was given page one treatment in the South African press and led to a denunciation of the show by that country's defense minister in Parliament, a sign that we were being taken very seriously indeed. Diescho now hosts a weekly 'Frontline Focus' segment reporting on events in Angola, Mozambique, and Zimbabwe as well as Namibia. In 1990, we established a Zimbabwe bureau.

Finally, we also critique news coverage itself through a regular 'Covering the Coverage' segment. Since filling the void in coverage is our goal, we often cover gaps, omissions, distortions, and disinformation in other media as a regular part of our programme. This type of reporting is also unique on television where there is very little direct media criticism by one network of another.

### Evaluating our Impact

How can we evaluate our work? What have we achieved, and what do we hope to achieve? For starters, we have won recognition in our industry. An Emmy Award. A Gold Medal from a New York video festival. And a citation of 'Excellence in Television' from *Channels* magazine. We have been proud of the kind endorsements we have received from journalists we respect in South Africa



and overseas, from Allister Sparks to Bill Moyers, Gwen Lister to Anthony Lewis, Les Payne to Peter Magubane.

We have been called 'indispensable' by the *Village Voice*, praised for 'filling the void' by *Time*, called 'hip and stunning television' by *Vanity Fair*, endorsed by Oprah Winfrey and featured on MTV and the 'Today Show'. Television writers around the country have sung our praises, too, from *The Detroit Free Press* ('puts the networks to shame') to *The Los Angeles Times* ('remarkable') to publications in Europe and Africa.

The point of citing this favourable attention is not just to pat ourselves on the back; it shows that TV programmes about Africa do not have to be marginalised or ignored. They can become popular and respected. For years PBS stations have run expensively produced nature shows about Africa and specials on African animals. They have been big ratings

boosters. Now we must do the same for the African people!

We are very mindful of our limits, problems, and shortcomings. Our staff is young and largely inexperienced. (Our salaries are probably the lowest in television and not by choice!) Our reporters can be rhetorical or rely on too much file footage. Our lack of access to satellites makes electronic news gathering slower than it could be, making it hard to always be as timely as we want to be. It is sometimes tough also to transcend charges of bias, a frequent contention of the South African government which would prefer we didn't exist. Organisational rivalries also impact on us. For example, PAC members say we are too ANC-oriented, and ANC people hate it when we cover the PAC.

Perhaps the most public controversy around our work followed the programme's cancellation by the Los Angeles public television station in October 1990 on the grounds that we lacked balance. *The Los Angeles Times* revealed that for some time, without our knowledge, 'South Africa Now' had become the target of a campaign to drive it off the airwaves by a conservative media advocacy group, the Committee on Media Integrity. The group's chairman, writer David Horowitz, publicly claimed the station's decision as his own victory. *The Los Angeles Times* explained that he had 'met with station executives a half dozen times and conducted a year-long letter writing campaign'. His charge: 'South Africa Now' represents 'hard-line Marxist propagandism posing as news'.

Many of the programme's viewers rejected this characterisation. While the station denied that it had been pressured, more than a thousand viewers flooded the station with calls and letters. Organisations threatened to picket the TV station and launch a boycott. City council members and congressional representatives spoke out on the programme's behalf, so did two Pulitzer Prize-winning journalists. *Los Angeles Times* television critic, Howard Rosenberg, praised 'South Africa Now' coverage, calling the cancellation decision 'bone-head(ed)' and publicly wondering if it represented the 'intellectual sterilisation of PBS'. Clarence Page of *The Chicago Tribune* called 'South Africa Now' 'one of the most enlightening programmes on television' and called the cancellation part of an 'ominous trend'. 'President de Klerk's happy and soothing diplomacy,' he wrote, 'may be accomplishing what his government's onerous State of Emergency failed to do: silence important news and criticism of the South African government while the battle to end apartheid continues to rage. As a loyal viewer of 'South Africa Now', I think the bias excuse is bogus.'

The Los Angeles station reconsidered after a barrage of pressure that the station's manager called a 'firestorm'. But more insidious than right-wing attacks or decisions by conservative programmers was a larger problem, a growing view among many PBS stations that the show was no longer needed because the situation in South Africa was changing and that news was more

accessible. The Boston PBS station took that view, cancelling the programme because it had 'outlived its usefulness'. 'Conventional media are covering the story in depth now,' contended Broadcasting Director Dan Everett. Researchers from Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting responded with statistics to show that this 'conventional wisdom' is way off base. Looking at the period between July 1 and October 15, 1990, they noted that the three network news programmes devoted no more than thirteen minutes per week to South Africa. In the first two weeks of October 1990, when the station's decision to cancel 'South Africa Now' was being made, NBC ran one three-minute report on white South Africans, ABC had a twenty-second anchor mention of a change of law, and CBS aired nothing.

The trend seemed clear: whatever beachhead 'South Africa Now' had established for coverage of African news was being eroded. The news business, on commercial and public channels, was once again limiting coverage. The deeper reasons were discussed by some of the country's top journalists who met at Harvard in May 1990 under the auspices of the Nieman Foundation in Journalism to bemoan the paucity of news coverage about the continent. Anthony Lewis, the Pulitzer Prize-winning *New York Times* columnist who frequently writes about South Africa, explained the problem this way: 'We have a short attention span. This is the age of ten-minute fame and the nine-second soundbite. After a week or two, Mandela dropped down to



small type and left the screen, and with him Africa went out of American consciousness. As it happens, South Africa is only at the beginning of a profoundly important story, what could be a transforming process.'

Some corporate executives have complained about our reports on divestment campaigns and one accused us of not adequately covering Chief Buthelezi. (He finally helped us get an interview with the Inkatha leader after we assured him that we wanted his perspective on the air.) Like other news organisations, we have had our share of gaffes and inaccuracies. You certainly can't please everyone and, as someone who has known the benefits of professional network production budgets, I'm not pleased by the quality of some of our footage. I've had to lower my expectations as well as the production budget.

### Changing Television

'South Africa Now' has not achieved all of its goals, but it has gotten its message across. Although we know we haven't changed television, we would like to think that we haven't left it the same either. Hopefully the show's approach, its fusion of information and culture, and some of our experience in low cost production, will find its way into a democratic South Africa where the programme's style, sensibility, and attitude could become one model for new television programmes there.

The battle for more TV coverage of Africa here will be a long one despite the fact that millions of Americans turned out to welcome Nelson

Mandela during his American tour, demonstrating their interest in the issue. If anything should have convinced the media gatekeepers that millions do care, that massive response in city after city should have done the trick. A survey by the Times Media Company at the time of Mandela's release indicated there was more interest in that story than the uprisings underway in Lithuania. Not all American news executives got that message, even after coverage of the Mandela events proved ratings blockbusters for local TV stations that went live to Mandela events.

