

Sophiatown Renaissance:

A Reader

(ed.)

by

Ntongela Masilela

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Section I:

Autobiographies

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Memoirs

Chapter 1

A South African Childhood

by

Nadine Gordimer

Growing up in one part of a vast young country can be very different from growing up in another, and in South Africa this difference is not only a matter of geography. The division of the people into two great races---black and white---and the subdivision of the white into Afrikaans- and English-speaking groups provide a diversity of cultural heritage that can make two South African x children seem almost as strange to each other as if they had come from different countries. The fact that their parents, if they are English-speaking, frequently have come from different countries complicates their backgrounds still further. My father came to South Africa from a village in Russia; my mother was born and grew up in London. I remember, when I was about eight years old, going with my sister and mother and father to spend a long weekend with a cousin of my father's who lived in the Orange Free State. After miles and miles of sienna-red plowed earth, after miles and miles of silk-fringed mealies standing as high as your eyes on either side of the road and ugly farmhouses where women in bunchy cotton dresses and sunbonnets stared after the car as we passed (years later, when I saw

“Oklahoma!” in a Johannesburg theatre, I recalled that scene), we reached the dorp where the cousin lived, in a small white house with sides that were dust-stained in a wavering wash, like rust, for more than a foot above the ground. There two little girls slept on beds of a smothering softness we had never felt before---feather beds brought from Eastern Europe---and drank tea drawn from a charming contraption, a samovar. There---to our mother’s horror---we were given smoked duck, flavored with garlic, at breakfast. The two children of the house spoke only Afrikaans, like the Boer children who played in the yards of the mean little houses on either side, and my sister and I, queasy from the strange food and able to speak only English, watched their games with a mixture of hostility and wistfulness.

How different it all was from our visit to our mother’s sister, in Natal! There, with the “English” side of the family, in the green, softly contoured hills and the gentle meadows of sweet grass near Balgowan, we might almost have been in England itself. There our cousins Roy and Humphrey rode like young lords about their father’s beautiful farm, and spoke the high, polite, “pure” English learned in expensive Natal private schools that were staffed with masters imported from English universities. And how different were both visits from our life in one of the gold-mining towns of the Witwatersrand, near Johannesburg, in the Transvaal.

There are nine of these towns, spread over the distance of roughly a hundred and forty miles and west of Johannesburg. The one in which we lived was on the east side---the East Rand, it is called---and it had many distinctions, as distinctions are measured in that part of the world. First of all, it was one of the oldest towns, having got itself a gold strike, a general store, a few tents, and a name before 1890. In the pioneer days, my father had set himself up in a small, one-man business as a watchmaker and jeweler, and during the twenties and thirties, when the town became the most rapidly expanding on the Witwatersrand, he continued to live there with his family. In the richest gold-mining area in the world, it became the richest square mile or so. All around us, the shafts went down and the gold came up;

our horizon was an Egyptian-looking frieze of man-made hills of cyanide sand, called "dumps," because that is what they are---great mounds of waste matter dumped on the surface of the earth after the gold-bearing ore has been blasted below, hauled up, and pounded and washed into yielding its treasure. In the dusty month before spring---in August, that is---the sand from the dumps blew under the tightly shut doors of every house in the town and enveloped the heads of the dumps themselves in a swirling haze, lending them some of the dignity of cloud-capped mountains. It is characteristic of the Witwatersrand that any feature of the landscape that strikes the eye always does so because it is a reminder of something else; considered on its own merits, the landscape is utterly without interest---flat, dry, and barren.

In our part of the East Rand, the yellowish-white pattern of the cyanide dumps was broken here and there by the head of a black hill rising out of the veld. These hills were man-made, too, but they did not have the geometrical, pyramidal rigidity of the cyanide dumps, and they were so old that enough real earth blown on to them to hold a growth of sparse grass and perhaps even a sinewy peppercorn or peach tree, sprung up, no doubt, out of garden refuse abandoned there by somebody from the nearby town. These hills were also dumps, but through their scanty natural covering a blackness clearly showed---even a little blueness, the way black hair shines---for they were coal dumps, made of coal dust.

The coal dumps assume, both because of their appearance and because of the stories and warnings we heard about them, something of a diabolical nature. In our sedate little colonial tribe, with its ritual tea parties and tennis parties the coal dump could be said to be our Evil Mountain; I use the singular here because when I think of these dumps, I think of one in particular---the biggest one, the one that stood fifty yards beyond the last row of houses in the town where we lived. I remember it especially well because on the other side of it, hidden by it, was the local nursing home, where, when my sister and I were young and the town was small, all the mothers went to have their babies and all the children went to have their tonsillectomies---

where, in fact, almost everyone was born, endured an illness, or died. Our mother had several long stays in the place, over a period of two or three years, and during these stays our grandmother took us on a daily visit across the veld to see her. Immediately lunch was over, she would spend an hour dressing us, and then, brushed and beribboned and curled, we would set off. We took a path that skirted the coal dump, and there it was at our side most of the way---a dirty, scarred old mountain, collapsing into the fold of a small ravine here, supporting a twisted peach tree there, and showing bald and black through patchy grass. A fence consisting of two threads of barbed wire looped at intervals through low rusted-iron poles, which once had surrounded it completely, now remained only in places, conveying the idea of a taboo rather than providing an effectual means of isolation. The whole coal dump looked dead, forsaken, and harmless enough, but my sister and I walked softly and looked at it out of the corners of our eyes, half fascinated, half afraid, because we knew it was something else---inert. Not dead by any means, but inert. For we had seen. Coming back from the nursing home in the early-winter dusk, we had seen the strange glow in the bare patches the grass did not cover, and in the runnels made by the erosion of summer wind and rain we had seen the hot blue waver of flame. The coal dump was alive. Like a beast of prey, it woke to life in the dark.

The matter-of-fact truth was that these coal dumps, relics of the pre-gold-strike era when collieries operated in the district, were burning. Along with the abandoned mine workings underground, they had caught fire at some time or other in their years of disuse, and had continued to burn, night and day, ever since. Neither rain nor time could put the fires out, and in some places, even on the coldest winter days, we would be surprised to feel the veld warm beneath the soles of our shoes, and, if we cut out a clod, faintly steaming. That dump on the outskirts of the town where we lived is still burning today. I have asked people who have studied such things how long it may be expected to go on burning before it consumes itself. Nobody seems to know; it shares with the idea of Hades its heat and vague eternity.

But perhaps its fierce heart is being subdued gradually. Apparently, no one can ever remember, these days, the nasty incidents connected with the dump, incidents that were fresh in memory during our childhood. Perhaps there is no need for anyone to remember, for the town now has more vicarious and less dangerous excitements to offer children than the thrill of running quickly across a pile of black dust that may at any moment cave in and plunge the adventurer into a bed of incandescent coals. In our time, we knew a girl to whom this had happened, and our mother remembered a small boy who had disappeared entirely under a sudden landslide of terrible glowing heat. Not even his bones had been recovered, but the girl we knew survived to become a kind of curiosity about the town. She had been playing on the dump with her friends, and all at once had found herself sunk thigh-deep in living coals and hot ashes. Her friends had managed to pull her out of this fiery quicksand, but she was horribly burned. When we saw her in the street, we used to be unable to keep our eyes from the tight-puckered skin of her calves, and the still tighter skin of her hands, which drew up her fingers like claws. Despite, or because of, these awful warnings, my sister and I longed to run quickly across the lower slopes of the dump for ourselves, and several times managed to elude surveillance long enough to do so. And once, in the unbearable terror and bliss of excitement, we clutched each other on the veld below while, legs pumping wildly, our cousin Roy, came from Natal to spend the holidays with us, rode a bicycle right to the top of the dump and down the other side, triumphant and unharmed.

In the part of South Africa where we lived, we had not only fire under our feet; we had, too, a complication of tunnels as intricate as one of those delicate chunks of worm cast you find on the seashore. All the towns along the Witwatersrand, and the older parts of Johannesburg itself, are undermined. Living there, you think about it as little as you think about the fact that, whatever your work and whatever your life, your reason for performing it where you do and living it where you do is the existence of the gold mines. Yet you are never allowed to forget entirely that the ground is not solid beneath you. In Johannesburg, sitting eight or ten stories up, in the office of

your stockbroker or in your dentist's waiting room, you feel the strong shudder of an earth tremor; the vase of flowers skids toward the magazines on the table, the gossip of the ticker-tape machine is drowned. These tremors, never strong enough to do any serious damage, are commonplace. By ascribing them to the fact that the Witwatersrand is extensively undermined, I am inadvertently taking sides in a long, discreet controversy between the seismologists and the Chamber of Mines. The seismologists say that the tremors are not, geologically speaking, earth tremors at all but are caused by rocks falling from the ceilings of either working or abandoned mines. The Chamber of Mines insists that they are natural and not man-caused phenomena. And jerry-builders take advantage of the dispute, greeting the evidence of cracked walls in houses with a shrug of the shoulders that lets the responsibility fall on God or the Chamber of Mines, take your choice.

Our life in the mining town, in one of the ugliest parts of a generally beautiful continent, was narrow and neighborly---a way of life that, while it commonly produces a violent reaction of rebelliousness in adolescence, suits young children very well. The town had sprung into existence because of the mines, had grown up around the mines. The shopkeepers had come---first with their tents, then with their shanties, and, at last, with their corner sites and neon signs---to fill and profit from the miners' needs. At the start, the miners wanted only the necessities of life---stoves and workmen's clothing and meat. Soon they wanted everything---cinemas and shiny wooden cocktail cabinets and tinned asparagus. My father's little business was a good example of how trade grew into the full feather of provincial luxury from scrawny beginnings in utility. When he arrived in the town, just before the Boer War, he used to tramp from mine to mine carrying a cardboard suitcase full of pocket watches. The watches sold for less than a dollar each. They ticked as loudly as the crocodile who pursues Captain Hook in "Peter Pan," and they were as strong as they sounded. They were a necessity for the mineworkers, who found that ordinary watches became rusted and ruined in no time by the damp and heat underground. So my father, a tiny, dapper, small-featured youth with feet no bigger than a woman's, made his living

by selling watches to, and repairing watches for, the great, hefty Afrikaners and the tough Scots and Irishmen who produced gold. He had a little wood-and-iron cottage, where he lived with a black retriever named Springbok, two German roller canaries, and his watchmaker's worktable.

By the time my father married my mother, he was living in the newly built local hotel, owned a horse and trap, and had rented a glass-fronted shop, where he sold diamond engagement rings. By the time my sister and I were old enough to notice such things, his shop had showcases full of silver sports cups, walnut mantel clocks, stainless-steel cutlery, and costume jewelry from America and Czechoslovakia. A stone-deaf relative had been imported from Leningrad to do the watch repairing; he sat behind an engraved glass partition, out of sight of the customers, who were now townspeople---the families of other shopkeepers, municipal officials, civil servants---as well as white workers from the mines. The white miners wore new Swiss water-and-shock-proof watches. The only potential customers for cheap pocket watches were now the tribal Africans---migrant laborers who were employed to do all the really hard work in the mines---and these bewildered, primitive men, still wearing earrings and dressed in ochre-dyed blankets, mostly made their purchases at government-concession stores on mine property and did not venture into a jeweller's shop in the town.

The mine people and the townspeople did not by any means constitute a homogeneous population; they remained two well-defined groups. Socially, the mine people undoubtedly had the edge on the people of the town. Their social hierarchy had been set up first, and was the more rigid and powerful. There was a general manager before was a mayor. But even when the town did create civic dignitaries for itself, even when we did get a country club, there were those among us who neither knew nor cared about the social scaffolding that was going up around them, whereas at each mine the G.M. was not only the leader of society but also the boss, and if one did not revere him at first, one had to respect him as the second. The dignitaries on both sides---the G.M.s and their officials from the

mines, and the city fathers, the presidents of clubs in the town, and so on---invited each other to dinners and receptions, and the teams of the sports clubs of mine and town competed with each other, but there was little mixing on the more intimate levels of sociability. The mine officials and their wives and families lived on "the property;" that is, the area of ground, sometimes very large, that belonged to each mine and that included, in addition to the shaft heads and the mine offices and the hospital, a sports ground, a swimming pool, a recreation club, and the houses of the officials---all built by the mine. The G.M. lived in the largest house, usually a spacious and very pleasant one, situated in a garden so big that one might almost have called it a park. The garden was kept in full bloom all year around, right through the sharp, dry Transvaal winter, by African labor diverted from the mines, and the liquor stock indoors was ample and lavishly dispensed. The assistant manager's house was smaller, but decent enough; then came the underground manager's (he was in charge of the four-sided barracks, with all its windows opening on a courtyard and only one gateway, always guarded, to the world without, in which the African laborers were fed and housed in celibacy, having left their families in distant kraals), and then the mine secretary's, and so on down the salary and social scale, the houses getting smaller, the gardens getting less elaborate. Most of the mine families lived only a few miles out from the town, but their self-sufficiency surrounded them like a moat. Their offspring could go from the cradle to the grave without having anything to do with the town other than attending its high school, placing weekly orders with the butcher and the grocer, and paying three visits to church---one for christening, one for marrying, one for burying.

We, of course, were town people. All my childhood, we lived in the little house, in one of the town's earliest suburbs, that my parents had bought before I was born. Other people moved to the newer suburbs of flat-roofed villas, pseudo-Tudor houses, and later, houses inspired by American magazines, with picture windows looking out on the bare veld. But we stayed. Ours was a bungalow-type house with two bow windows and a corrugated-iron roof, like almost all the other houses that were built in the Witwatersrand

gold-mining towns during the twenties and early thirties. It stood in a small garden, one of several similar houses on a street along whose sidewalk grew leathery-leaved trees, which in summer put out bunches of creamy, bell-shaped flowers. When my sister and I were little, we used to fit these flowers over our fingertips, like tiny hats; when we were old enough to own bicycles, we would ride up and down beneath the trees, feeling rather than hearing the swish of their leaves above our heads. The trees were kept clipped in the shape of bullets, in order that they might not interfere with the telephone wires, and so were not beautiful. There was, in fact, no beauty in the whole town. We children simply took it for granted that beauty---hills, trees, buildings of elegance---was not a thing to be expected of ordinary, everyday life.

The town had already grown up and hardened, as it were, into permanent shape before its leaders became sophisticated enough to consider orthodox municipal planning, and so, although it kept expanding in all directions, it remained essentially a one-street affair. As is so often true in such cases, that street was too narrow, and the land on either side of it was too valuable to make widening feasible. The street had the authentic jostle and bustle of a thriving business center, and we children loved to walk "downtown" on Saturday mornings with our mother. This was as much a social as a shopping expedition. During our early years, the only places of refreshment in the town were two or three hotel bars (in South Africa, closed to women anyway) and the Greek "cafés," where black-haired Minos or Mavrodatos sold cigarettes, sweets, polony, and fruit, and where one could sit at a table with a flyblown cloth and be served terribly weak tea or coffee adulterated with chicory. But by the middle thirties there were one or two genteel teashops, where the local women met for midmorning refreshment, and the Greeks had installed shiny soda fountains, which we children used to patronize heavily after Saturday matinees at the local cinema.

Most of the shops were family businesses, but with prosperity came Woolworth's---from whose gramophone-record counter dated jazz swung out into the main street---and branches of various big

department stores in Johannesburg. The owners of the family business became the city fathers, and their families became the “old families” of the town. We were one of these “old families” of the town. We were one of these “old families” and were known to everyone in the town and even at the times--- there by sight rather than by association. My father took no part in civic affairs and remained what he had always been, a simple man and a shopkeeper, but my mother, a woman of considerable energy and not much scope, served on endless committees. Some years, she was president of several organizations at once, with a secretaryship or two thrown in as well. She baked cakes and she prepared reports; she was honorary cashier at charity concerts, and she taught first aid to children. Her position was a curious one. Unlike most of the other women, she did not confine herself to the particular section of the community to which she belonged. The fact was that she didn't seem to belong to any particular section. Although my father kept some sort of token allegiance to the Jewish community, contributing to the upkeep of the ugly little synagogue and even going to pray there once a year, on the Day of Atonement, my mother did not fit in very well with the ladies of the congregation. She got on much better with the Scots ladies of the town, and I remember her working (or, rather, baking) like a beaver for the annual cake-and-sweet sale in aid of the Presbyterian Church.

Our life was very much our mother's life, and so our pleasures, into which we plunged with gusto, knowing no others, were charity bazaars, the local eisteddfods that were held in the town hall by members of the Welsh community, and dancing displays by the pupils of local teachers (my sister and I were often performers), along with---staple stimulation for the entire population---the cinema. In summer, we went to the municipal swimming bath. Walks or rambles about the outskirts of the town were unknown to us, except for those furtive excursions in the direction of the burning dump. There was nothing to see beyond the limits of the suburbs but “the location” ---an urban slum where the African industrial workers and servants were huddled in segregation from their white employers--- and a damped-up pond, created by waste water pumped from one of

the mines, in which a yellow cyanide dump was reflected, its image broken by bulrushes and the occasional passage of a small duck.

There were junior and senior state schools in the town, where education for white children was free, but my sister and I were sent as day scholars to the local convent; the Dominican nuns had come. Like everything else, with the town's prosperity. Many of the townspeople, torn between the businessman's natural suspicion of getting something for nothing and the fear that their children would be converted to Catholicism (the town was largely Protestant), resolved the issue by sending their children to neither the state school nor the convent but to boarding school in Johannesburg. My mother, a fearless nomad when it came to social and religious barriers, had no such misgivings. My sister and I spent our school life at the convent, and were taught English by a bun-faced nun with a thick German accent. At school, I showed some of my mother's bland disregard for the sheeplike group consciousness of the town, and struck up a long and close friendship with the daughter of an official at one of the oldest and most important mines. So it was that I came to cross the tacit divide between the mines and the town, and to know the habitat, domestic life, and protocol of "the mine people."