A month after the trip, on August 8, 1990, *The Wall Street Journal* reported that the executive producer of NBC 'Nightly News' had decided to axe a story filed by their South Africa correspondent on apartheid and its effect on the education of South African children, 'insisting that viewers were becoming bored with the South African story'. The segment, which was two minutes long and therefore considered practically documentary length, was screened for staffers who were reportedly enthusiastic about it and thought it should run. The executive producer said he would broadcast it only if they could 'prove it was a piece that would interest a housewife in Queens'.


Fortunately, one of the staffers had a mother in Queens who was actually invited to screen the story without being told quite why. Incredibly, when Mrs Sonia Perez of Astoria, Queens said she liked it, NBC ran it. This episode is one more sign that the audience is more open to

watching news from South Africa than media guardians are willing to provide it.

### What Is To Be Done?

The challenge to American television is to respond to the interest that is there, and not to abdicate its responsibility to better inform Americans about the world we live in. The challenge to those who care deeply about Africa is to find ways to improve media coverage of Africa, especially on television, and to find ways to change the situation.

So what can be done? If you agree that the television media is too important to be left to its own devices, then there are efforts to be made by viewers and producers alike. For one thing, individuals and organisations can monitor TV news coverage to pinpoint inaccuracies or misinformation. Letters to the editor can be written and individual journalists can be approached with suggestions and criticisms. Organised efforts can be made to meet with network executives; letters can be sent to correspondents at African news bureaus. (None of the big three networks have African bureaus outside of Johannesburg!) Writing more about media issues, in the spirit of the essays in this book, can be useful in raising public awareness about media deficiencies.

And 'if you don't like the news,' to quote the legendary San Francisco radio broadcaster, Scoop Nisker, 'you can always go out and make some of your own.' 'South Africa Now' is doing just that. 

☉ Louise and the Mellow Moon  
or The Written Woman

*Carsten Knoch*

This is a sad country  
Autumn and winter come  
With yellow skies  
Here we are  
Here we are  
Leaves are climbing  
onto thorn bushes  
As if  
As if

Oh, Louise, are you turning  
On your original futon tonight?  
It serves  
As a reminder  
Of me.

Hey, Louise, are you turning?  
Hey, Louise, are you burning?  
You should sing about  
the seasons that cannot be felt  
You should think about  
the treasons that cannot be held  
against you, Louise,  
are you there?

This country is alive  
with a song of violence  
at night and only at night  
There you go  
There you go  
Will she sleep with him  
Won't she sleep with him  
I write you  
I write you

Hey, Louise, are you burning?  
Hey, Louise, are you turning?  
You should sing about  
The seasons that cannot be felt  
You should think about  
The treasons that cannot be held  
against you, Louise,  
are you there?



☉ Water

*Carsten Knoch*

Water fills the little bags  
in the corner of my eye  
When poemless people  
Gaze at me blankly  
And I say that being the  
bookkeeper of my soul  
Sometimes keeps the water  
that fills the little bags  
in the corner of my eye  
from running



## The Uncanny Beauty of Cellos

Carsten Knoch

*For Vivaldi*

She goes for wailing cellos  
Wherever she sees them  
She attacks the cases with knives  
And vehemently stabs the cellos  
To death

She saw him doing a  
Vivaldi reenactment on stage  
Purely for her self  
And her pleasure  
And it was

Indisputably beautiful

The Cellist was black  
Which is unusual in a world  
Whose Italian music belongs  
Only to white people

(This is uninteresting)

She hacks them to death  
She cuts off their strings  
And eats the wood  
The old beautiful wood  
Then she saws off  
Their necks

Which is not unusual  
(Say the psychiatrists)

In heavy psychoses like that  
Induced by passions  
Uncontrollable and beautiful  
In a meaningless way

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## My Airlock out of Exile

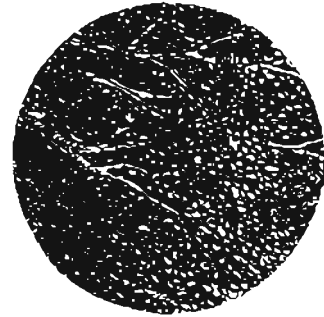
**Barry Feinberg**

*For Linda*

A far cry from London  
where home was home  
for real  
if not at home  
in my soul;  
I remain  
for the time  
a being  
suspended  
over Table Bay  
with its Robben Island ulcer  
hovering uncertainly  
with no home-coming  
Cape Town  
still inscrutable  
under my birdlike gaze

Blinds flap  
and implode  
as relentless summer wind  
rifled by fluted mountain granite  
flaunts its refrain  
unerringly over millennia

On a journey  
back and forwards  
into my life  
my origins  
you who chose to  
scan with me  
go into me  
brought me  
to stare unflinchingly  
at myself  
my spirit distraught  
with persistent anonymity  
and pathetic regrets  
stirred by yearning



I struggle to launch  
a reluctant voice  
my tongue  
it seems  
still steeped  
in London  
and to be honest  
blunted by the habit  
of abstinence  
my morale  
invaded by ennui  
and recycled discontent

Through old avenues  
endlessly caravanning  
my internal desert  
I became wise to  
this watering hole  
and the life  
that spawns around it.  
But my roots here  
seem more ritual  
than reality;  
sounds, colours and smells  
have familiarity bred  
of repeated dreams  
and not identity  
nurtured by blood

Thirty years a castaway  
 clockworking round  
 a London anchor  
 from time to time  
 arriving at islands  
 taking on water  
 to assuage  
 my addled palate.  
 Often the sight of land  
 erected castles in my head  
 South Africa always  
 out of reach  
 remained hinged  
 to the horizon  
 of my mind

Now  
 beached in Woodstock  
 flagellated by palms  
 indifferent as whips  
 at some wild initiation gauntlet  
 I enter my airlock  
 out of exile

Restlessly  
 we traverse apartheid's dunes  
 divining oases  
 of my adolescence;  
 squalor pervades  
 but the agony of deprivation  
 is audible everywhere:  
 heads still scan the heavens  
 but not for signs of God  
 as the hopes of a people  
 elevate to freedom

At last  
 evening arrives  
 and a day's unimpeded sky  
 curdles round the mountain  
 churned by unyielding wind  
 into buttered ridges  
 masking the sun intermittently  
 as it plummets  
 red and naked  
 into the Atlantic;  
 Lion's Head  
 like some Great White's fin  
 breaks surface  
 buttressing the cascading sky  
 against this embattled planet

As light expires  
 I fasten my eyes  
 onto encroaching night;  
 with this mind  
 on overtime  
 I put sleep on hold  
 and stalk  
 the darkness  
 into dawning

Mag Ons  
Skreetjies  
'n Ontploffing  
Laat Losbars



*Stephen Samuels*

*Under the layers of political slogans, in the heart and mind of a very normal man, of a man who led a model life, was a naked feeling of simply wanting to live a good life. It was a frighteningly raw and honest, selfish desire. It was a feeling that refused to submit to politics.*

—Zhang Xianliang —  
Half of Man is Woman.



Ons het langs die lowarivier afgestap, beduie na 'n eekhorning, papiere rondom die eerste herfsblare uit die rivier gevis, gelag. Ons kon niks vir mekaar sê nie. Sedert daardie eerste dag wou ek met Zhang, die enigmatische lang man praat. Vir weke het ons nou en dan mekaar raakgehoop, gegroet op 'n afstand, beduie, saam gedraf, sonder 'n gesprek met woorde.

'n Week gelede het hy so terloops 'n kopie van sy vertaalde novelle, *Mimosa*, in my hand gestop, met 'n bewerige inskripsie, 'For my friend.' Juis na die gebaar wou ek eenvoudig met hom praat. Na drie maande moes ons in mekaar se koppe inkom.

Dis met die geskiedenis dat ek voor die halfoop deur van Zhang se woonstel beland. Hy blaas 'n bol rook deur die oop venster en wink my binne. Beduie-beduie gooi Zhang Xianliang sy welige swart kuif agteroor. 'Ek is op pad,' wys hy na die opgestapelde tasse.

'Ek knik my kop. 'Ek ook.' Dit val my op: hy lyk jonk, te jonk vir 'n treurige geskiedenis.

Ons kan nie veel sê nie. Ongedurig wag ons vir die vertaler. Dit het dae geneem om die onderhoud te reel. Nou sal die gesprek waarskynlik aan informeelheid en hartelike inboet. Maar liever dit, as niks. Zhang skink tee in koppies, wankelig gebalanseer op 'n geprakscerde tafeltjie.

Wat ek van Zhang weet, staan in die Iowa-skrywers-brosjyre: 1936 — gebore in Nanjing; geskool in Beijing; in 1955 — onderwyser in Ningxia-provinsie; in 1957 — slagoffer van die 'anti-regse' beweging; in 1979 — vrygelaat: voorsitter — Ningxia Chinese skrywersvereniging; ondervoorsitter — Ningxia Federasie van Literêre en Kunskringe; lid — Chinese Volksraadplegende Politieke Konferensie; woon in Yinchuan, hoofstad van Ningxia. 'n Paar reëls wat 'n mens se lewe met die shorthand van 'n studentassistent probeer vasvat. Wat lê tussen 1957 en 1979? Wat lê daarvoor? Wat lê daarna? Wat weet ons van China? Minder as niks, en tog het so baie van my generasie sinnigheid gehad in Mao se 'Honderd Blomme-beweging.'



Zhang het al sy tweede sigaret opgesteek en die rook deur die slierte sneeu geblaas. Sy skouers verskonend opgetrek en 'n tweede koppie tee ingeskink.

'n Halfuur laat daag die vertaler uiteindelik op, verskonend in Mandarin en Engels, 'ek moes agter die sneeuploeg aantry.'

'Ek is bly ek kan met jou praat, ek wou lankal.' sê ek nog voordat Yan behoorlik haar sit kon kry.

'You're welcome!' lag Zhang.

Ek weet nie waar om te begin nie. 'Hoekom is jy in 1957 opgesluit?' kom dit hortend uit. 'n Hopelose begin vir 'n onderhoud, 'n inval in die middel van die storie, sonder enige opbou. Die vertaler bring my van stryk af, mens kan nie eers behoorlik opwarm rondom ditjies en datjies nie. Dan mors jy die vertaler se tyd.

Ook Zhang is gesteurd deur die invalshoek, maar met ingebore hoflikheid antwoord hy. 'Ek weet nie regtig nie. Almal wat teen Mao gepraat het, het daardie risiko geloop. Ek ook. Ons is tot regses verklaar. En opgesluit.'

'Het jy iets spesifiek gedoen?'

'Ek weet nie werklik nie. Ek was een-en-twintig. Op daai ouderdom volg jy liever in plaas van kritiseer. Maar ek dink dit was my gedigte wat die owerhede kwaad gemaak het.'

'Tot hoe lank is jy gevonniss?'

Dis 'n vraag wat Zhang seker talle kere al moes beantwoord. 'Tien jaar, maar ek het twee-en-twintig jaar gesit.'

'Wat, hoe bedoel jy?'

'In China is geregtigheid 'n snaakse ding. Ek is van tronk tot tronk gestuur. As jy eers in die tronk is vir intellektuele oortredings, dan is dit so maklik vir 'n volgende beweging om jou ook te veroordeel. Dan word jou straf net uitgerek.'

'En vandag? Is dit oor?'

Zhang lag. Yan vertaal die vraag maar antwoord

Stephen Samuels

vanuit haar eie ervaring. 'Jy weet maar min van China af, as jy dit glo. Niks is ooit oor of verby in China nie.'

Na 'n rukkie sê Zhang, 'ek is gerehabiliteer. Die Party het 'n verskoning aangebied. Daar is 'verkeerd teen my opgetree', se hulle.' Ek wag dat hy moet uitbrei, maar daar is eerder 'n ongemaklike stilte.

'Wat doen mens 22 jaar lank in 'n tronk. Dis soos die Soviettronke, die goelags: tronkkampe, arbeidskampe — jy werk elke dag. Dag in. Dag uit. Elke dag. Elke dag van jou tronklewe.'

'Hoe oorleef jy?'

'*Mimosa* handel daaroor.' Zhang wil duidelik die vrae van hom af weglei, na die derdepersoon van 'n romankarakter. 'In die boek vra die hoofkarakter, "hoe moet die intellektueel oorleef?" Daar is altyd twyfel, 'n gebrek aan selfvertroue. Is dit sy fout dat hy in die tronk beland het? Is daar iets met hom verkeerd? Het hy verkeerd verstaan? Is die staat nie miskien reg nie?'

'Wat dink jyself, wat is jou ervaring,' hou ek vol.

'Na baie verskillende ervarings — nou ook buite China — weet ek, ek was nie verkeerd nie. Dis die stelsel se fout. Nie myne nie. Maar in die tronk is jy sonder hoop. Ek moes leer van alles rondom my. Dit was die deel van my probeerslae vir vryheid. Selfs daar in die tronk moes ek vryheid probeer ontdek.'