Like middle-class children everywhere who lived within reasonable reach of an ocean, we were taken to the sea every year. The hot months of December and January are the popular season for family holidays in South Africa, the Indian Ocean is the nearest ocean for Transvaalers, and Durban---four hundred miles from Johannesburg--is the nearest city on the Indian Ocean coast. So almost every summer we spent our three weeks in Durban or in a village on the South Coast, not far from Durban. We could, of course, have gone to Lourenço Marques, the tiny little port in Portuguese territory, which is about the same distance from Johannesburg, but we never did, because that was a place to which grownups went without their children (and preferably without their wives or husbands) and only in the winter season of July and August. When we were very small, we adored Durban, where we stayed in one of the solid, cool, high-ceilinged hotels along the Marine Parade and, leaning out of the

steamy bathroom in the evenings, after we had been sent off to bed, could see the colored lights strung like beads on an abacus from lamppost to lamppost along the sea front while the trams thundered past, and a strange fading and rising cry---a mingling of laughter, squeals, and juke-box and hurdy-gurdy music---rose, between the roaring advance and hissing retreat of the sea, from the amusement park.

When we grew a little older and entered that dreamy, remote, soulful state that comes in early adolescence, we found the crowded beach, the sand lumpy with popcorn, and the vulgarly lit sea front, where all the wires and cables of an electrically contrived fairyland showed on the lampposts in the light of day, utterly abhorrent. Nothing would have persuaded us to enter the amusement park, from which wonderful Teddy bears and even a felt Mickey Mouse had once come, won by our mother by dint of Heaven knows how many tickets at the sideshows, and placed at the foot of our beds for discovery in the morning. Nothing would have bored us more than the slow, chugging trips around the bay on a pleasure launch named the *Sarie Marais*, which only a few years back had had all the solemn thrill of departure for a new continent. And most of all we revolted against the nagging of the Indian vendors on the beach, with their "Mangoes? Litchis? Banana? Very nice p-ruit? Grandaila parfait? Ice cream?" Gesture one angrily away, and another, sweating, scowling, barefoot on the burning sand but dressed from head to foot in white drill embroidered with some unlikely name---Joe's Place, or the Top Hat---came at you like a persistent blue-bottle. You must want *something*. "No, no, no, no!" my sister would shout in rage, and the vender would stare at her, waiting for her to change her mind.

What we wanted at this stage in our lives, and what we usually got, since, like many parents, our acquired the tastes of their children, being formed rather than forming, was a holiday at a South Coast village beyond the reach of even the little single-track railway. In this village, the hotel was a collection of thatch-roofed rondavels, the water was free of refuse, and the beach---ah, the beach lay gleaming, silent, mile after mile, looping over flower-strewn rocks; there were,

indeed, many beaches, and always one where for the whole day there would be no footprints in the sand but my sister's and mine. In fine weather, the village was, I suppose, a paradise of sorts. In front of the little hotel was the warm, bright sea, and, curving around behind it, hill after hill covered with the improbable green sheen of sugar cane, which, moving in the breeze, softened every contour like some rich pile, or like that heavy bloom of pollen which makes hazy the inner convolutions of certain flowers. Streams oozed down from the hills and could be discovered by the ear only, since they were completely covered by low, umbrella-shaped trees (these are seen to better advantage on the hills around Durban, where their peculiarly Japanese beauties unobstructed by undergrowth), latticed and knitted and strung together by a cat's cradle of lianas and creepers. My sister and I would push and slither our way into these dim, secret places, glimpsing, for the instant in which we leaned over, the greenish, startling image of our faces in water that endlessly reflected back to the ferns the Narcissus image of their own fronds.

More cheerfully, in the bush along the road we would sometimes hear that incredibly lighthearted, gossipy chatter which means that monkeys are about. The little Natal coast monkeys are charming creatures, in appearance exactly the sort of monkey toy manufactures choose; in fact, they are just what one would wish a monkey to be. They bound about in the treetops, nonchalant and excitable at the same time, and unless they are half tame, as they have become around some of the roadhouses on the outskirts of Durban, they move off almost too quickly to be clearly seen; you find yourself left standing and gazing at the branches as they swing back into place and listening to the gaiety as it passes out of hearing, and the whole thing has the feeling of a party to which you have not been invited. If the monkeys, like distant relatives who wish to make it clear that there is no connection, ignored us, there were creatures who, because their movements were attuned to some other age of slime or rock, could not escape us. On the trailing plants near the rocks, sleepy chameleons stalked shakily, or clung swaying, their eyes closed and their claws, so like minute, cold human hands, holding on for dear life. If they saw you coming for them, they would go off nervously,

high-spepping across the sand, but with a kind of hopelessness, as if they knew that all you had to do was lean over and pick them up. And then, unable to bite, scratch, sting, or even to make any protest other than to hiss faintly and hoarsely, they wrapped their little cold hands around your finger like a tired child and went as pale as they could---a lightly spotted creamy beige that was apparently their idea of approximating the color of human skin. My sister was particularly fond of these resigned and melancholy creatures. Twice we took one home to the Transvaal with us on the train, and twice we watched and wept in anguish when, after two or three happy months on the house plant in my mother's living room, the poor thing lost first his ability to change color, fading instead to a more ghostly pallor each day, and then, literally, his grip, so that he kept falling to the floor. The Transvaal winter, even indoors, was too much for chameleons.

In the heavy green water of the lagoon at the South Coast village where we used to stay, there appeared to be no life at all, though some people said that under the rocks at the bottom there were giant crabs. When the weather was bad for a few days, and the combination of the sea's rising and the lagoon's flooding washed away the sandbanks between the lagoon and the sea, the dark river water in the lagoon poured in a deep channel down into the waves, and the waves mounted the river water, frothing over the swirl. Decaying palm leaves, the rotten ropes of broken lianas, and fallen vegetable-ivory fruit, as hard and round as cricket balls, were washed out of the stagnant bed of the lagoon and brushed you weirdly while you swam in the sea. Once, late one afternoon, my mother and I were lying on the sand watching a solitary swimmer who evidently did not mind the dirty sea. Suddenly we saw the rhythmic flaying of his arms against the water violently interrupted, and then he heaved clear up into the air, gripping or in the grip of a black shape as big as he was. My mother was convinced that he had been attacked by a shark, and went stumbling and flying over the sand to get help from the hotel. I went, with that instinct to seek human solidarity in the face of any sort of danger toward humankind, to stand with some excited children who had been playing with toy boats at the water's edge. I was four or five years older than the eldest of them, and I kept

holding them back from the water with the barrier of my outspread arms, like a policeman at a parade. What danger I thought there could be in two or three inches of water I cannot imagine, but the idea that there was a monster in the vicinity seemed to make even the touch of the water's edge a touch of menace.

In minutes, the whole village was on the beach, and out there, but coming nearer with every wave, were the swimmer and the dark shape, now together, now apart, now lost, now discovered again. As the lifesaving rope was unreeled and the volunteer lifesavers plunged into the sea, supposition was shrill, but hastily silenced at the occasional cry of "Look, there he is!" There was a feeling of special horror, oddly, because it was obvious that the creature was not a shark; with a shark, one knew exactly what it was one had to be afraid of. And then the cry went up: "It's a crocodile! It's a crocodile!" Even the lifesavers heard it, and looked back toward the shore, confused. Before they could get to the swimmer, he was in water shallow enough for him to stand, and we could see him very clearly, his face grim and wild with water and effort, his hands locked around the long snout of a big reptile, which seemed to gather up the rest of its body in an attempt to kick him, rather than to thrash at him with its tail, as crocodiles are said to do. "A crocodile!" the cry went up again. "Enormous!" Men rushed into the shallow water with pocketknives and weapons of driftwood. Yet the man staggered up onto the beach with his monster alone. He was short, stocky, and it was true that the thing was as big as he was. It seemed stunned, and he kept hitting it across the snout with his fist, as if to say, "That will show you!" Amid the screams and the squeals, and the confusion of lifesavers, rope, brandished driftwood, and Boy Scout knives, he beat it to death himself; it was plain that, exhausted though he was, he wanted the privilege of being the conqueror. Then he sat on the sand, sniffing deeply, his chest heaving, a flask of brandy trembling in his hand; I remember so well how he said, in an incredulous, rasping voice, "Crocodile that size could've torn one of those kids in half."

The man was a great hero for half an hour. Then the old retired major who had lived in the district for many years and was a botanist and naturalist came over the sand, leaning on his little cane, and prodded at the monster lying there disfigured by blows and sand. "Leguan," the major said. "Old leguan. Poor old lizard wouldn't harm a fly. Must've been trying to get back to the lagoon." Then major was quite right. The beast was not a crocodile but one of those giant lizards, the leguans, that are still fairly common all over South Africa but are careful to keep out of the way of man---as timid and, indeed, except for the frightening size and resemblance to the crocodile family, as defenseless as the chameleon. He would not have bitten the swimmer, and he was too stupid and clumsy even to use his weight to defend himself. The man had done little with most reluctant of dragons. So, with the wiliness of human beings, who hate to admit that they have been taken in and must turn their gullibility to advantage somehow, the people in the village and at the hotel were quick to make a joke of the swimmer; where before his words "Could've torn one of those kids in half" had made him seem the savior of their children, now they saw something absurd in the dramatic way he had struggled to bring the creature in instead of making for the shore and his own safety. He went about the hotel for the rest of his holiday very much alone, and a little sullen perhaps.

By the time my sister and I were in our middle teens, we had lost our taste for solitude and the gentle wilderness. Our childhood love of Durban returned---for different reasons, of course---and I think that then we came to love the place for what it really is: in many ways a fascinating city, even if rather dull and smug intellectually. One of our chief delights at this time was our discovery of the Indian quarter of the town, and the Indian market. We enjoyed turning away from the pseudo-American and neo-Tudor architecture of the shopping center and wandering down wide Grey Street, where the shops were small and crowded together and the balconies picked out in gaudy curlicues, and here and there a silver minaret or cupola shone. Among the more conventional stores, which sold men's outfittings in fierce competition, were shops full of gauzy, tinsel lengths for saris, and Indian jewelers whose crammed windows seemed almost

to tinkle with rows and rows of long gold earrings, and pendants strung upon thread. Those shops that were especially designed to entice European visitors like ourselves burned incense. Their dry, sweet odor was pleasant after the hot street, where splashes of chewed betel nut looked like blood on the pavement. In the Indian market there were piles of sweetmeats colored violent pink and putrescent yellow, which smelled as revolting as they looked. We would return from these small expeditions with a particular type of sandal, thronged over the big toe, or a pair of earrings that looked as if they had been stamped out of thin gold tinfoil and that hung from the lobe to the shoulder. The sandals were called, if I remember right, *chappals*, and I know they were imported from India, but I do not remember ever seeing an Indian woman in Durban wear them. The earrings, without the folds of a sari to back them up, looked cheap and foolish in Western ears.

Like most South Africans, once I had been to Cape Town I wondered how I had ever thought Durban beautiful. Before I was quite grown up, I went alone with my father to Cape Town and we took a cable car to the top of Table Mountain. We stood there, on a clear, calm. Perfect day, and, truly, for a little girl, that was god's eye look at the world. On such a day, you can see the whole Cape Peninsula, from Fishhoek on the one side, right around the ribs of mountain rising out of the sea, to Camps Bay on the other side. Some people even claim that you are looking at two oceans---the Atlantic on one side and the Indian on the other. But that is in dispute, for it is difficult to say where one ocean begins and the other ends. Anyway, the vast waters that lie before you are enough for two oceans. No peacock's tail ever showed such blues and greens as the seals do from that height; all the gradations of depth are miraculously revealed, and looking far, far down, where the color crinkles and breaks into white near the shore, you see pale translucent areas in which the rocks show as boldly as if you were looking through the glass bottom of a boat directly above them.

It is something splendid, an almost superhuman experience, to see the tip of a continent, alive, at your feet. I know that I stumbled

back to the cable station that day smiling constantly at my father but with the feeling of tears behind my eyes, in a confused state of exaltation that made it impossible for me to speak, and because I was so young, I immediately lost my exaltation in anger when I saw that many people who had come up with us on the cable car had been spending their half hour before the cable took us all down again writing postcards that would bear the postmark "Table Mountain." These absorbed visitors scarcely glanced out of the windows at what they had come to see.

For some reason, our family did not visit the Kruger National Park until I was sixteen and in my last year at high school. Just how unusual this abstinence is is difficult to explain to anyone who is not South African. For whatever else the South African in general, and the Transvaaler in particular, may or may not do for this family, he will manage somehow to get them to Kruger Park, the great wildlife preserve in the Transvaal. If he has no car, he will borrow one, and if he cannot do this, he will persuade a friend that two families can travel as uncomfortably as one, and beg a lift. The Park opens at the beginning of winter, in late April or early May, and by dawn on the opening day, cars and trucks loaded with camping equipment and tinned food are lined up in mile long queues outside the various camps that serve as points of entry to the preserve.

I had heard so many tales and seen so many home movies about the Kruger Park ("My dear, and then the lioness walked right up to the car and sniffed the tires!") that I almost dreaded going. I regarded listlessly the prospect of overcrowded camps, boerewors (a coarse, highly seasoned sausage held in sentimental regard by both Afrikaans- and English-speaking South Africans) cooked over an open fire, and long processions of cars crawling along the dusty roads in the stern rivalry along the dusty roads in the stern rivalry of who would sight the most lions soonest. But when we went, it was very different from that. We went in October, during the last few days before the park closes for the summer rains and the calm that is granted the beasts for their breeding season. We stayed at a camp with a beautiful name---Shingwedisi---and we had the shade of its

trees and the red blossoms of the cacti almost to ourselves. The peace of the bushveld was scarcely disturbed by the few cars on the roads.

The rainy season was a month off, but the first night we were at Shingwedsi the fantastic roar of a freak storm woke us at midnight and flooded the camp, marooming us for nearly twenty-four hours. During the next day, while we were shut in by drumming rain, my Uncle Robert, our mother's younger brother, drank beer with and received the confidences of an engineer who lived and worked in the Park all the year round, watching over the boreholes that guarantee the animals' water supply. At that period, I had just begun to read Hemingway, and it seemed to me that for the first time in my life something in fact had measured up to fiction. The engineer was just such a man as poor Francis Macomber might have chosen as an escort on a hunting trip. (And, on reflection, just such a man as Mrs. Macomber might have wished him to choose.) He had a taciturn, world-weary air, and, in the cozy confinement of the rain, over the beer, he made Robert (since he was only ten years older than I, we girls did not call Robert "uncle") feel that he, Robert, was the first person in years to whom he had been able to talk as he was talking, the first man whose sporting sense and sensitivity matched the engineer's own, a man---at last! at last!---who instinctively would understand the boredom and tameness, for a man of spirit, of life in a sanctuary, with no one to talk to but gaping tourists. In fact, the engineer was one of those people who make others feel chosen. At five in the afternoon, when the rain had stopped, he stood up, flexed his tanned, muscular knees, and said, with a kind of stern, sardonic glee, "This is the time for elephant, if you want elephant. This water'll keep the wardens out of my way for a day or so."

Robert and I were agog, as we were meant to be. While Robert questioned him, unconsciously adopting the engineer's terse manner as he tried to show that he "belonged," I kept close by his side, determined not to be left out of this. The way to see elephants, to get right up close to them and just about feel them breathe on you as you photographed them, said the engineer, was to take a light truck and go after them fast, ignoring the strict twenty-five-mile-an-hour speed

limit in force in the preserve, and then, when you sighted them, to get out and stalk them on foot, ignoring the still stricter rule that no visitor may leave his car. Robert and I grinned with excitement. "But you can only do it when those bastards are sitting with their feet in mustard water," said the engineer, referring to the wardens. Well, that was now.

Robert and I slipped away from the rest of the family---I was extremely anxious to have this adventure exclusive of my sister---and in half an hour the engineer had Robert, me, and Robert's movie camera in his truck. While the wild passage of the truck through water and mud shook loose every nerve in our bodies, he told us that what we were going to do was perfectly safe, and then, almost in the same breath, that what we were going to do was terribly dangerous but that we need not worry, for he knew exactly how to do it and get away with it. I wanted to close my eyes with the speed and exhilaration, but the leaps of a herd of impala deer that we had startled into a Nijinsky-like retreat of alarmed grace brought me out of my tense passivity almost as abruptly as the deer had been brought out of theirs. After about twenty minutes, we reached a river bed, and there, with their great columns of legs in the newly flowing water, stood three magnificent elephants.

The shattering life of the truck came to an abrupt halt. The engineer said "There you are!" and sent Robert and me stalking on foot. It seemed as if our hush of intensity had brought home to the engineer his boredom with his sort of adventure; he looked around for a dry boulder where he could sit and smoke his pipe while he waited. The truck was, I suppose, about two hundred yards from the river. When Robert and I were very near indeed to the elephants, and the beetle-wing whir of the camera was sounding, one of the great beasts slowly swung his head erect and toward us. Then he walked out of the shallow water, trailing his huge feet like a clumsy child, and advanced to within thirty feet of the camera, Robert, and me. And there the elephant stood, slowly flapping those wide, palmetto-like ears that African elephants have. I don't think he seemed real to us; we thought only of the camera, and saw the elephant as he would

loom on the screen rather than as he was, a slack-skinned splendid hulk, standing there before us. Then, all in the same instant, I smelled licorice tobacco and felt myself violently grasped by the arm. The same thing must have happened to Robert, for at once we were jerked furiously around, met the impatient and alarmed face of the engineer, and were running, pushed roughly along by him, for the truck. I suppose it was the beating of my own heart that I thought was the pounding of the elephant coming up behind us.

Driving back to Shingwedsi camp, the engineer grinned fascinatingly---it was difficult to say who was more under the spell of that grin, Robert or I---and remarked, "Those pictures will be quite good enough as it is. You don't want to scare your friends, do you?" And Robert and I laughed, to show that we, too, knew there hadn't really been any danger. It was only next day, when our party had moved on to Pretorius Kop camp to see lions, that I suddenly remembered that the engineer hadn't had to start the truck when we jumped in; he had left the engine running all the time. Some years later, I was told that there is reason to believe that when an elephant flaps his ears, he does it to fan the scent of his enemy more strongly toward his nostrils, in preparation for a charge.

In a country where people of a color different from your own are neither in the majority nor the ruling class, you may avoid altogether certain complications that might otherwise arise in the formation of your sense of human values. If the Chinese, say, remain a small, exiled community in Chinatown, and the Red Indians are self-contained on their reservation, you can grow up to have a reasonable standard of personal ethics without taking consideration of their presence. The problem of how you would behave toward them if you met them can be almost purely academic; you need not meet them, if you don't wish to. In South Africa, this is not possible. There are people who try it, who arrange their lives for it, but they never succeed, for it cannot be done. Even if you are the most diehard reactionary you cannot get away with it in a country where there are three million white people and nine million black and Colored.

For me, one of the confusing things about growing up in South Africa was the strange shift---every year or two when I was small, and then weekly. Daily almost, when I was adolescent---in my consciousness of, and attitude toward, the Africans around me. I became aware of them incredibly slowly, it now seems, as if with some faculty that should naturally, the way the ability to focus and to recognize voices comes to a baby in a matter of weeks after birth, have been part of my human equipment from the beginning. The experience of the warm black bosom of the mammy (in South Africa she would be known as the nanny) has been so sentimentalized that I must say I am glad it is one I missed, though not for the reason that I missed it. The reason was simply that my mother, like many good South African mothers from England and Europe, would not have dreamed of allowing any child of hers to nestle in the bosom of a dirty native girl. (That was exactly the phrase---a phrase of scornful reflection on those mothers who did.) And if, at the age of five or six, it had been suggested to my sister or me that we should go up and give our native servant a hug, we would have shrunk away. We accepted the fact that natives were not as clean as we were in the same way we accepted the fact that our spaniel had fleas. It was not until years later that it occurred to me that if our servants were not so well and frequently bathed as ourselves, the circumstance that no bathroom or shower was provided for them might have had a great deal to do with it. And it was later even than that when the final breaking down of this preconceived notion came about. I was a long time learning, and each stage of enlightenment brought its own impulse of guilt for the ignorance that had gone before.

Our successive attitudes toward the Indians is another example of the disturbing shift in values that is likely to beset any child growing up in South Africa. The Indians are a minority group here, but even before their treatment became an issue at the United Nations, affecting the attitude of the rest of the world toward South Africa, they could not comfortably be ignored, because they belonged to the great mass of the Other Side---the Coloreds. The Indians were imported into country as indentured labor for the Natal sugarcane fields in the mid-nineteenth century, and now, except for a

considerable number of businessmen in Natal, a few traders in nearly every Transvaal town, and the considerable number who are employed in hotels and restaurants, they seem to be occupied chiefly as venders of fruit, vegetables, and flowers. In our West Rand mining town, the Indian traders were concentrated in a huddle of shops in one block, bought by them before the passage of what is known as the Ghetto Act of 1946, which, in effect, bars them from owning or leasing property in any but restricted, non-European areas. These were tailor shops, or they were "bazaars" where cheap goods of all kinds were sold, and they were the object of dislike and enmity on the part of the white shopkeepers. In fact, a woman who was seen coming out of an Indian bazaar with a basket of groceries immediately earned herself a stigma: either she was low-class or, if her husband's position as an official of one of the gold mines put the level of her class beyond question, she must be stingy. "She's so mean she even goes to the Indians'" was the most convincing allegation of miserliness in our time. It was bad enough to be penny-pinching, but to stoop so low as to buy from an Indian trader in order to save!

For some reason I have never understood, it was quite respectable and conventional to buy your fruit and vegetables from the Indians who hawked from door to door with their big red or yellow lorries. Our household, like most others, had its own regular hawker, who called two or three times a week. Whatever a hawker's name (and it was always painted in large, elaborate lettering, a kind of fancy compromise between Indian and English script, on his lorry, he was invariably known as Sammy. He even called himself Sammy, rapping at kitchen doors and announcing himself by this generic. There was a verse, parodying the hawkers' broken English, that children used to chant around these lorries:

"Sammy, Sammy, what you got?
Missus, Missus, apricot."

There were many more verses with the same rhyme scheme, becoming more and more daring in their inclusion of what struck the children as giggle-producing obscenities, such as "chamber pot," and

a few genuine old Anglo-Saxon shockers, which they pronounced quite calmly.

If you did not serenade the Indian with rude songs, and your mother was a good buyer and prayer, he might had you down a peach or a bunch of grapes from his lorry, but if you were an urchin without family backing, he would shout and shoo you away, lest your quick hand filch something while his back was turned. It is interesting to me now, too, to remember how yet again the boggy of uncleanness came up immediately with the gift of the peach from Sammy; my mother, too polite to offend him by saying anything, pronounced such a warning with her eyes that I would not dare put my teeth to that peach until I had taken it inside to be washed. Sammy had "handled" it. Sammy was an Indian. In fact, Sammy was Not Wgite. Heaven knows, I don't suppose the man *was* clean. But why did no one ever explain that the color had nothing to do with cleanliness?

So my sister and I began by thinking of the Indian as dirty, and a pest, the venders whom I have described as annoying us on the beach at Durban were the prototype. Then we thought of him as romantic; our wanderings in the Indian market in Durban were, I suppose, part of a common youthful longing for the exotic. And finally, when we were old enough and clearheaded enough and had read enough to have an abstract, objective notion of man, as well as a lot of jumbled personal emotions about him, the Indian became a person like ourselves.

I suppose it is a pity that as children we did not know what people like to talk of as "the real Africa" ---the Africa of proud black warriors and great jungle rivers and enormous silent nights, thaty anachronism of a country belonging to its own birds and beasts and savages which rouses such nostalgia in the citified, neighbor-jostled heart, and out of which a mystique has been created by writers and film directors. The fact of the matter is that this noble paradise of "the real Africa" is, as far as the Union of South Africa is concerned, an anachronism. Bits of it continue to exist; if you live in Johannesburg, you can still go to the bushveld for solitude or shooting in a few

hours. And bits of it have been carefully preserved, with as little of the taint of civilization as is commensurate with the longing of the civilized for comfort, as in the Kruger Park. But the real South Africa was then, and is now, to be found in Johannesburg and in the brash, thriving towns of the Witwatersrand. Everything that is happening on the whole emergent continent can be found in microcosm here. Here are the Bantu, in all the stages of an industrial and social revolution---the half-naked primitive, fresh from the kraal, clutching his blanket as he stares gazelle-eyed at the traffic; the detribalized worker, living in a limbo between his discarded tribal mores and the mores of the white man's world; the unhappy black intellectual with no outlet for his talents. And here, too, are the whites, in all the stages of understanding and misunderstanding of this inevitable historical process---some afraid and resentful, some pretending it is not happening, a few trying to help it along less painfully. A sad, confusing part of the world to grow up and live in. And yet exciting.

Chapter 2

Sophiatown

by

Trevor Huddleston

Sophiatown! How hard it is to capture and to convey the magic of that name! Once it is a matter of putting pen to paper, all the life and colour seem to leave it; and failing to explain its mysterious fascination is somehow a betrayal of one's love for the place. It is particularly important to me to try to paint the picture that I know and that is yet so elusive, for in a few years Sophiatown will cease to exist. It will be, first of all, a rubble heap, destruction spreading like some contagion through the streets (it has begun already), laying low the houses, good and bad alike, that I have known; emptying them of the life, the laughter, and the tears of the children---till the place is a grey ruin lying in the sun. Then, I suppose, the factories will begin to go up, gaunt impersonal blocks of cement, characterless and chill, however bright the day. And in a few years men will have forgotten that this was a living community and a very unusual one. It will have slipped away into history, and that a fragmentary history of a fraction of time. Perhaps it will awaken faint echoes in the memory of some who recall that it was to Sophiatown that Kumalo came seeking Absalom, his son. But they will never remember what I remember of it; and I cannot put my memories on paper, or, if I do, they will only be like the butterflies pinned, dead and lusterless, on the collector's board. Nevertheless, I must try.

Sophiatown! The name has about it a certain historical and almost theological sound. It recalls Sancta Sophia, Holy Wisdom, and the dreaming city where her temple is built. I have never heard of another Sophiatown in the world, though I suppose there must be one; it is such a euphonious name, for one thing. And, of course, it has a history and a meaning as romantic in its way as anything connected with the Eastern Mediterranean. As romantic but also about as different as it could well be.

Some fifty years ago, when Johannesburg was still a mining dorp, a planned and growing town yet small and restricted in area, a certain Mr. Tobiansky dreamed of a European suburb in the west, on the rocky outcrop which is shadowed by the spur known as Northcliff. It is quite a long way from the centre of town, about four and a half miles in fact, but not an impossible distance. It was a most attractive site in every way, for it had "features": it was not like the flat and uninteresting central area of the city. It could hold its own in natural beauty with Parktown and Houghton, soon to become the most fashionable suburbs, and, like them, it had iron-red rock for a foundation and for a problem in civil engineering.

Mr. Tobiansky bought a large plot of ground and named it in gratitude and admiration after his wife, Sophia. As he pegged out the streets he named many of them after his children: Edith and Gerty and Bertha and Toby and Sol. So from the very beginning Sophiatown had a homely and "family" feel about it. There was nothing "upstage" or snobbish about those names, just as there was nothing pretentious about the kind of houses which began to spring up. In fact, there was nothing very planned about it either. Still the veldt and the rock were more noticeable than the houses: the streets ran up and down the kopje and stopped short when the kopje became too steep. There was on one side a wide sweep of what you might call meadowland: an empty plot of ground which provided clay for the bricks and a good playing field for the children.

There seemed to be no reason on earth why Sophiatown should not be as popular a suburb as Parktown itself, perhaps even more

popular because it was more open, higher up on the six-thousand-foot plateau which is Johannesburg. But Mr. Tobiansky had reckoned without the Town Council; or perhaps already that mischievous and unpredictable voice had whispered something about the future. Whatever it was, the Council decided that a growing town must have sewage-disposal facilities: and it decided further that those facilities must be in the Western Area of the young Johannesburg. The natural and immediate consequence of this decision was the end of Mr. Tobiansky's dream. Sophiatown ceased to be attractive in any way to those Europeans who wished to buy land and to build homes in the suburbs. Mr. Tobiansky could not sell to white Johannesburg and for a while he could not sell to anyone else.

Then once again the Town Council intervened. The First World war brought a wave of industrialisation, and with it the need for African labour. The only existing location, Pimville, had been planned and planted some ten miles from the centre of the town. There was certainly need for another location which would house the African workers and which might be a little more conveniently sited for their work. The Western Area was once more chosen. Sewage disposal and a native location seemed to go together. The Western Native Township, with accommodation for some three thousand families, was built. A tall iron fence was erected all around it. The Africans moved in. So, some forty years ago, began the African occupation of the western suburbs.

As soon as location was established, Tobiansky found himself in an area where the non-European was in the majority. There was nothing to prevent him selling his land to Africans, coloureds, and Asiatics. Under one of President Kruger's laws he was perfectly safeguarded for doing so, and as a good businessman he did the obvious thing. The obvious thing but not the most usual in South Africa. For when Tobiansky sold freehold properties to African purchasers, he was in fact establishing a unique situation. He was making possible an African---or at least a non-white-suburb in Johannesburg. He knew, no doubt, what he was doing. He could hardly have known the far reaching consequences of his action. For as Johannesburg expanded,

so did its need for African labour. Apart from the squalid slums of Vrededorp and the distant corrugated iron location of Pimville, there was nowhere for the people to live except the Western Native Township and the suburbs of Sophiatown, Martindale, and Newclare which surrounded it. Houses sprang up in Edith Street and elsewhere: houses of all types, all sizes, all colours. They crept up towards the rocks on top of the hill; they spread out towards the brickfields. By 1920 or thereabouts it had become quite obvious that here was an area which belonged by right of possession to the non-European half of Johannesburg. It was not so evident at that time that white suburbia was also spreading rapidly westwards and that it was becoming especially the residential area of the European artisan. Sophiatown had come to maturity, had a character and an atmosphere of its own, and in the succeeding thirty-odd years that character and that atmosphere deepened and became only the more permanent. When I arrived to take as priest-in-charge of the Anglican mission in September 1943, the place had for many years assumed the appearance it has today. It is that which I wish d so greatly to put into words. Yet I know I cannot succeed.

They say that Sophiatown is a slum. Strictly in terms of the Slums Act they are absolutely correct, for the density of the population is about twice what it should be – 70,000 instead of 30,000. But the word “slum” to describe Sophiatown is grossly misleading and especially to people who know the slums of Europe or the United States. It conjures up immediately a picture of tenement buildings, old and damp, with crumbling stone and dark cellars. The Dickensian descriptions come to mind, and the gloom and dreariness which he could convey so vividly are there in the imagination as soon as the word “slum” is read or recognised. In that sense Sophiatown is not and never has been a slum. There are no tenements; there is nothing really old; there are no dark cellars. Sometimes, looking up at Sophiatown from the Western Native Township across the main road, I have felt I was looking at an Italian village somewhere in Umbria. For you do “look up” at Sophiatown, and in the evening light, across the blue-grey haze of smoke from braziers and chimneys, against a saffron sky, you see close-packed, red-roofed

little houses. You see on the farthest sky line the tall and shapely blue-gum trees (which might be cypresses if it were really Italy). You see, moving up and down the hilly streets, people in groups: people with colourful clothes; people who, when you come up to them, are children playing, dancing, and standing round the braziers. And above it all you see the Church of Christ the King, its tower visible north, south, east, and west, riding like a great ship at anchor upon the grey and golden waves of the town beneath. In the evening towards the early South African sunset there is very little of the slum about Sophiatown. It is a human dwelling place. It is as if old Sophia Tobiensky herself were gathering her great family about her, watching over them before they slept. Essentially Sophiatown is a gay place and, for all the occasional moments of violence and excitement, a kidly one too. But like every other place with a character, you have to live in it, to get the feel of its life, before you can really know it. And in the whole of South Africa there are only a handful of white citizens who have had that privilege.

The decision to move the Western Areas, to destroy all the properties built there, and to transplant the whole population to Meadowlands, four miles farther away from the city, was taken by people who had no firsthand knowledge of the place at all. How could they be expected to know it, when in their eyes it represents the very antithesis of a sound "native policy"? Freehold rights and permanence, the building up of a living community---these things are contrary to the whole doctrine of *apartheid*. They assume that the African has a right to live in the city as well as to work in it. Such an assumption is heresy to Dr. Verwoerd. It cannot be allowed. But what is it that makes Sophiatown so precious? Why should we care so much to preserve what, on any showing, is two thirds a slum area? I have asked myself that question a thousand times as I have walked its streets, visited its people in their homes, taken the Blessed Sacrament to the sick and dying. I have asked it when the dust was flying and the wind tossing the refuse about in those sordid and overcrowded back yards, and I have asked it when, looking for someone at night, I have stumbled in the dark across children asleep on the floor, packed tight together beneath a table to make room for

others also to sleep. I have asked it when, on a blisteringly hot December day, the sun has beaten down on the iron ceiling of a shack and the heat has mercilessly pressed its substance upon that old, frail creature lying on the bed. I have asked it as I lay awake at night listening to the drunken shouts and the noisy laughter from the yard behind the mission. In other words, I know Sophiatown at its worst: in all weathers, under all conditions, as a slum living up to its reputation. I still love it and believe it has a unique value. But why?

In the first place, because it is not a "location." Part of the meaning of white South Africa's attitude to the African is revealed in that word "location." In America it generally has reference to part of the technique of the cinema industry. A film is made "on location" in order to give it the genuine flavour and atmosphere required by the story. But everywhere else in the world, so far as I know, the word just means a place, a site, a prescribed area. That is why, no doubt, it was chosen by the European when he decided that the African must have somewhere to live when he came to work in the towns and cities of his own country. He could not live in a suburb. He could not live in a village. He could not live in the residential area of the town itself. He could only work in those places. And because he is an abstraction---"a native"---he must have an abstraction for his home. A location in fact, a place to be in for so long as his presence is necessary and desirable to his European boss. A place from which to move on when it ceases to be necessary or desirable that he should stay.

The locations of South Africa for the most part live up to their name. They are abstract, colourless places. Every town has one on its outskirts. Today it is necessary by law that there should be a buffer strip---not even a pair of football goal posts. It must mark that tremendous and vital distinction between civilisation and barbarism upon which the doctrine of white supremacy rests. No one of either race may linger on that strip of land, for in that way it might become a meeting place. It is, in exact and literal terms, a no man's land; and it is meant to be just that.

There is a noticeable and depressing similarity about all locations. It is not only that for the most part the houses are built on mass-production lines and at the lowest cost compatible with minimum housing standards. It is that at the same time they are sited in the most monotonous way imaginable, as if to say: "There must be no variety in a location. Variety is a characteristic of the human being. His home is a reflection of that characteristic. But because the African is a native, it is a quality which simply does not exist." Sometimes, with the older locations, tall iron fences were erected and give the impression not only of a kind of imprisonment but of a fortification, as though the location were totally alien to the life around it and had to be defended at all costs from any contact with it. Today the buffer strip serves the same purpose and is less expensive. So, in a location, you have row upon row of small boxlike houses of almost identical shape and size. Such variation as there is marks the end of one housing contract and the beginning of another or the start, perhaps, of some new experiment in pre-fab construction. It is never variety for its own sake. It is a location---not a village, you must remember. As such it is unnecessary for the streets to be named. You simply number the houses from one to two or ten thousand and you leave it at that. If, later on, a few streets receive baptism, it is too late for old habits to be broken. Mrs. Kambula lives at 6004A Orlando. Mrs. Marite lives "in the four thousands." It all helps to keep the idea of abstraction alive.

The great advantage of the location is that it can be controlled. People who come to visit their friends for the weekend must have permits before they can set foot upon that arid, municipal turf. It is so much easier, too, to prevent the native feeling himself a permanent resident in our cities if nonpayment of rent is a criminal offence rather than a civil one. The presence, in every location, of a European superintendent with a small army of officials, black and white, and his municipal police, is a sound and healthy reminder that in South Africa the African needs the white man to guide and direct his daily life. And in the sphere of broader strategy it is also wiser to have the native living in one large but easily recognizable camp than scattered around the town in smaller groupings. If there is trouble in

Johannesburg, for instance, Orlando can be “contained” by a comparatively small force. It is not a bad target from the air either. And its buffer strip ensures that no European suburb will be hit by mistake.

In the larger locations there are shops, and they are even allowed under licence to be owned and run by Africans. All the essential services are provided, though lighting for your house is not necessarily regarded as essential. It is not untypical of the location concept that in Johannesburg the largest power station in the Southern Hemisphere stands at the gate of Orlando. It supplies electricity to the city. Orlando is lit by candles and paraffin lights. Churches, schools, and clinics exist in locations through the effort of the various missionary and voluntary organizations. Municipal social workers go about their business. Men and women live there and make their family life a reality. But always I have the feeling (and I am sure I am meant to have it, as are the inhabitants themselves) that a location cannot *belong* to anyone except the people who control it, the European officials who live far away in the city, that other abstraction, “the municipality.” Always, even in considering the better aspects of location life (and there are some, I suppose), I seem to hear the voice of the Manager of Non-European Affairs saying: We are going to do you good, whether you like it or not, for we alone know what is good for you!”