'En tog bly jy 'n kommunist?'

'Elke mens het 'n basis nodig. Ook intellektuele. Jy moet 'n basis hê om van af te wyk, om terug te keer na, om nek om te draai. Marxisme is my basis. Dis die storie van my roman.

'n Intellektueel wat soek vir 'n basis, daardie bron wat hy kan gebruik vir rasonale, praktiese verklarings.'

'In die boek word dit byna 'n godsdienstige soeke. Ek herinner my aan 'n voorstelling waar die held in 'n angstige moment huil, en dan gerusstelling soek in *Das Kapital* asof dit die allesverklarende godsdienstige boek sou wees,' sê ek.

'Ja, vir die intellektueel in ongewone omstandighede is dit natuurlik om deur sulke wisselinge te gaan. Die ervaring is 'n weerspieëling van die historiese ontwikkeling in ons land. Marxisme as 'n rasonale wetenskapstoerie is in 'n sin vir ons maar 'n relatief-onlangse ontwikkeling. Een van die probleme van die Kulturele Revolusie was juis dat Marxisme as 'n godsdienstige

beskou was. Die karakter in *Mimosa* besef dat die Marxistiese ideaal nie 'n godsdienstige ervaring behoort te wees nie, maar 'n nuttige instrument om die wêreld te verstaan.'

'Hoe sien jy die Kulturele Revolusie?'

Zhang sug en skud sy kop terwyl hy 'n volgende sigaret aansteek. 'Dis een van ons grootste tragedies. Daar was soveel verneukery, soveel skewe persepsies. 'n Magstryd in die heersende elite het uiteindelik uitgebrei tot 'n verskriklike nasionale verskynsel.'

'Was dit nie poging om meer Chineeas, meer onafhanklik te word nie?'

'Nee, dis 'n oppervlakkige begrip. Uiteindelik het dit 'n beweging geword om mense te beheer, om hulle verstand en hulle gedagtes te beheer. Maar ek kan jou nie veel vertel nie. Ek was nie daar nie. Al wat ek weet, almal het gepraat, gedink, gelewe soos Mao.'

'Vertel my van die posisie van die kritiese intellektueel, van jou as kritiese mens?'

'Die gekheid van die Kulturele Revolusie was aanvanklik nie maklik bespeur deur die meeste mense nie. Aan die begin was dit suiwer idealisme, die slagspreuke was toepaslik en treffend. Die mense het saamgestem. Ook die intellektuele. Toe word dit anti-alles, anti-buitelanders, anti-voortgang en gelykheid. Toe word dit 'n beheer van idees en gedagtes. Daar was soveel spanning. Jy kon nie jou buurman vertrou nie. Of jou pa of ma nie. Jy kon jouself nie eens vertrou nie. Woorde het verskuilde betekenis gekry. Toe die intellektuele sien dat dit verkeerd gaan, was dit reeds te laat. Sommige het in die tronk beland; ander het hulle hoop in die toekomst geplaas. Maar watter toekomst, watter hoop? Wanneer sê die denkende mens, tot hiertoe en nie verder nie? Waar is die kern van integriteit? So baie intellektuele het selfmoord gepleeg. Baie mense. Ek was gelukkig; ek was in die tronk. Ek het oorleef. Ironies, nê? Midde-in China, het ek die Kulturele Revolusie van buite beleef.'

'Jy weet. Ons weet regtig min van China. Ons begrip bly oppervlakkig. China sluit hom ook doelbewus van die res van die wêreld af. Maar dit is so anders met *Mimosa*. Daar is 'n magdom westerse invloed, verwysings na westerse tekste, skrywers, maar so min van die ryk Chinese erfenis.'



'My generasie het 'n sterk dosis westerse opvoeding gehad met min Chinese klein. Die opvoeding van die bourgeois.'

Ek wil self-spot in sy antwoord inlees, maar Zhang se gesig is sonder 'n teken van emosie. Dis bloot 'n feit, 'n stuk geskiedenis. Sy antwoord word korter en my vrae miskien te onsensitief. Yan vertaal sugte en roonhoogtes sonder om moeg te word, en die band is besig om vol te loop.

'Zhang, miskien 'n laaste vraag. Daar is 'n man-vrou-verhouding in *Mimosa*, maar ten spyte daarvan is daar 'n gebrek aan menslike warmte, liefde. Dit bly funksioneel, by Maslow se skaal van behoeftes — die uitreiking na kos, met min subtiële menslikheid.'

'Om jou honger te stil is 'n menslike verhouding. 'n Mens wat honger is, kan nie aan liefde dink nie. Hy dink aan kos. Ek wou die tragedie van die situasie wys. Ons samelewing het daardie tragedie geskep. In ons samelewing is seks uit die openbare oog. Ons het geslagloos geword ...'

Die band het afgeloop. Die res van die gesprek sou ek my kon verbeel, maar sonder Zhang se ervaring is dit nutteloos.

Ons het nog een en ander gepraat. Oor die sneeu in China, die afbreek van spoeltoilette met die kulturele revolusie, 'n gelykheid wat nou meesal 'n publieke gat in the grond is.

'Hy wou nie te veel sê nie, want hy moet teruggaan. China het oral ore. Vra my,' sê Yan terwyl ons met die trappe van die woonstel afstap na haar motor.

Al die skrywers is vir die laaste keer bymekaar. Drie maande was ons hier in die midde-weste, tussen miellielande, studente, 'n kleurvolle herfs. Ons staan op die balkon van 'n huis bo-op 'n bult. Die sneeu lê kniediep. Die eekhorings in die somerhuis het verdwyn. Die rivier is bevrore. Daar is nou minder kans om die riviertjie te besoedel.


Afskeide bly moeilik.

Zhang, met 'n bewoëheid wat mens nie van fyn-gemanierde Chinese verwag nie, vra vir 'n laaste woord.

'Dis my eerste besoek buite China. Alles wat ek van Amerika gehoor het, het my nie voorberei op wat ek gesien het nie. In julle wildste verbeelding kan julle nie weet watter ervaring dit was nie. Nee, ek is oud en ervare



genoeg om nie deur propaganda oorrampel te word nie. Maar wat ek hier ervaar het, het vir my bewys hoe ons onderdruk word, hoe agterlik ons gehou word, hoe repressief ons regering is, hoe ons lewe ingeperk word. Wat ek hier sê, is maar net 'n klein mompel teen alles wat verkeerd is in China. Ek wil julle almal bedank vir my ervaring. En mag ons skreetjies — en julle s'n — 'n ontploffing laat losbars. Vir 'n beter China.'