Sophiatown is not a location. That is my first reason for loving it. It is so utterly free from monotony in its siting, in its buildings, and in its people. By a historical accident it started life as a suburb, changed its colour at an early moment in its career, and then decided to go all out for variety. A £3000 building jostles a row of single rooms: an “American” barber’s shop stands next door to an African herbalist’s store with its dried roots and dust-laden animal hides hanging in the window. You can go into a store to buy a packet of cigarettes and be served by a Chinaman, an Indian, or a Pakistani. You can have your choice of doctors and clinics even, for they also are not municipally controlled. There are churches of every denomination and of almost every imaginable sect. There is one, for example, known as the

“Donkey Church,” upon whose squat, square tower there stands, in place of the traditional weathercock, an ass. I would not know its real origin, except that it is, I believe, a schism from the Methodist Church. Nor do I wish to suggest any approval for schism as such: for nothing has done so much damage to African Christianity than its fissiparousness. But somehow or other that little donkey represents the freedom that has existed down the years in Sophiatown, and when I pass it I metaphorically lift my hat. It reminds me, for one thing, of the truth that G. K. Chesterton so simply and so profoundly taught in his poem:

The tattered outlaw of the earth
Of ancient crooked will;
Starve, scourge, deride me: I am dumb,
I keep my secret still.

Fools! For I also had my hour:
One far fierce hour and sweet:
There was a shout about my ears,
And palms before my feet.

Basically, white South Africa has the same benign or unbenign contempt for the African as man for the donkey. Was it not Smuts himself who said once that “the African has the patience of the ass”? And so Sophiatown is written off as a slum area; its values must be those of the slum; its people must be dirty, undesirable, and, above all, unseen. Like the donkey that stands as a symbol above their streets, they are useful for their labour, for they are strong. But, as Dr. Verwoed says, there is no place for them above that level in society itself. “I keep my secret still. . . .” The secret of Sophiatown is not only its variety, it is its hidden heroisms, or rather its unknown heroes and heroines, its saints uncanonised and unsung. I know very many.

In the first place, let me say it frankly, any young person who keeps straight when the dice are loaded so heavily against him needs virtue of a heroic quality. The overcrowded rooms of Sophiatown, wherein

whole families must sleep and must perform all their human functions as best they may, do not make morality an easy thing. The lack of opportunity for fulfilling his personality in any productive way does not make it easy, either, for a lad to escape the street-corner gang and the excitement of gambling. The endless, grey vista of an existence which is based upon poverty is not the kind of outlook which helps to keep a boy or his girl friend alive to ultimate standards of beauty, truth, and goodness.

Again and again, hearing confessions, I have asked myself how I could advise these children, how warn them, how comfort them when they have fallen. “. . . I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word, and deed, by my fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault. . . .” Have you *really*? No doubt the actual sin is grave enough --fornication or stealing or fighting--but what would I have done in your place? And whose fault is it in the sight of God? And what, anyway, can I advise?

“Don’t let yourself get into bad company. . . . Don’t be idle. . . . Find some other interest than gambling. . . . Love? Well, it’s not so easy to describe it. . . . it must have the quality of unselfishness. ”

God forgive me! I find myself giving advice that, in those circumstances, I *know* I could not follow. And yet, again and again, those gentle men and women, those fresh, gay lads and girls try to follow, try desperately hard to obey it, and even in their failures do not make environment or circumstances an excuse. To keep your self-respect when you are *expected* to have less than your white *baas*; to keep your home neat and tidy and to dress your children in fresh clothes; to pay for their school books regularly and to see that they are fed properly. All this against a background of overcrowding, of the need to be up and away to work before you have time to eat your own breakfast or to clean the room that is your home. It needs the kind of virtue which most European Christians in South Africa have never come within a mile of. And it is common in Sophiatown. I do not refer just to our own church people, though naturally they are the ones I know best and most intimately. There is in that “black spot”

(to use the minister's offensive title) a great well of courage and cheerfulness in face of adversity which has been through the years an inspiration and a challenge to at least one Christian priest. I can shut my eyes for a moment and see old blind Margaret tapping her way along the street in the darkness which has been hers for many long years. Always, half an hour before the early Mass, she will be there in church, prostrate in prayer. Day by day I will find her spending an hour or more before the statue of Our Lady which she has never seen, and if I stop her in the street I will be greeted with that wonderful smile and the lifting of her sightless eyes to my face. . . .

Or, after Mass on Sunday morning, there will be old Tryphena Mtembu. She has spent all her years (at least all those that I have known) mending sacks and inhaling cement dust into her old lungs, so that she is never free from a fierce cough. She lives in a single dark room and "does" for herself, although a few years ago she fell and broke her leg and has to fight her way on to the early-morning bus with a crutch in one gnarled and work-lined hand. Tryphena has a wonderful flow of language, and her epithets are not always what you might expect from a devout and faithful old lady. She is, in fact, very much a product of the Old Kent Road, and were it not for her broken leg I believe she would sing and dance to "Knees up, Mother Brown" with the best of them. I also believe that her place in heaven is assured. For how could it be otherwise with one who fronts adversity with those twinkling and mischievous brown eyes and defies poverty to get her down with that marvellous and undaunted faith?

Or, again, there is Piet, who put all his money into the house in Millar Street, where he now sits, crippled with arthritis, and hoping to die before they come and demolish his home over his head. Old Piet, our churchwarden for so long, who worked for over thirty years in one of the best furniture shops in the city and was rewarded by his employers with a pittance which would not keep him alive. Never have I heard him complain, even when it was obvious that the handling of great bales of material was too much for him in his old

age, even when it was a painful and weary journey for him to climb the short hill to the church he loved.

It would be easy but not very interesting, I suppose, to list a score of others of all ages and types who have lived in Sophiatown for the better part of their lives and who by their very living have enriched and beautified it greatly. A priest can see these things. Sometimes he cannot find words in which to express them. But Johannesburg knows nothing of them and can know nothing, for it does not care. To Johannesburg, Sophiatown is a slum: a native slum at that. How could it possibly have any human dignity about it?

But there is one feature of life in Sophiatown which everyone can recognize---everyone who goes there, that is. It is inescapable from the first moment when you step out of your car or stop to ask the way from the tram stop to the mission. It does not matter much what time of day it is either. Nor does it make a great deal of difference who you are or what your business---provided you are not a policeman in uniform. It is the children.

I remember the first day of my arrival there on a September morning twelve years ago. After breakfast at the mission I was told, "There's a school Mass on in the church. They'd like to see you. Will you come across?" The church is a large one by any standards. As I stood at the back and looked towards the High Altar I could see nothing but row upon row of black, curly heads. It seemed impossible to imagine that there could be quite so many children---impossible, anyhow, to imagine myself getting to know even a fraction of them. But I was wrong on both counts. This congregation represented only about half the children in one school. Soon, within a few weeks, I was beginning not only to know them but to compare them mentally with other children I had known in England. I found that I quite easily thought of their names, their features, and their characters in the same terms as of those who were already part of my family, part of my very life. And the reason was not hard to discover.

The Sophiatown child is the friendliest creature on earth and the most trusting. God knows why it should be so, but it is. You will be walking across the playground and suddenly feel a tug at your sleeve or a pressure against your knee; and then there will be a sticky hand in yours. "hallo, Farther, hallo, Seester, how are you? Hallo, hallo, hallo. . . ." You will come back from Johannesburg, as I have done a thousand times, fed up and sick with weariness from that soulless city, and immediately you are caught in a rush and scurry of feet, in faces pressed against your car window, in arms stretching up to reach yours whether you like it or not. You are *home*. Your children are around you---ten of them, a hundred, a thousand; you belong to them and they will never let you forget it. How, then, can you fail to love the place where such things happen? Its dusty, dirty streets and its slovenly shops, its sprawling and unplanned stretches of corrugated-iron roof: its fetid and unsanitary yards? ". . . and the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets thereof. . ." is a description of the heavenly Jerusalem. It is a good one. And anyone who has lived as I have in that "slum" called Sophiatown will recognise how swiftly, through the presence of its children and through their unspoilt and unassailable laughter, heaven can break in upon this old and dreary world.

I have said that Sophiatown is a gay place. It is more. It has a vitality and an exuberance about it which belong to no other suburb in South Africa, certainly to no white suburb. It positively sparkles with life. Sometimes when I have been depressed by the apparent success of the present government in selling the idea of "white supremacy," I have pulled myself up by thinking just for a moment or two of the African people as I know them in Sophiatown. There is something so robust and strong about their way of dealing with each frustration, which is each day, that it is even laughable to think that such an idea can endure. And in fact it is by laughter, so often, that the problems and the sorrows are fronted and overcome. It is by that magnificent sense of humour and by the fitness with which it is expressed that victory is won in the daily struggle and will ultimately be won in the struggle for true nationhood.

A good example of the kind of humour I have known and loved is to be seen in Sophiatown any weekend, when the "Sophiatown Scottish" are on the march. In the distance, on a Sunday afternoon, you will hear the beating of a drum and the sound of a far trumpet. Soon, at the farthest end of Victoria Road, you will see a small crowd moving towards you and becoming a large crowd as it moves. Then, if you are wise, you will wait, and witness the unique and heartening sight of an all-African, all-female band dressed in tartan kilts, white gloves, bandman's staff, and accoutrement, swinging down the road with marvelous gusto. Behind them will come the spectators, not marching in step but dancing with complete abandon and, surrounding them as always when there's sight, a crowd of the children, dancing, too, and singing as they dance. Somehow the "Sophiatown Scottish" stand for so much more than a happy Sunday afternoon. They stand for the joy and gaiety which is there, deep in the heart of the African and ready to break out in one form or another whenever and wherever he is at home.

Another example of the same thing I have seen very often at political meetings, especially when European police are present to take names and to record speeches. What could so easily, in other circumstances, become a dangerously tense situation through the provocative and contemptuous attitude of the authorities becomes a ridiculous and irrelevant matter. "After all," the Africans seem to say, "this is only an incident, and a minor one, in our progress to freedom and to fulfillment. Why not laugh at it, shrug it off with a song?" And so they do.

Sophiatown! It not your physical beauty which makes you so lovable; not that soft line of colour which sometimes seems to strike across the greyness of your streets; not the splendour of the evening sky which turns your drabness into gold---it is none of these things. It is your people. Yet somehow I do not think it can be the same when you yourself have been destroyed and your houses are just rubble and the factories begin to go up and to smother you with their bulk and size. Even though your people will still be here in Johannesburg, in the wide symmetry of some location such as Meadowlands, there will

have been a loss immeasurable. The truth is that Sophiatown is a community, a living organism which has grown up through the years and which has struck its roots deep in this particular place and in this special soil. So have I known it to be. A community with all the ordinary problems of a community and made up of people and families both bad and good. A community, not an abstraction, and therefore *personal* and real in all its aspects. And because it is an African community, living in a city of South Africa, it has to grow together in a unique way. Xhosa and Mosotho, Shangaan and Motswana, Indian and Chinese, coloured and white have all contributed something to it. And in my opinion they have all had something of value to contribute. The place is cosmopolitan in a real sense and has about it that atmosphere which belongs to cosmopolitan towns the world over. It is, in that sense, unique. The most unlikely and unexpected things can happen there and not appear at all unlikely or seem incongruous. So you have to be prepared, if you live in the midst of it as a priest, for every conceivable problem at every hour of the day or night. How, then, can you fail to love it?

A great deal is said by sociologists and others of “the breakdown of tribal custom” and “the disastrous impact of Western industrialism upon the urban African.” That sentence itself is stiff with the jargon of the race-relations textbook. But when you live in Sophiatown you don’t see it that way at all. You see Mrs. X., who has a drunken husband and five children to support---and what must she do? You see Mr. Y., whose wife left him two years ago and the kids are growing up; what is he to plan for them, can the “Father” help them? You see young Joel, who has just left school and got a “tea-boy” job in the city, but he longs to do his Matric, and can’t find the time or the money or the quietness for work that he needs. You are called to that room in Tucker Street, where Joseph is fighting for his life against advanced t.b., and in spite of all your efforts you can’t get a bed anywhere and you wonder---well, you wonder what it all means within the Providence of God. And you hear that Jane has got into trouble and the boy won’t admit his fault; and you run *posthaste* to see her father before he goes out with a sjambok. . . . And then there’s

George, arrested for carrying *dagga*, and there's Michael, whom you've not seen for weeks, but you hear he's drinking. . . . But behind them all, behind the "problems" which come the way of every priest in every parish in Christendom, there is that great mass of folk who live ordinary lives in extraordinary conditions and who *are* the Christian community in Sophiatown. And a more vital Christian community it would be hard to find anywhere.

I wonder, for instance, how many parishes in England today would have a Mass in the dark of a winter morning at half-past five and get a congregation of twenty or thirty people? And that not just once, but week after week? I wonder how many churches today are full on Sunday morning at six o'clock and again at eleven? Yet this is but the outward form of something far deeper and more profound. It is in fact the answer to the sociologist's question---at least it is part of the answer. The only thing which is meeting the need for a sense of "community," of "belonging," in the broken and shattered tribalism of the town-dwelling African is the Church. It is for that reason that these present years of crisis are of such tremendous significance. If the Church fails in bearing her witness on the colour question now, she will never, in my opinion, have a second opportunity. Here in Sophiatown over the past thirty years and more we have been engaged in building a Christian community. It is that community which is now being smashed to pieces in the interests of a racial ideology. And as we watch our people's homes being reduced to heaps of rubble we watch also the destruction of something which cannot be built again so easily or so fair. When Sophiatown is finally obliterated and its people scattered, I believe that South Africa will have lost not only a place but an ideal.

*Day that I have loved, day that I have loved,
The night is here. . . .*

Chapter 2

House of Truth

by

Anthony Sampson

Ladies and gentlemen! Let me present to you Africa's greatest film star, the irresistible, incomparable, indescribable one and only--- Dolly Rathebe!"

I was sitting on a hard chair in a barely-furnished room in Sophiatown, lit by an uncertain paraffin lamp in one corner. The dirty green walls were flaking away, showing the plaster underneath; the only decoration was a crude four-colour calender of a reclining blonde, advertising a Johannesburg garage, and a murky photograph of a stern and pious African grandmother, in a heavy oval frame. In one corner was a wobbly wardrobe, with a pile of clothes and boxes on top of it; in another corner a few crates were stacked on each other.

Round the room, thirty people were sitting in silence. They had been sitting for an hour in this deep, brooding African silence, gazing in front of them without expression or expectation. At the back were the old people---older than Johannesburg, their eyes looking tired with so many years of gazing. No one had tried to break the silence.

I was in a corner, the only white man, with friends on either side. I had forgotten that I was white. Only once, when I noticed my white hand next to a black hand, like a black note on a piano, did the oddness strike me.

I knew many of the people in the room----Todd [Matshikiza] in the other corner, Henry [Nxumalo] wandering outside, Can [Themba], our host, flitting lightly round the room. I wondered if anything

would happen in this impassive gathering. But no one seemed worried by the silence.

Suddenly Can, the master of the ceremonies, climbed on a chair; his slender body was quivering with energy, as if compelled by some electric shock. He gathered his academic gown around him, his own Bachelors of Arts gown from Fort Hare; and announced with confident authority the one and only Dolly Rathebe.

The spectators stared up at him with looks of scepticism. And they were right, for Dolly was not there. The silence was broken. "She got bored!" "She went that-a-way!" "Go fetch her, man!" "Voetsak [Shit]!" Can remained calm. "Ladies and gentlemen, Miss Rathebe will be with us very shortly . . ."

Sure enough, just then, Dolly appeared at the doorway. She had an instant effect on the crowd. For Dolly was the most famous African girl in the whole continent: her face appeared on hoardings, in films, and in *Drum*: she sang in white night clubs and made records which sold all over Africa. Yet here she was, the great Dolly, our Dolly, in the doorway of a small room in Sophiatown.

She was looking very beautiful, in her exotic way. She wore a long black dress, low cut, her brown shoulders and head emerging like a sculpted bust, hewn and rounded and polished from soft brown stone. Her thick black hair, gathered round with beads, stood up severely from her forehead; and she held herself erect on her high-heeled shoes. Like a statue, with the disdain of a *grande dame*, poised with an unshakeable dignity in these undignified surroundings.

She stood there, with her knowing eyes roving round the room. Then she smiled a naughty smile, and let out a tiny high-pitched giggle, and put her hand to her mouth in mimicked shame. She looked quickly again round the room: no longer the statue on her pedestal, but the warm peasant girl, unspoilt, unprotected, among her people. "Dolly, girl!" "There's my baby!" "Katz!" "Doll-Doll!" shouted the crowd; and she giggled again with delight, her small rounded face

warm in the flickering light, her wide white teeth shining from the dark in open friendliness. The spectators jumped up and down on their chairs in anticipation.

She spoke quietly, three octaves lower than her giggle, seeming to come right from the middle of her long brown body.

“Did you boys want to see me?” she giggled again, three octaves up. Everyone shouted: “Ya!” “Sure things!” “True’s God!” “Hi, Dolly, girl!”

Dolly walked across the room, sophisticated as a mannequin, and yet with the simple poise and grace of a Xhosa girl walking across open country with a pitcher full of water balanced on her head. She whispered to Todd, who looked businesslike and serious as only Todd could. He hummed a long note. Dolly squeaked again. Todd hummed again. Dolly sang a pure low note, and Todd nodded with gravity.

Dolly stepped out, her fine shoulders pulled back, her tinsel ear-rings flashing in the light against her dark, flat ears. She stood still. Abruptly, her face lit up, her eyes twinkled, and every limb sprang into movement. She leant forward on her toes, heaved her breasts forward, lifted up her arms, with her fingers tense, ready to strangle. Her mouth opened wide, her big lips quivered, and burst into song.

She sang the Xhosa hit-tune, “Into Yam,” which had sent the Reef locations crazy with delight. The song was about a girl who loved her man although he was a drunkard; her words jumped out with a frenzied desperation, beating the stark rhythm which repeated itself again and again like a broken record.

I love my thing!
Cos my man’s my thing!
Call him drink drank drunk!
He’s still my thing!
He jobs for me!

That you wouldn't have thunk!
So I love my thing!
Ee Ma Yee Mo Wunk!

Instantly the stone-faced figures round the room sprang to life like puppets lifted off their perch. Their eyes lit up and their feet beat time, and they clapped as one man, with beat of the music: they wailed the accompaniment which zig-zagged through the tune, or blew imaginary trombones, or twanged non-existent guitars.

Can, still twirling his gown around him, stepped into the middle of the floor, hopping to the rhythm like a clockwork duck: his whole body twisted into a sharp curve; one hand curled up behind his back, the other, tense with expression, gripped into his side. His feet jerked as if on hot coals; his body was consumed with the rhythm, lost to the world around him like an epileptic. His tongue slid between his teeth, and his face was contorted in a grimace.

Twenty other bodies were now up and jiving on the floor, hopping to and from each other, grinning and gasping in a crazy silent conversation.

I sat in my corner, watching this mass of dancing bodies. Everything was changed. The green peeling walls seemed insubstantial, swaying in time with the music. Grandma in the oval frame took on a new expression of tolerance and sympathy. The room became vast, its sharp right-angles vague and distant. The jivers seemed not solid.

Europe was translated into Africa. Every movement, every look, had the touch and feel of Africa. As I walked across the room in my European way, I felt like a corpse striding out from the grave.

One old man sat in the empty chair next to me; I turned to him. "Are you enjoying this?" He jumped up with the shock.

"It is not right, sir, do you understand, for the African people to behave like this before a European? What will the Europeans think of

us?" He pronounced the "Ahfrican people" as if he were a visiting anthropologist.

The music throbbed on, issuing mysteriously from the wobbling bodies, steady as a record. I focused on the figures tugging and flinging each other just near me. Behind the frenzied movements I could detect drama. Johnny, a smooth, light-skinned African, was jiving ecstatically with a young dark girl whose eyes followed his everywhere, and whose small feet jerked to and fro in neat obedience to his. But Johnny's quick eye kept jiving to a long-haired coloured girl, embroiled in a solemn dance with a spectacled teacher; and her eyes were always waiting for his. Their eyes quickly met, and flicked away, and Johnny gave a look of knowing.

A couple, hugged in a tight dance, lost to the world, suddenly, with no word said, walked away in opposite directions to sit down. A school principal with enormous spectacles looking disapproving at the side, suddenly hopped up and shook his nimble legs in all directions.

The singing stopped: not the end of a record, but the current switched off. The jiving stopped. The clapping stopped. Everybody separated and sat down.

Can, frozen in an apoplexy of jive, walked sedately towards me, with a large bearded man looking like a tamed cannibal chief.

"Tony, I'd like to introduce you," said Can with mock pomposity, waving g his arm at the man with a beard, "to a friend of mine---we call him the Bearded Horror---Horror for short. He's just left Fort Hare, and he's working in a bookshop. He's very interested in Bach, and he wants to write an article for *Drum*."

Horror smiled shyly, the pink inside of his lips looking pale against the brown skin and black beard. He sat down, and we talked about Fort Hare and customers at bookshops.

As we talked, as in the interval of a play, I watched people coming in and out. Johnny, his large sensuous mouth dropping with boredom, turned over records on top of the gramophone. Then he turned over records on top of the gramophone. Then he turned round, caught the eye of the Coloured girl, and ambled slowly out of the room, his hands deep in his pockets; two minutes later, the Coloured girl rose and went out, looking purposeful and domestic. I did not see them again.

Henry appeared from the next room, benign and paternal, surveying the room as if surprised that the party had continued without him. He came up to me laughing at the continuous joke of our relationship, and said: "Are you all right?" He went up to Todd, slipping off his chair in the excitement of a jazz argument.

"Todd, can I have a word with you outside?" Henry whispered importantly.

"No, man! Can't you see I'm busy, man?" said Todd briskly, and turned quickly back. "Shucks, Paddy, boy, but you can't compare the Swingsters to the Maniacs! The Maniacs are dead!"

Henry walked on magnanimously.

Can reappeared in the room, his arm round a meek bird-faced man carrying a case. A shout of "Jazzboy!" echoed all round, in every pitch and intonation. "Jazzboy Jazzboy, Jazzboy Jazzboy." The little man smiled a conjuror's smile, opened his case, and produced a gleaming saxophone while jazz fiends pranced round him, fondling his instrument, and shouting his name like a spell. "Blow it, Jazzboy! Show 'em, Jazzboy! Let it go, Jazzboy!" He stood upright with his proud instrument hanging from a black cord round his neck, as confident now as a soldier in uniform, and blew a swift arpeggio, lingering on a high shrill note which could crack the room in two.

Can, glowing with achievement, climbed again on to the chair.

“Ladies and gentlemen! I have the honour to present to you the renowned famous notorious well-known star of the Metronomes, Jazzboy!” And the word echoed again round the room.

“But before Jazzboy starts blowing,” Can shouted above the noise, “I come to the solemn business of this evening.” Can gathered his robes. “We have come here this evening to perform a solemn onerous duty. We have come to christen this noble mansion.” He waved round at the peeling walls and the shaky furniture. “Gentlemen, I have the honour tonight to name this palace ‘The House of Truth!’”

The spectators shouted: “Truth! The House of Truth!” Can cut a streamer and the two ends fluttered down; there was cheering and clapping and more cries of “Truth! The House of Truth!”

I turned to P-boy, a young student sitting near me. “Why is it called the House of Truth?”

“It’s a long story! You see, every room in Sophiatown has to have a name. I live in the House of Commons; Johnny lives in the House of Saints. But this place is very special, Mr. Sampson. You see, everyone in this room is supposed to speak the truth. No bull, no yes men! Particularly with regard to---Love!”

“Over to Jazzboy!” shouted Can.

Jazzboy’s sax shrieked jazz, and the bodies round the room were galvanized into jive. Horror turned to me.

“Do you know what this tune is called? It’s called ‘Bambata.’ Do you know who Bambata was?”

“No.”

“He was a Zulu king who led a rebellion against the white men. We always call our songs after African heroes,” he added dryly.

“Bambata” pounded on. Jazzboy, impassive and intent, blew tirelessly. David stood by him, possessive of his hero, staring at the shining brass. The dramas of the jivers picked up again.

Henry performed a vertical solo jive in the corner, as if pulling down an imaginary rope and treading soil at the same time. I noticed my grave old man, so concerned with the dignity of the African people, jiving with his knees bent double, half-seas over in the middle of the floor.

Jazzboy, his face a balloon and his eyes rolling into white, paraded slowly round the room. David and the jivers followed him, as solemnly as if they were following Bambata himself. Jazzboy played in turn to the seated guests, and lingered in front of Horror and me, bowing so that the wind shook Horror’s kinky beard, and adding special twiddles to the bare tune in our honour.

“Ladies and gentlemen,” shouted Can, above the din. “Before we continue any further---the toast.” And there was silence.

“To Oubass,” said Can. There was a pause, and then everyone chanted together, in unison.

The son of a bitch
Had no right to lead
Such a dangerous life.

I remembered Oubaas well. The “old boss” was a young man of twenty-five who seemed old and wise enough to be fifty; he had been very much part of this gang. He had mediated in quarrels, patched up love affairs, organized parties and kept out gangsters. He was an intellectual, steeped in Shakespeare and with pages of poetry in his head; but he lead the same rough life of danger of any other Sophiatowner. “I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue,” he would say. I had last seen him reading the *Divine Comedy* in his leaking shack in Sophiatown. A month ago he had been killed in a car crash.

“. . . Such a dangerous life. . . .” The solemnity lingered, and then Jazzboy lifted up his sax again and blew a gale into it. Near me, primly alone, was a pretty Xhosa girl, manicured and powdered to make her face light; she looked innocent and demure. The spectacled teacher came up to her and sat beside her. With elaborate courtesy he opened his shining cigarette case.

“Will you have a de Reszke, Princess?”

“Thank you, but I never ever smoke a cigarette, Mr. Tshabalala.”

I turned round to Horror.

“She’s very young and sweet, isn’t she?”

“She’s the biggest little bitch in Sophiatown,” said Horror feelingly. I saw Princess beckon to Can, who danced obediently up to her.

“Canny, boy, can I have a speak with you?”

But naturally, my Princess, I’d be delighted.”

They both walked out of the room. A minute later, Can came back and whispered to P-boy, who was chatting gaily with two girls. P-boy laughed and threw up his hands in mock despair. He made extravagant excuses to the two girls, and then waltzed out of the room, his features sad.

Can sat down next to me, and we talked gravely about next month’s *Drum*, shouting above blasts of noise.

“POLICE!”

It was David, shouting from the window behind us. The jazz stopped. In the corner, someone drained his glass and put a bottle of

brandy under a floor-board. Can, radiating respectability, walked slowly towards the door.

“This way, Mr. Sampson,” said David, pushing up the window. I tried to look dignified. I reminded myself that I was here on business. I knew that I was within the law. But I remembered that the police disliked white men in black townships. I looked at Can, who looked at me. He nodded.

I stumbled to the window. Everyone laughed and pushed me on, and heaved me outside. “There goes Tony!” “You ought to be black!” they shouted gaily.

In the darkness, David grabbed me, and pointed to a dustbin.

“I’d better go back.” He disappeared.

I crouched behind the stinking dustbin. It was very uncomfortable. I could see the lighted room through the window; the jazz had started again. I felt the full force of apartheid.

I found a more comfortable position; lit a cigarette, and felt that perhaps this incident was not the final humiliation of the editor, but his triumph. I began to have the feeling of Sophiatown, sharing this moment of anxiety with my readers: here, in this stinking corner, waiting for the crunch of boots and the shout of “Voetsak, man!” watching the jazz House of Truth through the window, I had a moment of truth. How easy to understand those short stories I read and discarded every day, obsessed with race and violence, in single-minded bitterness. How compulsory was this floating cabin of jazz and jive.

David appeared and shouted: “Tony!” (He usually called very formally, Mr. Sampson) “It’s okay, they’ve gone!”

I rose and stretched my legs; we smiled at each other in silent understanding of the situation. He opened the window, and pushed

me up, back to the room. Everyone looked round; somebody shouted, "The native!" and the room laughed. Can came up to me, beaming, and dusted my coat.

"They've gone?" I asked.

"Ya! And the joke is, they only came to try and bum a drink."

I looked at my watch, and noticed with a shock that it was half past midnight. I went up to Can.

"It's been a great evening. Thank you."

"Delighted. But wait till the tenth. And you whites want to get rid of Sophiatown!"

I slipped out silently, taking a last glance at the crowded room. Jazzboy was now lying on the floor, still blowing his sax, with jivers all around him. The old men were still along the back, gazing in front of them.

I walked outside into the stinking yard, past tiny shacks of corrugated iron leaning against the brick buildings; through the chinks in the iron I could see candlelight, and hear people talking. As I walked through the yard I could hear familiar voices whispering from the darkness---Princess, P-boy, Johnny, the Coloured girl. By the gate out of road, Horror was leaning on the post, watching the gangs of hooligans passing up and down the street.

Chapter 3

Into the Slums

by

Ezekiel Mphahlele

When I was about twelve I noticed something that had already begun to take shape in that part of north-eastern Transvaal that fell under the rule of Chief Mphahlele. The young able-bodied men were leaving the villages to seek work in answer to the call of the city. Vaguely I understood that Pretoria was the Mecca. At Christmas-time they came back in dashing clothes: trousers with eide sweeping pipes, shoes with sharp-pointed front; hats with small brims; jackets with fish-tails, trying painfully but in vain to stretch beyond the hips in length; striped ties; belts with iron knobs and spikes worked into the leather; colourful handkerchiefs dangling boldly out of the trouser pocket. They told us about the glamour of the city life, the money (£3 a month) and the electric lights and trams and motor cars we had never seen before and had no hope of ever seeing until we were big enough to go to Pretoria. They brought gramophones which they said they had played all the way in the train. They said the thing

we saw in Goldstein's general store were for chickens and not eagles compared with those that glittered in Pretoria shop windows. For a long long time they made us believe that there were very small people singing inside the gramophone. They probably believed it themselves. At Christmas time Jeemee Roe-Jars (Jimmy Rogers), then in fashion, yodeled plaintively from various parts of the village.

And there was a less glamorous side to all this. Wherever you went---in the fields, at village festivals, at church and every other place where people congregated---you found mostly middle-aged women, old women and old men. The land was not giving out much. The Black man could work only the strip given him by the chief. The chief had more to give out. The old men at the fire-place complained endlessly that most of their lands had been taken away by the white man. Old Modise pulled mucus through the nostrils and spat out of the mouth as if to clinch the matter: 'Our sons will go out to the city and the chief can't stop them. The cow is too old and it cannot give milk any more. Are we going to beat it for it?' And the old men looked helpless, shaking their heads like that in the glow of the fire.

The non-Christians didn't seem to like change. Their lands turned into patches of sand, but their t young men kept on. "That's the trouble with these Christians,' they said. 'All they can do is go to church and sing and run to the white man to work for him and they've not the brains of a hippo to stay where their ancestors lived and planted them.'

To Christians and non-Christians alike, what the chief couldn't do was impossible. The non-Christians praised him for allowing them to keep to their way of life and the Christians praised him for having built a big school and allowing them to have churches even although he wasn't a Christian.

I never dreamt that I should go back to the city, which I couldn't picture in my mind anyhow. We thrilled at the idea of riding a train, my brother, sister and I, when our mother came in the middle of the year to tell us that she had come to fetch us. Three things stick out in

my mind about those few days. The few days when whatever hand it was that drove the train of my life across the trackless wilds suddenly decided to take a capricious turn. First, my grandmother cried. I had only seen her cry at revival services in the Methodist church house. I knew my mother couldn't just come in the middle of the year like that to move a hard-hearted mother-in-law to tears with a kind of domestic joke. Secondly, mother shook off our lousy rags and scrubbed us clean and wrapped us up in brand-new clothes. That couldn't be a joke either. I overheard her to say to grandmother: 'I can't change my mind, any more than I can change your son. They're my children and I'm taking them away.' Thirdly, those bright lights we found on Pietersburg station after travelling many miles of dusty road. I heard Jimmy Rodgers yodel. The train arrived. I was too dazed to be happy. Too frightened to ask questions. We found ourselves in Pretoria station the next day. In the midst of a winter's morning we were whisked away by a taxi-cab to Marabastad, a Black location.

That is how a country bumpkin dived into slum life. The springboard was Second Avenue, where my maternal grandmother lived with Aunt Dora and three uncles, all younger than my mother. The eldest uncle was a policeman at Witbank.

After a few days my brother, sister and I went to live with our mother and father at Fifth Avenue. We occupied one room they had hired.

It didn't take long for us to notice that it wasn't all right between our father and mother. They were always quarelling; especially at weekends, beginning on Friday evenings. We soon discovered that the main subject of the wrangling was money. Father was not bringing money home. We came to know that was why our mother fetched us from the north. I was thirteen then, my brother three years younger and my sister five years younger.

Mother did dressmaking for an African tailor just outside town. In the evenings she brewed beer out of corn malt to sell. The family's

budget was all on her shoulders. She was hard working and tough. She never complained about hard work. Father walked with a limp as one leg was shorter than the other. It had been broken by a wagon wheel in his teens. But he could cycle fast and he used to bicycle to work. Town was only two and a half miles away. He drank like a sponge, especially home brewed beer which he had the tendency of commandeering and entertaining his friends with. My mother got very angry but couldn't do anything about it. No pleading could move my father. When he wanted *skokiaan*---brewed with yeast and water---he went to Cape Location, where Coloured people lived, just the other side of the Asiatic Reserve next to us. *Skokiaan* being much stronger than malt beer, my father often said threateningly to my mother: 'I'll go drink skokiaan for you.' But then he was so violent by nature that he didn't really need something to light a fire under him.

We'd never really known Father before. And now living close to him and seeing him at close quarters, I realized that his face was unlikeable. Like his mother, he couldn't laugh heartily. His facial skin clung too close on to the bones. There was something brutal and razor-like about the corners of his mouth; as there was about his limp and the back of his head. He was seldom in a mood to play with us. We kept close to our mother most of the time.

'How long do you want this thing to go on, Moses?'

'What, Eva?'

"Don't pretend you don't know I need money for food. At least you could worry about your children's clothes. Just look at you, drunk as always. What are you standing up for?'

'You don't want to sell me your beer, so?'

'It's there for you if you must drink. But while you're at it, you might think about the bellies of others that want filling.'

My father looked vicious.

'Don't talk to me like that, damn you!' he bellowed. My mother kept quiet. Every gesture of his was menacing, down to the limp. We got used to these quarrels. But we had a sixth companion in the room. Fear.

'I don't want that man here again, hear?' my father said one evening.

'He's your friend and you know he comes to drink.' She told us to go outside as she often did when she saw signs of a storm.

'Don't talk to me like that! Didn't your mother teach you never to answer back y to your husband and lord?' we heard him say, through the window.

'You started, Moses.' We looked through the window.

A crashing clap sent my mother down on her knees.

'I'll kill you, I tell you!' He was going to kick her when out of nowhere a hand held him by the scruff of the neck. It was the man from the next door. My father's eyes flickered in the glow of the candlelight. Mother got up and stood in the corner. We went through a restless slumber that night.

'Why does Father do this to you always, Mother?' I ventured to ask one day.

'I don't know, son,' she replied rather curtly.

'I wish Sello's father was my father too.'

'Why?'

'He plays morabaraba with his boys. Father'd never do that.'

'You don't know what you're talking, Eseki. Besides, grumbling never takes you anywhere.'

'I'm not grumbling.'

The matter ended. Mother was good at that kind of thing. Probably every trickle of a thought was pain, but grumble she wouldn't.

The tailor for whom she worked went bankrupt. She couldn't get another dressmaking job. Factories were very few and these didn't take in Black labour. So mother started to do white people's washing. She did some sewing at home for people in the location. She made all our clothes---skirts, trousers, jackets, and my sister's frocks and aprons. And I never saw a louse on me again, and she never left my father to go anywhere in dirty clothes.

He, on the other hand, continued to bully, grouse, roar and fume. Mother did a brisk business in selling home brewed beer. He drank elsewhere and came to her to ask or demand money.

'Don't grumble, Eva!' he'd say when she ventured a comment.