Ons klap hande, om sentimentele redes. Ons weet nie regtig hoeveel moed in sy verklaring opgesluit is nie. Dit moes ontsegliek wees. 

## ☉ Umbongo Kasekela-Nqununu uNjabulo Ndebele

*Keith Gottschalk*

A! Mahaye, Mazankosi!

Mbongindini yasezindlwin'ezimhlophe zaseMfuthweni!

Ngcaphephendini kwezokubonga!

Wena oyiPrezidanti ye-COSAW! Wena onguSekela-manqanqa we-UWC!

Lukhozi, wakha wantinga phezu kweentaba zeMaluti wasasaz' imfundo!

Lukhozi, wakha watshawuz' uburhulumente beembila bangcangazela:

'Njabulo? N-ee. Geen werkpernit'.

Nantsok' iUWC isuke yaluqesh' olu khozi lungaqali;

Yaluphind' impinda, yaluphindis' indlela, yathi buy' ube yiVice-Rector.

Ngqondi, uzile wena ukuze wakhe

Ngqondi, wena wakha Umzi wethu Wemfundo.

Mbhali, sifundise.

Sekela-Nqununu, sikhokele:

Khawuvul' iingcango zethu zemfundo nempucuko!

ncincilili.



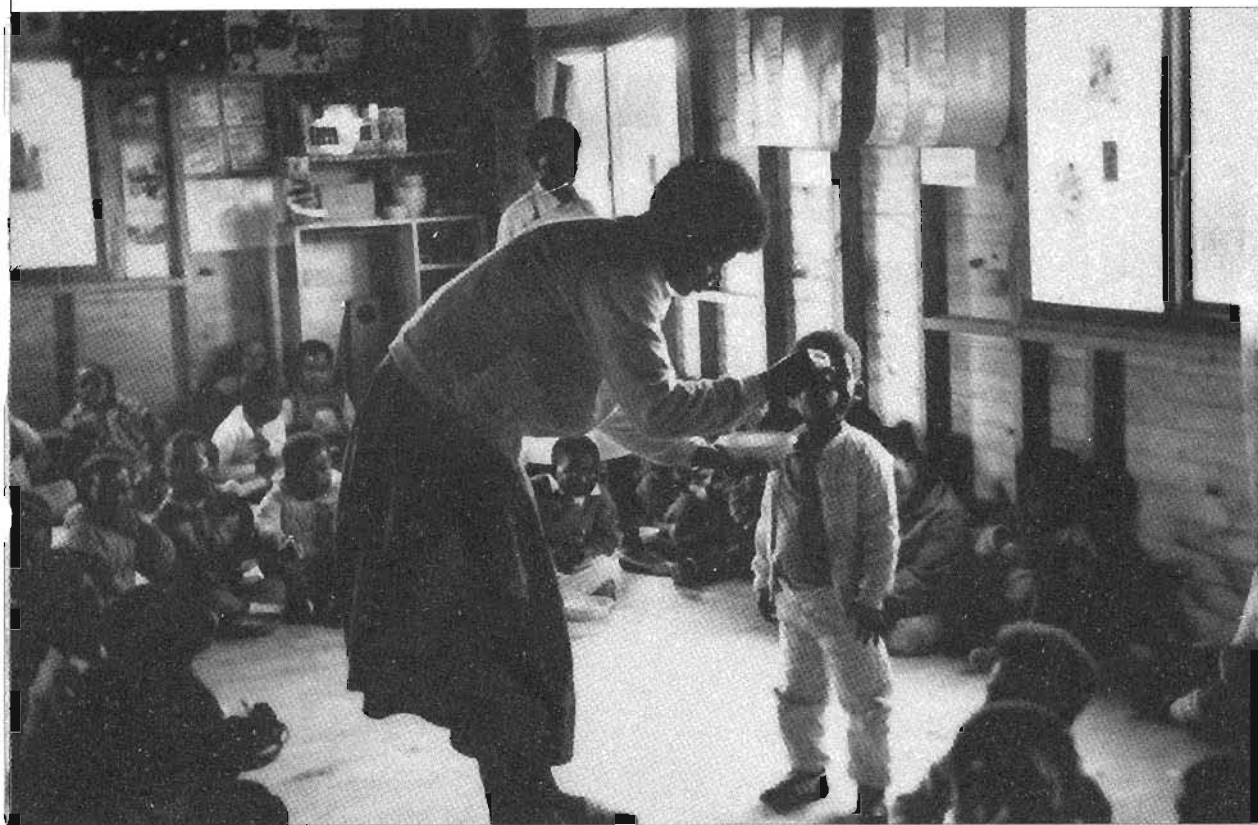
**Photographs by  
Mavis Matandeki and  
Primrose Talakumeni**

# The Way We Live

In 1989 Primrose Talakumeni and Mavis Matandeki were sent as United Women's Congress representatives to the one year media course at the CAP Media Project. Before this both of them had been employed as domestic workers.

In 1990 they put together an exhibition on women in the Western Cape: 'It was at the time when UWCO was dissolving to become part of the ANC Women's League and we felt that we should try and capture some of the history of UWCO before it was gone'. They have divided the exhibition into three parts: 'The first one deals with women in the squatter communities around Cape Town. The second tells the story about the two UWCO branches to which we belong — Gugulethu and KTC. The last story says that, even though there are many problems for us women, we are still proud and fighting.'

The following selection of photographs form part of the exhibition.







## Sebokeng

*David Motshwane Moisi*

A peaceful march in the glow of the day,  
Separated by thirty years from Sharpeville.  
Flags aloft as thousands march,  
In a springtide of song and dance.

Racist police toting guns,  
Hatred unchained from the minds taught to hate,  
Like thieves in the night fingers inch along the triggers.  
In cold-blood marchers are mowed down.

Blood-soaked bodies strewn  
Over the thirsty ground,  
Like trampled flowers  
Whose stems stand unconquered.

Bullets lodged in men's and women's backs.  
Agony mirrored in their sightless eyes,  
Empty shoes lie like vacated houses,  
Whose tenants left to return nevermore.

Sebokeng, a backyard of assassins you've become.  
Gunmen lurking in your dark shadows.  
Your barren soil soaks in scarlet red.  
Falling rain ever washing our blood into gutters.

Sebokeng, your image of death I fear,  
Glazed in the pained looks of your departed,  
But your resistance is woven into my being  
Wrapped like fabric around my soul.

Behind your eyelids death abounds  
Long rows of coffins placed on biers,  
Like boxes on conveyor-belts,  
To be sunken down the yawning graves.