'I'm not going to give you my money if you play the fool with yours, that's what.'

'Let's see if you won't, bitch.'

'You don't need such talk in front of the children.'

'They're mine, anyway.'

'They're mine. What do you do for them?' Her eyes sparkled and I knew from that day that she was going to fight like a tigress to defend her cubs. And from that day I found myself taking sides. I hated my father; his other children no less. Whenever he was in the house we preferred to play outside.

'Eseki, Girlie, Solomon!' We went reluctantly into the room. It was a drunken call. He gathered us in his arms before him.

'I---I – hic---brought you sweets, see? From town---hic.'

My mother was certainly suppressing a laugh.

'See!' He took out a broken packet that smelled of tobacco.

'You give the---hic---others, Eseki, as---hic---the oldest, see!'

This time my mother laughed aloud, as only she could when she was ticked, her strong arms and shoulders shaking with mirth. She went off into a peal again when my father said, 'Remember, you're my heir, Eseki, and don't let anybody cheat you out of it, see!' His breadth smelled of strong beer as he rubbed his rough cheek against mine.

By degrees I drew out of mother the reason why she had fetched us from Maupaneng. He was refusing to maintain us; she had reported him to the Native Commissioner; he advised her to fetch the children---maybe if he lived with us we'd be a constant reminder to him; then she was to report regularly to the Commissioner.

'And those goats and donkeys, *I* bought them,' my mother said. 'He would hear none of it when his mother wrote to him about donkeys she needed for the plough. But don't think any more about it, my son. You're still young and such things are still heavy for your small shoulders.'

Sunday morning. The day when we lounged in the blankets and silently boycotted the early rising custom. The primus stove was purring softly with a steaming pot on. There was an enticing smell of meat, potatoes and curry.

I was thinking of the years at Maupaneng, Pietersburg. The big dark mountains; the fields; my playmates; Old Modise and Old Segone. I

could see through the window that it was cloudy outside; and I hated clouds, as I still do today; had always hated them, because they made my soul gloomier than it was, there at Maupaneng and here in Pretoria. In the country it spelt heavy rains. And goats are impossible creatures to manage when it rains. The goats panicked and dashed about madly as if a huge flea had come among them. The donkeys simply would not move in the rain. How often I cried aloud chasing the goats. If I caught one I belaboured the creature with a stick so that it yelled to the heavens for help. I was sure it must understand why I was angry. Afterwards I'd stroke it and mumble how sorry I was. I learned that there is no domestic animal as proud as a goat, as disdainful; it seems never to have heard about flattering the vanity of the human heart.

Running footsteps. I was startled out of my reverie, and so was my brother. My sister followed close behind her, and she tripped over a strip of wood on the threshold and fell---my mother. When he thundered in we knew he had been chasing after my mother. She kept on her knees, clearly hurt.

'I'll show you who I am!' my father said.

'What is it with you, Moses? What are you standing up to do?'

'Get up!'

'I can't---I can't---my knee!'

'This is the day you're going to do what I tell you!' He limped over to the pot on the stove. In no time it was done. My mother screamed with a voice I have never forgotten till this day. Hot gravy and meat and potatoes had got into her blouse and she was trying to shake them down.

He caught hold of her by the blouse and landed the pot in the middle of her skull with a heavy gong sound. She struggled loose from his grip and fled through the door, crying.

Only then did I have the wits to go and ask for help. I came back with Aunt Dora. An ambulance had already been and carried my mother to hospital. The police came and arrested him. We packed our things and went to live with grandmother in Second Avenue.

A few weeks later my mother came out of hospital, bandaged up thickly, to appear in court against my father. I also went to court.

My mother recounted the events of the Sunday morning and all other things she had against my father before and after. The magistrate sentenced him to fourteen days' imprisonment with the option of a fine of---I forgot how much. I remember that he paid it. That was the last time I ever saw my father, that summer of 1932. The strong smell of burning paraffin gas from a stove often reminds me of that Sunday.

Chapter 4

The Pagan Woman

by

Noni Jabavu

We went to the station one morning to see off a party of relatives who were leaving us to return to their homes.

We congregated with other people at the far end of the platform on ground level, a good way beyond the top end of the platform which is where the 'Non-European' carriages tend to halt at stations in the Union since they were at present attached immediately behind the engine. The authorities are always changing the position of railway carriages of the races. Sometimes ours are at the tail end of the train, sometimes in the middle, sometimes at the engine end, the policy being to ensure (after the occasional derailments) that the safest part of the train should be for Europeans---or so we Africans firmly believed.

When the train comes in, however, you forget about this for its arrival is quite an occasion. You enjoy going to see people off or to catch a train yourself, or merely to go and watch and talk to travellers even when it is the morning train, which at our village arrives at that awkward time before breakfast.

The morning sun, newly risen, shone with its broad African smile on the sweeping expanse of shallow hills dotted with thorn trees, the hill-tops looking fresh and green in the clean new sunlight. In summer when pink and mauve and yellow flowers peep from between the boulders making tufts of colour along the ridges, 'the land looks beautiful like a young girl' as we say in Xhosa.

We watched the train approach, snaking its way along the sweeping contours, short green grass and trees and flowers until it slid to a standstill, in our case high above us so that we had to jerk our necks right back to speak to the travellers hanging out of the windows. Black and brown shining faces leant out greeting everybody known and unknown on the ground below.

And arms of raggedly dressed labourers going to work in the towns along the line handed out the luggage of passengers alighting from the third-class, luggage consisting of thin suitcases or pillowcases filled with belongings and tied with string or rope.

From the second-class windows more neatly dressed people, teachers mostly, looked out. And Europeans hung out of their windows, necks craned towards our part of the train as always at country stations; at the bustling ones like Port Elizabeth or Jo'burg they do not bother, but at rural stations it is as though Europeans are fascinated and mesmerised by the spectacle of Africans with their great bursts of exclamations and laughter and greetings; they gaze with set, unsmiling faces as if this African jollity is hard to tolerate. They hang on our every word and gesture, red-faced, tight-lipped. You sometimes hear a guard or linesman mutter in Afrikaans, '*Allemagtig*, what a lot of bloody Kaffirs travelling today!' Once I heard an African woman shout in Xhosa and laugh, 'My, who would be a European? Folks, these people rise up angry at everything even from their sleep! First thing in the morning angry, always angry, they were conceived on a twisted mat, those!'

While we were handing our relatives their things, a pagan woman walked up and down along the 'Non-Europeans Only' carriages balancing a basket of cactus pears on her turbaned head. She was a 'dressed' pagan, wearing an ankle-length cotton skirt that flared out in an immense fullness behind her not unlike the flared style of the red ochre-smeared pagan costume she would wear as a rule. There were many petticoats underneath this skirt, also full; and she wore an Edwardian style cotton blouse. I could tell she was pagan by the tiny bead circlets round each of her ankles.

The passengers began to clamour to buy prickly pears from her. 'Give them here, mama, what money are they?'

'Tickey a dozen!' she shouted back, and an exchange hurriedly ensued amid cries and loud laments from her for she was fearful of missing the tiny three-penny piece, the silver 'tickey' thrown down to her or passed from hand to hand. It was clearly a big thing for her to part with the fruit that she picked so laboriously and prepared; not only must she pick, dodging the long sharp-spiked cactus leaves but wipe each fruit clean of its own tiny, soft but devilish thorns arranged in harmless looking furry tufts all over the peel. All that day for a tickey a dozen. If she charged more, nobody would buy.

My Jo'burg uncle pounced on her and started to bargain, struck that moment by the idea of buying up the entire bucketful to give these departing relatives as *umpako*, provision, for their long journey north.

The train was about to pull out now, so 'Little Father' accelerated his efforts to beat her price down. I wished he wouldn't and so did all my cousins, but we knew that being a Johannesburg man he felt it necessary to demonstrate city smartness to these pagans and 'country pumpkins', that being the punning English term town relatives call us in the Reserves since country bumpkins grow and eat many pumpkins!

She cried shrilly, 'Make haste, brother, make haste. My money, I want my money!' handing her bucket up to the window. Many hands

grabbed it to help her, helped my cousins empty it, then passed it back to her anxious clutch. The station master waved his green flag, the train whistled, its departure imminent, both making her cry out in ringing tones, 'Oh my God, who will pay me?' ---a noble voice, stentorian and musical like an actress in an Elizabethan play.

My uncle answered, 'Hush, hush, sister-of-ours. Come with us. We are of course going to pay you your *ndaliso*, one shilling and sixpence.'

'But who are with you with your "come with us"? I don't know you.' She appealed to strangers standing near by, at which those of them who had finished waving farewells to their friends now turned to my uncle and me and took it on themselves to reassure her. The matter became everyone's business.

"It is all right, *mama*, they belong here these people. Go with this man and this girl.'

"Go"? Go where?' eyes flashing. How could she trust anyone with this *ndaliso*, might she not find she had braved those spikes and thorns for nothing? She said so and explained in bell-like tones how *indaliso* was the wherewithal to live for the best part of a week. 'Not, doubtless, to enjoy life,' she added, telling how she was a widow with children, 'but to live, to exist!' and people echoed the sentiment on all sides, urging her all the more to go with us.

'Pi? Where?' in despair, and was assured by a chorus.

'*Kwa Pro. . . fe . . . sa!* To Professor's, down there through the village!'

My little Father started to walk. The train had pulled right out, the tail end of it about to round the first wide sweeping shallow contour of our Eastern Cape landscape. He strode out fingering his watch-chain as if to show that even if he had no ready cash on him at that time in the morning, nevertheless a well-dressed city man like

himself possessed a watch and chain that meant resources somewhere.

The pagan woman fell in behind my uncle and me, a few respectful paces to one side, skirts rustling and swinging and tossing from heel to heel as she strode holding herself so very erect, with the empty bucket on her head.

She said, 'What people are you, brother?'

'Of here.' I thought my uncle answered rather curtly, but said nothing. We walked on, his eyes roving round the green countryside drinking in its girl-like beauty. We passed through the village of rondavels and square-houses, the hunger a city man feels for the country, of which he was often telling us during this family gathering, clearly intensifying his pace as we walked.

We went past little patches of early mauve vetch and by tufts of yellow onion-plants. Some of the households of the village were hedged with the red-blossomed *ichakatha*, others with the exquisite pale blue plumbago shrub which we call *umthi kaMaqoma*, the tree of Chief Maqoma. Some homes looked bare because the owners did not care, but the more sensitive occupants of others had planted azaleas, clumps of the flamboyantly feathered red and yellow Bird of Paradise bush, bouganvillaea, geraniums. As far as the eye could see the landscape was a typically South African one, wide expanse of rolling shallow bare hills and in the distance a jagged blue frieze of mountainous edge; and there were the dark forested apron-like folds, *kloofs* we called them colloquially in Afrikaans, of the local Amatola mountain range. You could see how the gritty veld was dotted with bright yellow gazania, looking like big buttercups.

I remembered how as children on our way to school at Lovedale we used to pick gazania petals and put them to our lips one at a time and make kazoos of them, then eat the stalks full of sweet creamy milk. And pagans like this woman following us, had the custom of beating this plant, *u-bendle* we call it, to a pulp in order to isolate the fibres

and make the soft stringy mass into a little public apron for baby girls. We walked on past cactus, mauve wild scabious, yellow mimosa, morning glory. And my uncle repeated, 'We're people of here,' his thoughts evidently on other matters. 'Here' was very different from the Rand where he had lived for many years and where, if you come from the Eastern Cape as he does, the country seems dismal, featureless, a land worn of exploitation; its bowels, those white and ghostly mine dumps, lie heaped on the skyline, the barren soil marred by huge hoarding signs bearing chilly commercial legends: 'Such-and-such a Company, Pty'. I could understand why today he fairly 'feasted his eyes' on the scene as he walked. The woman took up his reply.

'O-h,' she said drawing it out in the undulating interrogative tone of speech. 'Of here then? Do you mean precisely, really, truly, in fact?'

'Ah, well *mandithi*, let me say rather, we are of-the-Professor. He is my elder brother.'

'Ah!' At last the penny dropped. She had not really heard before when she had been told at the station how we belonged here and now exclaimed greatly and made sure of it by asking for repetition. My uncle gave it and added, 'We are staying here. We came on the errand of this Concealment of my son.'

'Aha, now I see! Oh my God, that was a terrible thing. What badness to happen to father Jabavu, his only son. My God, oh my God!' She paused, momentarily at a loss, but presently was able to continue. '*Kanti*, and yet, we too had wanted to come, brother-of-mine, to that Concealment for those are people we know. But we are "red" you see, pagans. This put us in a difficulty. All the same we prayed to God to bind you all, house-of-Jili. I pray for it the more now that I see you with my own eyes, "Let Him bind you, let Him make this heavy cloud pass from you." *It is nothing, akukhonto, it is nothing.*'

'Thank you, thank you, sister,' my classificatory uncle said, not slackening his step. The three of us were walking quite fast now. But

I saw that he too was as moved by her outburst as I was, for he withdrew his sharp eyes from the landscape and fixed them in the middle distance, left his watch-chain alone and said with the formality which in our language covers up grief:

'That was nicely spoken, nicely spoken indeed, sister. The house-of-Jali thanks you for those words. Truly, such words bind us at such times. This so painful manner of passing of this son of mine, after all, then, demonstrates a wonderful thing to us all here at home: that the house-on-my-brother is loved even by pagans, even by such as you,' which she at once confirmed with a tremendous reiteration, 'But that is so indeed, young man, it is *so*, brother-of-mine!'

My uncle prepared himself to reply, in Xhosa fullness, thrusting his hands out in front of him now as he walked, as though to measure a rectangle. He looked down on the path in front of him, watching out for the potholes which were filled with brackish water from the heavy rain of the night and days since the funeral.

'Now then, do you understand this thing?' he was saying, stretching his outheld arms out more to loosen his sleeves. 'Is this something that you will understand when I explain it, friend-of-mine-who-is-much-prized? It is this: you pagan people should *come* to us Christian ones. You should come. You should have come to our son's Concealment, understand? You should not have felt yourselves in a difficulty. We are one people now here in South Africa. That other thing of old is no more, now, that idea that pagans who have not received the Word are different people from us converts who have received it. Oh, we are all alone! That other was a thing brought by the missionaries, these missionaries who now *live* off us, themselves forgetting The Word. We were separated into pagans and converts, yet it is nothing, it is wrong. We are one! You see that, you understand that thing?' His baritone voice rang, fairly filling the country-side as we went.

'Yes, brother,' she said, her skirts swishing. Yes, yes. You say so.'

'*Eh-weh*, yes indeed I say it! Now then, you and yours should also come to us at church, often, just as you are; never mind coming only to pray for rain when the drought has got us by the short g horns, when even then when you come, you spoil your presence by wearing borrowed dress---tut! Leave the dresses to the converts, I say! Dresses mean nothing. Come in your pagan habit, and *dress* in it, then! Embellish yourselves, my dear good person. Adorn yourselves, oh adorn, *dress*, embellish, make yourselves beautiful, *thrust* your ochre on! Pile your beads on, make everything about you speak of pride, sister, confidence, yes pride in yourselves. For you are beautiful! Nothing is ugly in God, not even pagan dress. Therefore wear it proudly and hold out your chests! And *then* come and pray too, along with us!

I could see why this uncle was considered a speaker. He was a politician, had a magnetic personality, He was a celebrated organizer of men, gifted with a masterful voice. But I also knew, the way those in families know these things, how he was something else also too, not exactly celebrated, in business matters. A man of ability, of parts, but mercurial, with the clan temperament; also, he could have been kinder to my aunt and to other ladies. Among his virtues were fastidious and unrelenting neatness, breath-taking poetry in expressing himself in our language. Currently, too, he was not drinking. I thought of the old days when he was a horseman, how he used to gallop up to our house smiling, and we children would run to hold his horse and water it, and he would stuff sweets into our pockets.

He had one of those active brains, his brows almost always drawn, countenance preoccupied as now, always hard at work as all of us close to him knew, figuring out plans. He had the Jili initiative and aggressiveness; we all felt a constant regret that his undeniable gifts should so often be put to 'these schemes of his', as we in the family called them, since few men are prophets in the eyes of their own relatives, and we would cry, 'What would become of him?' But oh, how we loved him for he was indeed a poet, as we put it: *skilled and delicate in language, I-ciko!*

There was a silence, broken only by the sound of our footsteps on the grass verge of the path.

At last the woman spoke. She was calm and at peace, no longer alarmed, flashing, crying out as she had done at the station when afraid about her *tickey* and her *ndaliso*; all that was put to one side and her mind was now occupied with higher things. She said, 'After all, our pagan dress was our first dress, when we were a NATION!'

'Aha!' triumphed my uncle. 'You understand it, you see it.'

'Indeed I see it, Jili,' she said simply as we approached the house.

We went in by the back gate that you come to when you walk from the station. My uncle went indoors, through the passage by the kitchen, but calling out to her, 'Stay here!' So she stood by the *kniphofia* and cacti in the backyard where there were already standing groups of women, also wearing the kind of dress, the Edwardian style full skirts and mutton-sleeved blouses that she had borrowed.

Some of them were our house-servants, others callers who had come to 'exclaim' (at our bereavement) but were too respectful to go to the verandah at the front of the house, preferring to wait here demurely for my father to come. They had been promised that sooner or later he would appear at this side. The sun shone on their faces, and all were sad, serious, as if the loss of a son had happened to them.

Presently my uncle came back with *indaliso* in his hand. And the pagan woman received it in the customary way, cupping both her hands and genuflecting a little. 'You have helped me, brother,' she said; a gracious way, I thought, of thanking for what was after all her due. 'Let the Lord bind you all.' And she made to move away, but my uncle said, '*Kanene*, by the way: you said your clan name was *Makowane*?'

'Yes,' she said. 'One hails me thus: "*Makowane, Mathumbu, Masulelo, Sokhela . . .*"'

Before she could finish, exclamations broke out on all sides from the people standing and seated round about. 'Goodness! What people are those, what clan is that, where are you from? Never heard that one before.'

My uncle held up the palm of his hand to her. 'Don't go yet, stay, sister, stay. Let me call my elder brother. I mentioned your clan to him in asking him for the *indaliso*, and at once he said he would speak with you. Say no more about your clan now, keep it for him!' He dashed indoors again, after a while [he] came out, this time walking slowly, accompanying my father who held a pencil and a small sheaf of plain white postcards covered with his handwritten notes.