Let your blood nourish  
the indomitable tree of freedom  
Pregnant with the succulent fruit of hope,  
Whose sweetness melts the anguish of our hearts.

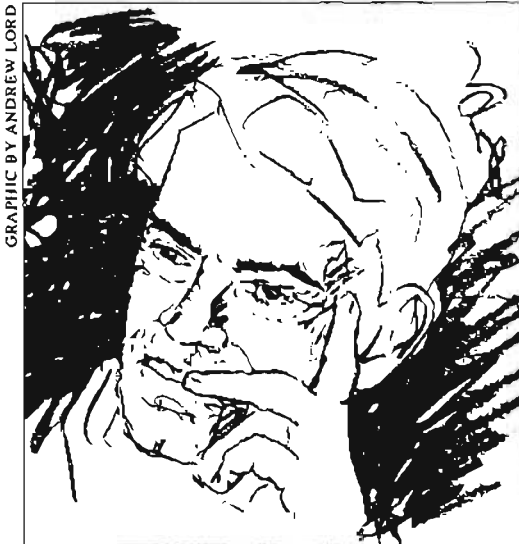
# ***The Self-presence of the Poet Inside:***

Jeremy Cronin's *Inside*

**T**

*Peter Horn*

here are situations where the only speech possible is solitary speech, a speech *inside*, a speech which does not through phonemes or graphemes reach out to others to communicate something, a speech where we represent something to ourselves which is absent. Such a situation is the *inside* of Cronin's poems, the speech of solitary confinement, the speech of jail. Of course, now the poems speak to us, but



GRAPHIC BY ANDREW LORD



that is not the situation in which they were produced, and in which they first functioned, in jail. Inside there is no outside except that which we can evoke in our words which we speak, silently, to ourselves. Yet, how can we speak to ourselves? Is not whatever I say already known to me? How can I communicate *inside* — my head, my cell, and what would be the purpose of me saying something to myself? One of course *speaks*, in a certain sense, even if one speaks to oneself

Off the top of my head  
a stream of bubbles

That rises, that billows  
above me, inside it

Is written:  
thinks dot-dot-dot

And no  
word of a lie (19)

That thinking is present, isn't it, and needs no re-presentation, does not have to be made present again by signs, by language, by speech. It is 'dot-dot-dot'. It is only when I want to present my thoughts to others that I have to re-present it in language, not so? Or is the presence of the present, is that which seems immediately accessible, that which I now think, feel and experience, impossible without the sign, the representation? Is every presence not already a repetition of the sign, is every presence not something which I can only understand because it is a repetition? That which is entirely new, the sign-

less presence, is always also meaningless: I can attach no meaning to what I have not already experienced and given a sign by which to remember that presence, by which to re-present it. Those incredible moments which are mainly in the past, in early childhood, where something happened for the first time before it happened for the first time — there is always a before, before it can sink in — those are the moments of radiant presence, but precisely because of that, those are the moments always already erased: no memory can reach the unique which has no sign attached to it yet. That is why childhood is that ideal object which is *present* before the act of repetition, the origin which is *entirely* imaginary, because no memory is attached to it. The adult 'out here circling about' can learn or forget nothing about the child 'hiding in there, ears pricked up', (36) because all childhood memories block off access to what it was.

Most of the uniquely present things, these signless memories block off access to what it was. Most of the uniquely present things, these signless presences happened before we were four, before there were signs, before there was memory. And yet, however alien that form is it is the form of ourselves, 'this five-year old boy, this shadow, /this thing stuck to my feet' (39). Forgotten, because never remembered. Remembered for ever, because intensely forgotten. There is no thinking, because there is no memory, before there is a sign,

and a sign is always a repetition of something which happened without a sign: 'Where do babies come from?' (37) Indeed! Out of a past with a silent mouth:

I ask a sea anemone.  
It folds a secret  
mouth in its mouth. (37)

There is no access, no speech here: the ability to see, hear, smell, imagine and understand events depends on signs, on representation. The presence of the present is derived from repetition. But of course nothing repeats itself exactly, only the words we use to designate what is happening to us repeat each other from one end of the dictionary to the other, and the identity of what is repeated is the idealism of the concepts. Not even in solitary confinement, where nothing happens what has not already happened,

**s every presence not  
something which I can  
because it is**

Where without appetite —  
you commune  
with the stale bread of yourself  
(25)

do events repeat themselves, however much they look alike. There is therefore always this difference between the words, the signs, the repetitiveness of our thinking, our need to

represent the events as the same or alike, as fitting some theory which we have constructed about the world, and the events which differ more or less from that description.

It is only in the metaphysics of the idealists that the present is all there is, and that being is this eternal presence: in the material world there is always a difference between the sign and the event which is supposed to be a repetition of itself. In the human world this difference in the repetition of signs is history. Idealism is the move by which I want to hide my being in time and in the world by thinking that my presence is the universal form, and that the present is before my birth and after my death.

But being *inside* also means to understand that that ideality is a false consolation: that some Wednesday morning the noose will go around the throat and end that presence. And

by others. We all only have this one life: and it is not ideal, permanent, everlasting, it has its time, its history, its unique story, which can never be repeated. It is true the uniqueness can ever only be grasped in the words which are repetitions of the same words said before, but in poetry that difference appears within the words; the fact that the same words are repeated to designate different events, makes these words differ in their meaning in their repetitions.

It is precisely this difference which surfaces in 'A grounded parachutist' as 'Ryle's distinction: /knowing how/knowing that' (89):

Lock a white boy up  
a few years inside, you'll find  
him  
knowing that/but not knowing  
how there're three dimensions  
to a woman (89)

The difference between knowing and knowing is that which generates that speech in our heads where we talk to ourselves about the things we know but do not know. The attempt to reestablish the three (or four) dimensions, the corporality and temporality of things, the 'knowing how' of that immediacy of experience, the presence of people and things which is constantly fading, which gets lost in the 'knowing that' of words. It is

in this distinction that the brave poem 'To Althea, from prison' by Lovelace fails: it is whistling in the dark, creating an entirely abstract 'liberty' in prison, a freedom in a love which has lost its third dimension. That love, in prison, becomes a love poem 'To no-one in particular' (88). Even if that love has a name, it has lost its particularity, its being made out of particles, of matter, living matter, warmth,

energy. Even where three-dimensional life is allowed to visit the jail, its three-dimensionality is kept two-dimensional behind a glass plate:

A glass plate, its sheer  
quiddity, its coldness  
forever between our hands. (75)

Poetry then is about this intensely felt absence, it is celebrating and overcoming this amnesia of the senses and the consciousness, which constantly forgets how to think in three dimensions. A poem is the passion of a singular mark: and that of course is impossible; as there is no singularity ever in words, the singular mark is a catachresis. Therefore the need to 'test the distant parts of this machine', the 'solid arch of bone' behind 'your upper front teeth' is a need to test the three-dimensional existence of the self at least, when no other corporality can be tested anymore, 'let lip touch lip' when it can no longer touch any other lip (45). The prisoners 'are restless':



## only understand a repetition?

this is not as it always was or will be, these are 'three fokken terrorists', in the language of the warders, they committed 'high treason', in the language of the court, it is the same and not the same, and they have names: Johannes Shabangu, David Moise, Bobby Tsotosobe. They are people, and once they are hanged, they will never be again, even if the hole which they leave behind is apparently filled

they hoist the back of their  
tongue  
to enclose a pocket of air, and  
then  
with a quick downward stroke  
they make  
'quagga!  
painting a palatal click on the  
roof of their cave. (48)

The mouth, the 'cave-site of word' (46) contains 'shells of meaning' left there 'by thousands of years of human occupation' (46). Words, sounds, mouths as caves: sounds painted like magic ritual signs so as to evoke the great freedom of the hills of the Karoo, a counter-image to the confinement. But all evocations are admissions of absence: you do not evoke what is here.

Conversely: The *inside* of Jeremy Cronin is for the average white citizen the *outside*, outside of society: the criminal is banished outside of society into the inside of the jail. Living inside a very confining boundary, one which allows practically no escape, one lives outside the boundary of society. Having transgressed this boundary in both directions, having gone *inside* and having returned to the outside, the criminal lives on the border, also on the border of language. He makes clear the distance between what is said and what is meant by placing between his person and 'submission' to a law which incarcerates him 'This epic gap', this Brechtian like and unlike at the same time. Language mimics submission but is subversion showing that it mimics by exaggerating the submission.

All the more interesting then the

inversion of Plato's cave parable, where the prisoners 'incessantly mimic/the sounds of their land' ... 'down in the very confines of their chamber', where they reconstruct out of 'snatches of news', out of 'a meagre / well-read, smuggled-in, month-old scrap of/newspaper' which is transported by a cotton thread torn from a blanket across the enormous distances of the floor of the prison, the reality of the struggle:

Supposing all this.  
do you think they'd assume  
this shadow play was real?  
That these prisoners could  
forget  
the struggles of their brothers  
and sisters  
there outside where these  
sounds  
bathed in daylight, may  
someday, grow into words? (48)

However shadowy and flat all memory grows in this confinement which makes the sky shrink, one inversion that is never achieved by the cave is: to make the prisoner believe that this cave is the last word in the game, that the shadowy characters playing in its darkness are reality. Even if the outside reality has been compressed into the two-dimensionality of a scrap of



newspaper, that piece of paper stands for the life that goes on outside, it guarantees that the struggle continues, that the incarceration of comrades, that their death in prison is not the last word in this story. Against this reality the apparently immediate reality of the four walls circumscribing the pacing foot, the rhythm of the poem, becomes a shadow. There is only one kind of amnesia which contrary to Plato's parable never befalls these prisoners. They do remember where they came from, and therefore why they are here.

But to feed that memory, poetry is vital: and I am not talking about verse and rhyme, I am talking about *mnemosyne*, that constant attempt to infuse life and materiality into that which is not here. *Mneme*, memory, is always close to *mimesis*, imitative recreation: 'You bleddy cocksucking, kaffir loving, / Communist jew' (16). One needs to remember that, and one needs to remember Johannes Stephanus Februarie, who makes a mockery of the ritual of submission, and one needs to remember the exact pronunciation of the *Internationale* by those comrades who sing it on death row. The memory is in the detail, the flashback is released as in Proust by the smell of tea and cookies. 'Course I knew Braam Fischer.' That remembrance is refreshed by a butterfly which flies into the cell, an ibis which flies across the sky, 'dopplered by mesh', by the archeology


‘  
**One  
 needs to  
 remember,  
 because  
 the holes  
 created by  
 death and  
 brutality  
 look so  
 ordinary  
 a few  
 months, a  
 few years,  
 later**  
 ’

of one's own childhood, but also by the life histories of other prisoners. 'pieced together, here from many months, from the prison workshop', like the story of John Matthews, born in Bez Valley, Joburg. A narrative, answering the comradely demand (not that other demand, uttered by those who want to know for other reasons and who use instruments of torture to wring the narrative out of one), the comradely demand to know, tell us what happened. 'was he present on the two days of Kliptown . . . 1955? . . . when the People's Congress adopted the Freedom Charter?' — 'Actually' — 'No he wasn't' — 'He was there the day before, he built the platform' (6). One needs to remember, because the holes created by death and brutality look so ordinary a few months, a few years, later, and South Africa is embarking on a colossal exercise of amnesia right now: called negotiation, pronounced 'nothing every happened here, did it?' and spelled: 'Let's forget about the past. Let's play rugby!' But the memory resides in those who didn't live in white suburbs where 'nothing happened':

The uprooted tree leaves  
 behind a hole in the ground  
 But after a few months  
 You would have to have known  
 that something grew here once.  
 And a person uprooted?  
 Leaves a gap too, I suppose, but  
 then  
 after some years . . . (21)

The fig tree will not be forgotten that was 'chopped down in reprisal' for

the defeat of the South African troops before Luanda. It is in the poem. The group photo was never taken, but it is in the poem. Even what is not in the photo, and what could never be in the photo, because as Brecht has pointed out, the essential relationships of the capitalist society cannot be photographed, even that is in the poem, signalled by the empty, unoccupied place in the centre, which 'stands for what happened / Way outside the frame of this photo . . . I name it: Luanda' (22)

The heart of the poet is that place where they chopped the figtree. A hole, a cavern. A place inhabited by men for thousands of years, but unknown, dark, difficult to access, needing all the finesse of the archeologist who brushes away the layers with a toothbrush. The heart is not what is present to your immediate consciousness, it is something which you have to supplement to the picture which is clearly in your mind. That is why you have to talk to yourself in prison. You do not yet know your heart, you have to learn it. Off by heart. Until you can carry it from *inside* to an outside not only on scraps of toilet paper but in your heart, so that if the paper gets lost in that last search *inside* the poem does not get lost. So that it survives this dangerous passage from the *inside* to the outside. And in order that it remains, and does not get lost in the outside, it needs to go to the heart again, be learned off by heart, it needs to reach others, outside, it needs to reach their *inside*. That alone is the survival of the poem — being printed in a book does not make it remembered. 