My father never missed an opportunity to take down rare or unknown clan names, or of checking those he had already collected; he had been at this antiquarian hobby for more than thirty years.

Everyone fell back a little; a teenage boy, on his way past the group and going to the kraal at the far end of the back enclosure, leapt aside to pick up a battered orange box and brought it up to my father who slowly lowered himself on to it and arranged his file of postcards in one hand and said:

'*Kha-utsho, dade*, be good enough to say, then, sister'; it was too urgent a matter to be held up with preliminary greetings. They would follow afterwards, as everyone knew.

The pagan woman again started the recital of her clan names, and there were three more from where she had left off before, *Magidigidi, Mafan'avele . . .* That one made us smile and start to interrupt with v comments, for it meant 'They-who-appear-for-no-apparent-reason'; and when she had repetitiously explained the reason for it until she was satisfied that we understood, there was a further little hold up because my father repeated all of them after her and mistakenly

chanted, ' . . . *Sokhela, Mafan'avele, Magidigidi . . .* ' but the woman stopped him, protesting that he had fouled the order, he should say, '*Sokhela, Magidigidi, Mafan'avele*', and lastly, '*Ntlongontlongo*'.

My father took great pains. At the end he carefully folded up his files and squared them like a card-player, slipped them into his waistcoat pocket, then addressed the entire group:

'You see then, all of you good ladies here today, these clan names and praise names---*zifumaneka nzima! kuba abanye abazazi*---are procured with extreme difficulty! For some do not know them.' He talked solemnly of the passing into oblivion of our nationhood, our traditions, our background as a people, who had travelled from the far north, East Africa; about our Hamitic forefathers with their cattle, always searching for grasslands, and mingling their blood with Bantu and Hottentot and Bushman and who knows what other peoples as they went during those unknown centuries? For decades now he had been trying to gather up what he could of known genealogies and praise verses, which often threw light on the journey and adventures of their owners' group of forebears. In his travels up and down South Africa on educational and political missions, at public gatherings from agricultural shows, athletic sports displays, from concerts to religious gatherings like revival meetings, in chance encounters with strangers on trains and buses, he had carried on enquiries until at last he had published his findings in his book, *Imbumba yama Nyama*. And he told the attentive group:

'That book has galvanized many Xhosa readers into writing and sending me more names, more praise verses. And now, among the many things I am doing in my retirement from Fort Hare, I am working on a further edition and will incorporate the masses of fresh news I have received from people like *these!*' here lifting his hand and pointing to the pagan. Everyone looked at her as if for the first time, and older ladies showered congratulations on her. She gave a most engaging grin on finding herself the centre of an uplifting little scene.

And now, the time having come, my father greeted her formally, which gave her the opportunity to tell him, also formally, how she and hers prayed that the Lord would bind him. My father nodded gravely at each sentence. She spoke at length, expressing deep-seated philosophies about Life and Death, Parenthood and the human condition, with a grace and flow and unselfconsciousness that dumbfounded me. My father acknowledged in simple yet moving words, sitting in his upturned orange box, and wound up the perorations:

‘Well, I am glad it is you, sister, who have come to say those things to us here-at-home, even though it was truly speaking through the prickly pears that you came. Nevertheless we now take it as if you had been with us on that day, since you show us that it was only the difficulty of the dress that prevented you. Would it had not. But this brother-of-mine-here,’ pointing at him, ‘did well to bring you to me. You have spoken to me of your progenitors, names I did not know. But there are hints in these praise names and verses you have given which link with some that I do know . . .’ And he recounted some of the traditions which he thought were linked.

The pagan woman was all smiles now. She had quite lost herself and forgotten daily cares as the splendour of her lineage, her *i-mvelapi*, her *where-from*, as we say, shone in glory before her and before my father, ‘A man who,’ as she put it to the company but indirectly addressing him, ‘was dazzling to her and hers because of his deeds, his fame, illustriousness, and blinding to behold now that he was in so dark a forest (of grief).’

She told him smiling, ‘We are few left of that lineage, that house, of few indeed, father!’ He discussed this decline and decimation with her at some length. Then changing his tone, my father teased her by punning on the praise name ‘*Mafan’ avele*’, about how, decimated though they might be and almost vanished, yet there was that recorded knack of her stock that it might reappear-for-no-apparent-reason, which naturally wound up the interview on a note that

everyone appreciated! And then he said, 'Go then, *Ntlongntlongo*, and the Lord go with you.'

She turned her radiant face away, in a smooth movement, that empty bucket poised on her head, and walked away, her skirts sweeping her heels.

Chapter 5

"Leaving for Ghana"

by

Alfred Hutchinson

My heart sank. Futility beat on me like a high fever. And in the next moment I was very tired. I looked at the newspaper. There was no mistake: we were still out on bail. For a moment I argued with the newspaper. How could we be on bail when the charge had been withdrawn?

Once more the yoke of the trial, which had been temporarily laid off, fell on my shoulders with added weight. The long months of the preparatory examination at the Drill Hall. Endless witnesses. Endless documents. Endless exhibits. Endless words. The shopkeepers, the butchers, the teachers, the nuns . . . who had appeared in the witness box, given evidence and gone their way. A notorious African gangster chief, who had admitted to killing his predecessor, had given his evidence and so had Mgubasi who had been brought out of prison where he was serving a three-year sentence for forgery and who had admitted under cross-examination that he had lived a life of deception and fraud. A security officer from Kenya had talked Mau-Mau in court; a pilot who had been shot down over Korea during the war there had testified to communist brain-washing and indoctrination---and we had wondered what it had to do with us. And Professor Murray, an expert witness for the Crown, had labeled speeches and documents as communistic, and had ended up by labeling an article as communistic which he himself had written a few years before. . . . They had all gone their way and were about the business of their lives. . . .

And then the shift of venue from the Drill Hall in Johannesburg to the "Old Synagogue" in Pretoria. Waking up in the dark and catching an early train from the locations to catch the "treason buses" to Pretoria, and sitting in court. And traveling back and reaching home at midnight. Day after day.

The trial clamped down, bit into me with its harsh discipline of poverty and anxiety and waiting. Sometimes I had felt that we were marooned, numbered and forgotten. That we would grow old in the trial and become nobody's business. And now the Crown had

brought a Polish Roman Catholic priest, an expert on communism, and we should have to sit through the tome of evidence he had written. . . .

I shook my head. It was all a mistake. The newspaper was wrong. Something definite was on the way, something telling us exactly where we stood---that we were in fact free.

"Go now! Go!" said Hazel.

"I'm going. . . ."

"What are you waiting for?"

"I'm going, but . . ."

"We've waited so long. . . . Why don't you go? There's a tide in the affairs of men . . . You have to go now!"

"I'm going. You know I'm going. . . . Let's wait a few days and see. Perhaps . . ."

"Perhaps what? The indictment's been withdrawn, that's what's important. What are you waiting for?"

"You know I'm going. You know I must. Perhaps there'll be a statement . . ."

"The charge has been withdrawn. Go now before they recharge you. . . . While there's still confusion. I know it's the time. I feel it deep down in me."

Hazel stood trembling. She wrung her hands and wandered away turning round sharply. She was almost frantic. I knew what was in her mind: had I suddenly decided to stay after all the schemes for going away?

“You know I’m going,” I said. “You know it couldn’t be otherwise.”

“I’ll get the money. I’ll see if I can get more. And you must go now, today.” The tension fell like a dress to the floor. “And then we shall be together.”

“I haven’t got the papers. The chap didn’t turn up.”

“See him. And go! Go tomorrow then!”

For some time past we had been looking for a road out of the Union. The ports were closed and the Special Branch kept a strict check on the people leaving the country. A “treason suspect” had no chance through the ordinary channels. In 1953 a body of us had left the country by the “backdoor”. The result had been a law making it an offence to leave the Union without a valid passport.

The road, as I saw it, lay north and overland to Ghana. It was along the trail of the thousands of migrant miners from the Rhodesias and Nyasaland. Vusumuzi Make, one of the sixty-one persons discharged, had, upon being banished from his home in Everton, slipped out of the Union dressed as a miner. It was possible that the outlet was now guarded, but with the right papers and luck it could still be used.

I had been trying to find the papers. I had a collection of tax receipts from Northern Rhodesia, Tanganyika and Kenya. People said that no papers were required for leaving the Union, others said they were. And quite by chance I had recently stumbled across someone who said he could supply a document for my travels north for two pounds.

I said I was leaving for Ghana. And the African National Congress made me a delegate to the All-African People’s Conference in Accra. There was still ample time to reach Accra before the commencement of the Conference on the 5th December. Ntsu Mokhehle of Basutoland would be there and we would discuss matters together. For months I

had been getting used to the idea of being away from my friends and the liberation movement. But the sadness of parting fell on me.

I was leaving. I swept with the morning and evening crowds, touching them with the tender hand of parting. I twigged the grubby cheeks of the children playing in the sand of a location street. I almost loved the scarred and barren mine dumps. And New Canada, with its mine lamps futilely burning on the mine lake below the grim tangle of the mine headgear, evoked again the fleeting feeling of some forgotten familiar thing. And I packed them all together along with the splendour of a high veld sunset.

I was leaving and I went to say a silent goodbye to the school where I had been teaching and where I had first met Hazel. The children were sitting in the corridor, in the yard, and some packed three in a desk in the classrooms---learning. After three years the Central Indian High School was still waging a grim battle for existence. It had become a tradition.

The school had been started in 1955 as a protest against the Group Areas Act. Suddenly and without warning the government had shut down Indian high schools in the city in an attempt to force the children to attend the school it had built at Lenasia, twenty-two miles away. The government had argued that once the children went to school in Lenasia the parents would follow. But the Indian community, faced with ruin, steadily boycotted Lenasia and the school.

Michael Harmel, the first principal, had got together a staff---the only of its kind in the country---composed of Indians, Coloureds, Africans and Europeans. Some of the teachers, like the principal himself, Molly Fischer, Mervy Thandray and Duma Nokwe, before he completed his law studies, were banned leaders of the liberation organizations. Later they had had to resign. The Special Branch raided the school but that was as nothing compared with the problems of money, premises and equipment.

Each end of the month had brought the usual flutter among the staff. Would we get paid? And Moosajee, Michael Harmel's successor, wore his end-of-the-month harassed look. Sometimes there was money; more often there was none.

The staff and the students were friends and there was a silent pact of mutual protection. Staff members felt involved in the inter-school scraps between our boys and the near by Johannesburg Indian High School. Once Diza Putini, one of the teachers, was arrested for crossing the railway lines at Braamfontein station. The students made a collection, paid the "admission of guilt" at the police station and returned with the imperturbable Diza. And, like the imperturbable Diza, the students had kept calm when the police arrested him in a classroom on a charge of inciting workers to strike during the election stay-at-home protests.

When I was arrested at school for treason, I was marched away to shouts of "Afrika!" from the students. And it was a great day when some of them came to visit me at the Fort Prison where we were locked up for two weeks. I had made many friends. Some were at the Witwatersrand University, while others had gone to study abroad. The student newspaper *C.I.H.S. News* had featured several times as evidence in the Treason Trial.

I had got arrested and Hazel had come to the school. And during one of the many court adjournments I had visited the school and had found her teaching there.

But now I was leaving. In many ways the years at the Central Indian High School had been among the best in my life. They had also been informative years. For in South Africa the various racial groups live like strangers.

Hazel counted the twenty pounds she had borrowed from a friend into my hands. I counted it slowly and laid it in my wallet beside the document. The pass described me as Alfred Phiri---a Nyasa returning home. My contact said that I should need a permit to cross

Portuguese territory. I could get it in Johannesburg or at Salisbury. I wanted everything completed at the beginning.

"It will take you to Blantyre," Hazel said, meaning the money. "I'll try to bring more when we meet there at the end of the month."

"The train is at 6.45 p.m.?"

"6.45. The African chap kept calling me madam."

Now that I was leaving I was filled with trepidation. Hazel had again opened the map. Far in the north was Blantyre, our rendez-vous, and the width of a continent away was Ghana, our goal. Hazel had written to Ghana for an entry permit but Ghana had refused. She would try again.

"Don't let us ever lose touch. It would be a terrible thing. And don't forget: 'Christmas' means Ghana. 'Baby well' means everything's fine. 'Baby ill' means there's a hitch."

I repeated the code carefully, although I could have recited it in my sleep. There was still length of a morning and an afternoon. My luggage was packed. I would get the Portuguese permit and wait for the evening.

"Goodbye, my dear."

"Goodbye."

Chapter 6

“Arriving in London”

by

Todd Matshikiza

Arrival. The English Channel dressed up in the most beautiful blue and white, the most gorgeous of satins as my family and I flew across towards London Airport. I kissed her, the English Channel. I kissed her each time the jet plane dipped a wing, a nose, a dive to give us a f glimpse of great London where we were heading. I would have kissed her long and lingering if our seats were not the ones on the wings.

I could have kissed the white air hostess too, in Johannesburg. The one who called me to the desk and said, "excuse me, sir, may I show you the seating plan. Here right across the wings are your seats with your family. You will be comfortable. Have a good flight sir." And then she telephoned the Johannesburg Car Hire Company and asked them to send a big, black Cadillac with a white chauffer to take Mr. And Mrs. Matshikiza to the Jan Smuts Airport. Suddenly I loved this white girl. She was dark, with long black hair that seemed to want to be thrown around my neck in a pleasant moment. She was my height, five foot four, and her eyes were long and black and far away from South Africa, just like I have always wanted Continental white women to look for me, especially as I was soon going up in the air. She kept on saying, "Make yourself comfortable, sir."

And I followed her wasp of a waist around the office remembering that yesterday when I was in the same office she had said I want to confirm my booking and this girl with you is she your wife and two piccanins are your children? Yes your booking is here. The passengers leave by bus from here at three tomorrow and you must be on time. I think I said yes, missus.

I kept looking through the window to see if Reggie Rathebe was waiting. He had sacrificed the whole day driving me in his car on that very hurried day. Reggie drove me to Cynthia Whitbank's house. Cynthia is the white woman who saved the piano on which I worked out some of the things in me. I had kept and loved my piano in my Orlando Native Segregated barracks through the riots. She bought my piano.

I had gone to collect the cheque and to say good-bye to her. As she opened the front door of her big, beautiful white house to let me in I suddenly remembered the white papers have been saying black men visit white women in Parktown while their husbands are at work. Before I had time to finish thinking like this, she was putting the cheque into my breast pocket with her beautiful, elegant, expressively talented hands, and I was drinking in her lovely,

delicate face barely one foot from mine in the mind of someone wanting but not daring to say good-bye, farewell, as one does on the brink of a long journey. The buzzing in my head suddenly looked round to see that the large wooden gate facing the front door where we stood was looking gape wide at us. She said, "Bye-bye dear, we'll see you off at Jan Smuts Airport."

Reggie revved up the car and we were off to the bank where the woman had said, "Come tomorrow my boy, I wouldn't serve even King George near closing time."

King George! But that was the land I was going to. I'd be there in a matter of hours. I remembered during the war tinkling the piano at the Windsor Hotel in Queenstown, South Africa. Every school holiday time I earned some money entertaining the English Air Force from School 47. There was a very tall sergeant who lifted me off the piano stool at closing time to say, "Jolly good, jolly good ol' chap. At the end of the war you must come to England." I told him, "I must come there if only to see the King."

And now after all those years through which I'd heard people say "it's not your King it is your King . . ." and all the clothes of that argument . . . my family and I were gliding smoothly over the English Channel. I forgot about the Belgian plane and all of that story, wondered how the English would be. I was cross with the plane's wings for obstructing my bird's-eye view, but then the Johannesburg travel agent had said the only available cabin on the ships was on the rumbling propellers.

Raymond Pitje who had been to England by ship several times had said, "Boy, all Natives are put on the propellers in the ship." That meant throwing overboard the dreams for my children of a long, lovely, lazy holiday at sea. My wife Esmé and I said it's just as well because the South African Special Branch could chase a ship by speed-boat and stop it in mid ocean in case there had been a mistake in giving us passports! They can't stop a plane in mid-ocean. And

anyway we were within swimming distance of the English shore now.

The Air hostess at London Airport called out our names. There were letters of welcome awaiting us at the Airport.

“Mr. And Mrs. Matshikiza!” It was thoroughly astonishing, she was pronouncing the terribly awkward, long, difficult name correctly, with the accent properly on the second syllable. Well,

Chapter 7

“Cauldron in Sophiatown”

by

Bloke Modisane

But I am black, because I am black I was a piece of the ugliness of Sophiatown and a victim of the violence of white South Africa; I became an unwilling agitator trapped in the blackness of my skin, and because I am black I was forced to become a piece of the decisions, a part of black resistance. I wanted to be both black and unconcerned with the games at politics, but a non-committed African is the same black as a committed Native. Intellectually I resisted involvement with political parties, rejected attempts to be drawn into political discussions, yet my physical being became a tool of the decisions of the African National Congress. There was no choice, during riots the police shot their rifles and sten guns at anything which was black.

After every riot there were the usual stories that the police had been provoked beyond human endurance, that in self-defence they had been compelled to open fire at the rioters. I have seen people who had been shot by the police, some I have seen just before they died; seen the glint in their eyes, then the forced, but brave smile and then nothing. I suppose it was brave to die like that, definitely courageous to face police guns with stones in their hands; yet it was so futile. But it happened every time there was a riot. My mind screamed to them against this futility, that theirs was a useless way of dying, but how does one tell a dying man that his death is meaningless? I have never seen a dead policeman.

I have lived through many riots, I have looked upon death too many times. I know the stark horror of South African riots. The police have their excitement and are initiated into manhood; the politicians are

provided with a few more martyrs to hang on their glib tongues, but it is the people in the locations who know the full concentrated meaning of the strikes which the politicians call for in their best platform showmanship.

Such a call came forth in 1951 when the politicians called for a one-day strike on May Day; it was another of those political adventurisms, people were instructed to stay home, away from work, in protest against some legislation. I cannot remember which, possibly the Suppression of Communism Act; it was somehow not explained why I should protest, I was not a Communist, and when I did become a part of the protest I could not explain it to myself, except that the politicians thought I ought to. I doubt if it would have made any difference if they had explained, but I believe a code of etiquette ought to have been considered; if a man is asked to die he deserves the decency of an explanation.