## Watching Young Beach-goers

Today the guys are out and jogging.  
Two tonnes of manhood trundles down the shore —  
calf-springy, tippy-toey, tanned to gold,  
flaunting brightly-coloured strips of bathing-suits.  
Stunning good looks and pumped-up pectorals  
join in this paean to flesh.

I am peripheral to such delights.  
Time's whittling me a rugged mask:  
gouging in ways I hadn't guessed:  
(I always imagined that my brow would be  
formally ribbed like sands of the sea —  
not these random ditches.)

Bowled over by the surf, I learn  
that oceanic lusts are not for me.  
I have no barrel chest nor G-strung groin  
to bolster up a macho fantasy.  
Towelling my flanks and combing scanty hair,  
I settle for a cool, unsalty dream.

## Geoffrey Haresnape

### Two Poems

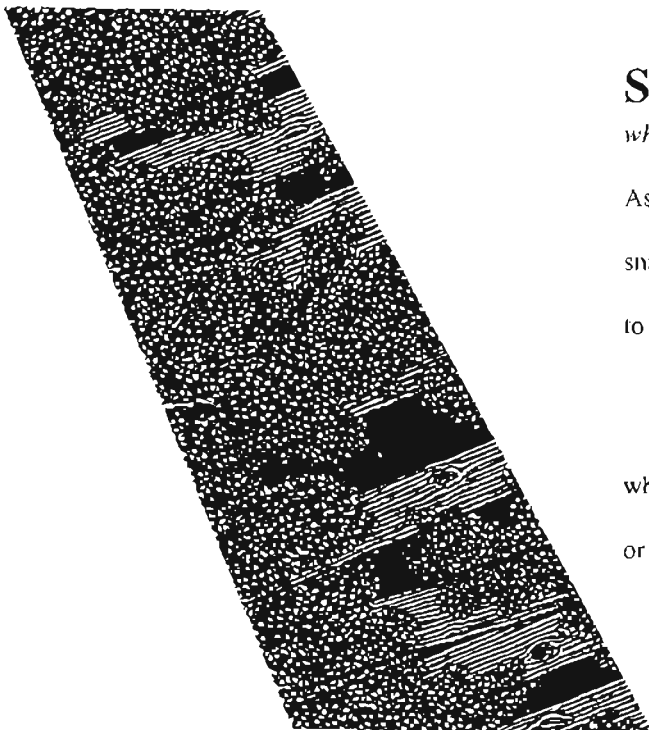


## Sentence on a Painter

*who hangs 'Do Not Disturb, Please' on her studio door*

As you trade on your superb self-confidence, inspiration  
[or whatever]  
snatching from your bucket of brushes that slant upward  
like spears  
to daub on your canvas a slant-toothed, African mask  
and its basilisk stare,

it's clear that you regard as little nobodies the others  
in your home  
who might otherwise come knocking to ask you about the  
grocery order  
or in the hope of sharing some subliminal and mortal  
fear.



# THE ART OF POISE

DIRK KLOPPER

*Nine Lives* by  
Tatamkulu Afrika,  
published by  
Carrefour Press  
1991.

M

uch about this volume of poetry suggests the making of poetic myth. The name Tatamkulu Afrika, the old man of Africa, conjures up images of the prophetic; the title of the volume, nine lives, points to rebirth and transcendence; and the cover photograph looks uncannily like the Turin shroud. Yet the author has



So, as the evening aged and you talked on,  
reliving for me what I had no right to know,  
your voice grew softer till it was as dust on air,  
and then it stopped and your head  
swung this way, that, and soundlessly,  
as did the tortoise in its shell,  
you screamed.

(The Detainee)

Tatankulu's own imprisonment is hauntingly conveyed in the image of the *Doppelgänger* crouching in the dark corner of his cell. Typically, even the harshest of experiences is transmuted into a mystical encounter:

Am I alone?  
Who is the stranger sitting in the corner then?  
The sunlight does not touch his face.  
Though I turn and turn,  
he wears a shadow like a veil,  
but the bright eyes, gleaming through it,  
question mine,  
and I feel that I yet will come to know him well,  
as I should have known him all along,  
but this is the first time I have sat with him,  
measuring him as he is measuring me,  
listening to freedom wailing at the wall . . .

(The Prisoner)

There is a sense, finally, that the struggle has been betrayed. The victors are not those who took to the streets in courageous defiance of batons and bullets. The heroes of the struggle, the ordinary people, have been forgotten. The real victors are the 'deft men in trim, grey suits' (Lines to a Jailed Friend).


The volume ends with a rumination on the significance

of a cat walking carefully along a wall on which broken glass has been embedded. The poet admires its assurance as it jumps onto a higher level of the wall, and is reminded by this action of his impending death:

It is then that you face what no man does  
unless it is the middle of the night and the day far:  
you are old and dry as these dry leaves  
and the road that once seemed endless is  
turning through its last slow curve,  
and you can cry if you want to, and be a fool,  
because the road, like the cat, has never cared.

As none have ever really cared,  
neither lovers nor friends: all loose your hand  
at the final bend of the road.  
You call to them, but they turn away  
in terror of your end.  
The cat, though, still walks along  
the high yard-wall, and you watch it go.  
Where, in your heart, the grace to leap,  
like it, straight up, to a higher plane?

(Cat on a High Yard Wall)

The concluding sentiment of the volume is one of faith in the possibility of transcendence. The word 'grace' has been chosen with care, balanced as it is between suggestions of physical beauty and spiritual redemption. A similar poise is evident throughout the volume, making this a graceful body indeed. 

#### Note

*Nine Lives* was awarded the 1992 CNA Award for New Writers.





## Trans-Siberian Railway, February 1989

Nick Hartel

We burst through Ural at night, at  
a throbbing ache of snow and  
stars like dangerous glass, a  
round chinese host mopping round our feet  
inaudibly filling the samovars with steaming life

I pressed my nose against the movie, licked  
the air for smoke, caught a dust  
transported it on the tip of my tongue up  
under the lip This dust  
had to be my reality, in lack

A herd of rocking sleeping dustlickers in lack

Couldn't catch, couldn't hold  
but noted at least a dust  
and the point of a fence buried in the  
infinite drift  
and an occasional white smoke, factory  
chimneys like absurd ancient monuments  
on the fled tundra

But grief itself  
doesn't grieve  
With an almost foolish smile  
it rests upright, aware of  
the steaming of primeval forests

the billowing of savannas  
the water we are

Constantly awake it listens to  
the song of horizon  
the sublime mumbling of circulation

It knows it is a long farewell  
that must be taken  
with uneven courage

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