People died in that stay-at-home strike, laid down their lives without question or even a promise for a better tomorrow for their children; there still has to be a national relief fund for the families of these martyrs, and since there is at least one such adventure a year this fund is urgent.

The May Day riots, as I saw them, were the bloodiest on record, even for Sophiatown. I saw it happen, could smell the pungency of death, tasted the salt in my mouth, brushed shoulders with it and stared at it full face, as I had seen it on the battered face of my father; but the canvas was larger and the sight of blood and the taste of death did not revolt me. Rather the sight and the smell filled me with maniacal hatred for the police, something which made me understand why oppressed peoples go on a murder rampage after a successful revolution.

I saw the police rehearsing their roles in the drama of murder unfolding before us; it was a cool, calculated, cold-blooded dress rehearsal. It was around ten in the morning when it all began. The impressive parade began in earnest in Victoria Road spreading along

the area covering Gibson to Good Street; mounted patrols, marching detachments and military convoys in a resplendent show of arms; it was a magnificent sight, an august show, dazzling in military ritual. Brass buttons and military drill never fail to draw a crowd.

We lined the street to watch, with silent awe, the spectral parade, we did not cheer or wave flags; we stood there spell-bound, transfixed as by a stately, slow and solemn funeral train. There was a promise of death and we could sense the horror in that promise, and yet we could not turn our faces aside, turn our backs to it. Then suddenly, as if in fulfillment of that promise, an order was shouted through the loudspeaker. The people were given three minutes to disperse, but the people mumbled and shuffled their three minutes away.

'Disperse the crowds!' the order boomed through the loudspeaker, and the South African police went into the kind of action for which they deserve, and win, medals.

The mounted police steered their horses into the crowds, galloping into men and women, charging into mothers with children strapped on their backs; screaming women and children were running from one horse and baton into another; men were collapsing under the baton wallops, falling to the ground before the galloping horses. I saw a mounted policeman charging in the direction of a woman running for shelter, heard her terrified scream as she fell under the horse, the rider almost falling off his mount from the sheer force of the blow. He had meant to cudgel her but had missed.

I was insane with anger; I shrieked and swore, but was too petrified with fear to move from behind the corrugated-iron fence which girded in our yard. I stood peering over the fence, swearing and afraid. It is inhuman to even suggest that I thought the police were enjoying themselves, like a man at a duck shooting. There were these two mounted contestants racing for a black figure, two polo players swinging together at the ball, both missing the strike, their horses in near collision; swinging the mounts round and charging again. I was ashamed in my coma of cowardice. I wanted to step outside, and

with my bare hands strangle each one of them in turn. But I was afraid.

Then it happened, I mean the action which has caused the death of many people in countless riots; it is not an act of bravery, of reckless courage, nor definitely one of stupidity. It is an action which shows man as a complicated set of responses capable---under normal circumstances---of reactions within a limited range of experiences, but beyond a certain limit of endurance of loosing control of his rationale, shouting like Laertes:

*To hell, allegiance! vows, to the blackest devil!
Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
I dare damnation:---to this point I stand,---
That both the worlds I give to negligence,
Let come what comes; only I'll be revenged. . . .*

I believe that white South Africa---to preserve its privileged existence---is gambling on this very explosive probability, to push the black South African beyond the endurance limit, and then under the justification of self-defence, the preservation of law and order, and in protection of Western civilization, to completely crush the African, to obliterate him from the face of South Africa. They are committed to accomplish this before the Africans can organise themselves into a striking or a retaliatory force. This eagerness can be seen in the streets when the bullies bait an African into a temper.

On that day in May the police succeeded in their efforts; except for a few minor bruises, there was no real danger to them. Someone threw a stone and it bounced off the shoulder of a mounted policeman, then there was another, and another, until the stones seemed to drop from out out of the fleecy, solitary clouds drifting by unconcernedly, as if to emphasise their non-alignment. It seemed the police had not expected to be attacked, for a moment they were open-mouthed, withholding belief, like a bully struck by the local coward. Like clots of sweat panic began gathering on their faces, I saw it mounting in their ranks, the restlessness, the creeping fear. In vain they flayed

their truncheons about, parrying the stones with the butts of their rifles. From behind the fence I threw a stone, my single contribution, unconcerned with its effectiveness. With it I had my say. I returned to my post. I was encouraged to discover they were human after all; the superman cloak had fallen off, stripped of the sense of authority. They started running, even though their bodies may not have moved more than three feet; it was the mind which was running. They were holding their rifles high in the air, scampering about in a confused retreat. They may not have been supermen, but they were not men either; and although their mind was running, the bodies would not follow until they had been ordered to. We were throwing stones at a machine fitted with discipline. It was a victory for us, we had brought out the flaw in the mechanism, the human element of fear.

It was a brief, empty victory, but it was a glorious brief moment, almost worth dying for. The order to open fire disciplined them into juggernauts of death; from that moment on there was no excitement, only death. The rifles and the sten guns were crackling death, spitting at anything which moved---anything black. The police selected their targets at random with persistent accuracy; watching through a crack through the corrugated iron I saw a policeman support himself against a pillar, the muzzle of his rifle panning slowly across and then crack. The shooting, the screaming, the dying, continued for what seemed like the whole day, and the snap staccato of the guns echoed from all around Sophiatown; and the smell and the decay of death spread over the township, over the burning cinders and the smog.

And the night spread its darkness over the darkness of those who had died, over those who huddled behind locked doors, and the women and the children under the beds; but it also brought an uneasy quiet, a respite from dying, a time to count the dead and a time to be angry. The police had retired to the Newlands Police Station presumably for fresh supplies and a deserved rest. Too many of us saw too much death that evening, until we were physically exhausted by the sight of death. And in our anger we prepared and waited for the next encounter. We laid the battleground. We smashed

the bulbs of the electric standards, switching Sophiatown into the darkness which made all things equal.

A small patrol was treading up Gold Street without the shaving of a moon to light their steps, and for once it seemed God was on our side; at least the colour of our skin served us in a way that was purposeful. In the dark the police reacted to footsteps they could not see in their gun sights, and we followed the towering bravery of their course up the street. Then we started the game of nerves. I was in a group detailed to beat out signals on the electric standards, and with a stone I beat out signals on the electric standards, and with a stone I beat out a rhythm signaling the concentration of our forces in Gold Street; the group was assigned to cover the area between Good and Tucker Street. I struck the rhythmic tattoo three times, the sound coming from behind the police. When the patrol reached Victoria Road the signals for attack were sounded, the sharp peals rose from all round the police; we were shouting as the attacking Red Indians did in the films. It was a hideous noise.

We crushed our stones, almost point-blank, at them; they were shooting blind at imaginary targets. The shots were erratic and we pelted them, piling on the pressure from an arsenal which we had stockpiled in the yards all along the street. We shrieked and screamed as the stones harassed them. Darkness had made the contest equal; though the police were at a tactical disadvantage, they had guns. We pelted them until we heard them running down the street towards Main Road, and along their retreat they collided with more stones. Some were knocked down, rising without bothering about their police caps, others dropped their rifles which disappeared into the yards. It made me feel good, and in a sense it restored my masculinity, vindicating the sense of cowardice and shame which I had felt during the day; it made all of us feel proud that we had routed the law enforcement officers of the State. We had struck a blow, not at the police, but against the entire system, and I wished that those who had died could have been looking on at our moment of triumph, perhaps it might have filled them with a sense of

purpose; that perhaps they did not die in vain, that although their death did not win anything, at least they were revenged most thoroughly for their pain.

The next morning---as the police were conducting reprisal raids, under the excuse of rounding up the lawless elements and searching for dangerous weapons, in fact dragging people out of their homes and assaulting them---the white papers carried banner-headline stories describing the remarkable restraint of the police, who in great danger to their person, were forced to open fire on the rioters. There has always been a margin of difference which, because of my limited education, I have been unable to appreciate: the police do not shoot at the Natives, casualties arise following a clash with the police. Reading the account of the riot in the *Rand Daily Mail* the next morning made me feel a great admiration for the police, and if I had not been directly involved in the riots I would have argued the case for the police. It was white justification speaking out. In Sophiatown the figure stood at eighteen Africans dead; one did not have to look for the casualty list of the police, and even when the newspapers reported the dangerous situation of the police being fired at by the Natives, the police were never hit; either the police wore bullet proofing or the Africans were using water pistols.

The leader pages of the newspapers usually carried editorials commending the police and blaming the rioting on the lawless element, the irresponsible tsotsis; this was all that white South African required to satisfy its conscience, to rationalize the death of eighteen people.

Blame it on the tsotsis, the parasitic layabouts who prey on both the whites and the responsible law-abiding Africans; blame it on the African National Congress, the irresponsible Communist agitators in the Congress; blame it on those who died; blame it on the overcrowding conditions of the slums. Then the responsible leaders in the African National Congress, intent on demonstrating their moderation, would dissociate themselves and the Congress from the rioting, from the violence, disowning those who had died; the

Congress leaders would re-emphasise: 'Our struggle is a non-violent one.'

When everybody has blamed it on somebody else---and the more charitable have blamed it on history---the police would feel justified to launch the reprisal raids; hundreds of Africans would be rounded up on infringements of the Pass regulations and other minor technicalities. Of course the papers will explain that the raids are a new and vigorous police drive against u illegal firearms and illicit brews; just routine raids aimed at protecting the Africans against the tsotsis.

The routine raids are routine only in their consistency of vengeance and brutality, but the hooliganism of the police is something which never gets into the newspapers; except for the very enthusiastic and unfortunate police constable who occasionally finds himself in court facing an assault charge brought against him by an African. But here, too, the free and courageous white press is---especially on the matters of colour---more white than free and courageous; and the white-owned black press is more yellow than black.

I have found the reprisal raids more terrifying than the actual riots. They do not mourn at the home of a coward, says an African proverb; I am either a coward or very careful. I have been stabbed only once, and it was a flesh wound. I have not been hit by a police bullet nor battered by police batons, and for someone born in Sophiatown that is a record. It is unbelievable that I have never been arrested for any crime or contravention of any of the thousands of Pass Regulations for which more than a million Africans are imprisoned each year, I suppose luck has had something to do with it, but I did spend a week-end in a place of detention for juvenile delinquents.

There is no set prescriptions for safety in a reprisal raid; during the reprisal raids following the 'Stay-at-Home' campaign of 1958, I escaped police assault by the providence of chance. In April 1958, the white electorate went to the polls to decide between the uncompromising apartheid policy of the Nationalist Government

and the watered-down segregation policy of the United Party, with its tongue-in-cheek policy of integration. The Congress Alliance decided on a campaign of mass withholding of African labour, a protest against the policies of both white parties. The Congress Alliance hoped the stay-at-home, if successful, would be a threat to the country's economic stability and shock the country into a recognition of the existence and the political demands of twelve million non-white races who are denied the vote.

The pro-United Party English press used the campaign as a bogey to frighten the voters into returning their cancerous United Party; much play was made of its moderate policy of integration (possible), partnership (ultimate) and trusteeship (permanent)---eloquent quibbles for baasskap and apartheid. The English press, the United Party and other hopefuls actually believed this would be the effect. I heard argument that under the United Party Government there would be a 'steady' return to better black-white relations. Integration was the new toy. Some Africanists saw in the campaign another Communist adventure. Mr. Potlako Leballo said: 'We are against the campaign because it's left-wing inspired.' Fire-eating Joasia Madzynya, the Alexandra Township strong man, openly defied Albert Luthuli's call for the branches to endorse the campaign; but in spite of the dissensions Sophiatown responded to a greater extent than the other areas, and therefore suffered the most.

On the first day of the stay-at-home the police were omnipresent, armed with the routine paraphernalia, but acted---surprisingly---with patience and restraint. Their commanding officer must have read to them the editorial in the *Sunday Times*: 'The police will earn high praise if, by their patience and restraint, they succeed in carrying out their duty with a minimum of force.'

The police did just that, until sunset.

By sunset the Africans who had sneaked off to work were assaulted by pickets as they got off the buses. This grave the police the justification they needed to throw off their 'patience and restraint'.

The police interpretation of the situation was simple: These Natives are molesting law-abiding Africans, let's go get them. But since a law-abiding African is as black as a lawless Native, the police were liberal in their punitive action; every Native in the streets was a Congress agitator interfering with the rights of law-abiding Africans, so every African on the streets was assaulted.

The police hooliganism sparked off a few minor clashes at various points in Sophiatown; nothing serious, the casualty list was moderate. But the following morning it was very serious. The uniformed hooligans came in lorry loads, charging into the yards and houses dragging out people---who because they had not gone to work were therefore A. N. C. agitators---assaulting and throwing them into the kwela-kwelas. It was dangerous to be taunted out in the streets, the home---man's proverbial castle---was the most dangerous place to be trapped in; no place was safe. By nine o'clock that morning there was not a single man in Sophiatown; they had run into the surrounding white areas, disappearing behind the kopie outside Sophiatown into Linden.

I was caught in the centre of the vengeance of the police, not because I was black and lived in Sophiatown, but because I was a working journalist on *Golden City Post*. Six journalists and photographers were assigned to cover Sophiatown for the three days of the stay-at-home, and because the newspaper---as a matter of commercial policy---traded in battered corpses, fractured skulls, rape, murder, sex perversions and salacious confessions, our assignment was to bring back photographs of the police in action. We had been trained to a point of being disappointed if nothing dramatic happened. We followed the police vans round Sophiatown with cameras cocked, note books and cheap biros ready; every time the police rushed a man was clicked our shutters and Peter Magubane, famous for his reckless chances and outstanding photographs, abandoned the security of the press car for greater mobility with his camera.

Understandably the police did not wish to be identified from newspaper photographs bashing in skulls of agitators, so twice they

warned Peter Magubane off, shouting at us to 'Fock off'. But we dared not report back to the office without scoop pictures of bleeding heads; we spent hours following the police and being warned off and we were desperate for a d front-page picture. We decided to divide into three parties and because I took my own photographs I was left on my own at Ray Street. Without the protection of the press car I rated the same as any African on the streets, which means I had to keep a respectable distance from the police and still bring back reasonable pictures. A reporter of the *Bantu World* who was alone and on g foot was later found with his head covered with blood after being battered by the police. I was not Peter Magubane. Nothing was happening around Ray Street, an except for an occasional excitement and average pictures of police jumping out of the vans and chasing an African into a yard, it was a dead beat. After an hour of uneventfulness I decided to move towards the bus terminus where most of the action was concentrated. At the corner of Meyer Street the police dropped out of the kwela-kwela to chase a man u in my direction; there was little point in risking assault for a photograph of a police chase, the office files are filled with them. I disappeared into the nearest yard, c scaled a fence into Gibson Street, across the street into another yard, over the fence into Miller and on to Tucker Street and one more yard and fence and I was home.

There was a crucial moment when the police stormed into the yard where I lived and discovered me reloading my camera, but before they could pounce on me I confronted them with my press card, the impressive police seal and the signature of the deputy commissioner of police saved me from the storm troopers of law and order.

That evening we made a check of the hospitals, there were the usual casualties with police gun wounds, fractured skulls and broken limbs.

Then a rumour came through that the campaign was called off, it was reported that the announcement had been made over the radio, that it had been called off by Oliver Tambo; some said that the full text of the announcement would be in the morning papers. And because it

came from those sources of mass communications controlled by the whites, the signal was dismissed as white propaganda intended at breaking the strike. The people of Sophiatown had a feeling of distrust towards the message, but it was authentic. It had been signed by the National Secretary of the African National Congress. The signal had annoyed the youth of Sophiatown who were shooting questions at me: What right had Oliver Tambo to sign that document? I was sympathetic with their cause. In his comfortable home, away from the police batons and the guns, he had arrogated to himself the pretension to sign such a document; people were dying in Sophiatown when he was signing that document. I supported the view that the campaign should have been allowed to continue for the scheduled three days, whatever the consequences, which the A. N. C. should have realised before calling the strike.

Another campaign had failed, yet another blot on the African's determination for national liberation; another failure for the same reason the others before had failed. It was a misadventure in the political game played by amateurs.

The same editorial in the *Sunday Times* of the week-end before the campaign had stressed that 'it will be of immense benefit to race relations, and to the increasingly sympathetic interest which many Europeans in commerce and industry are taking in the problems of the urban Native workers, if it (the campaign) is conducted in a strictly orderly manner and is brought to an end as quickly as possible without serious incidents.'

Because of the stay-at-home campaign the Nationalist Government imposed a ban on all meetings and gatherings at which more than ten Natives were present; the ban remained enforced long after the usefulness of it had passed, and was not lifted 'as soon as possible'.

Chapter 8

The Cell

by

Ruth First

For the first fifty-six days of my detention in solitary I changed from a mainly vertical creature to a mainly horizontal creature. A black iron bedstead became my world. It was too cold to sit, so I lay extended on the bed, trying to measure the hours, the days and the weeks, yet

pretending to myself that I was not. The mattress was lumpy; the grey prison blankets were heavy as tarpaulins and smelt of mouldy potatoes. I learned to ignore the smell and to wriggle round the bumps in the mattress. Seen from the door the cell had been catacomb-like, claustrophobic. Concrete-cold. Without the naked electric bulb burning, a single yellow eye, in the centre of the ceiling, the cell would have been totally black; the bulb illuminated the grey dirt on the walls which were painted black two-thirds of the way up. The remaining third of the cell wall had been white once; the dust was a dirty film over the original surface. The window, high in the wall above the head of the bedstead, triple thick---barred, barred again and meshed---with sticky black soot on top of all three protective layers, was a closing, not an opening. Three paces from the door and I was already at the bed.

Left in that cell long enough, I feared to become one of those colourless insects that slither under a world of flat, grey stones, away from the sky and the sunlight, the grass and people. On the iron bedstead it was like being closed inside a matchbox. A tight fit, lying on my bed, I felt I should keep my arms straight at my sides in cramped, stretched-straight orderliness. Yet the bed was my privacy, my retreat, and could be my secret life. On the bed I felt in control I of the cell. I did not need to survey it; I could ignore it, and concentrate on making myself comfortable. I would sleep, as long as I liked, without fear of interruption. I would think, without diversion. I would wait to see what happened, from the comfort of my bed.

Yet, not an hour after I was lodged in the cell, I found myself forced to do what storybook prisoners do: pace the length and breadth of the cell. Or tried, for there was not room enough to pace. The bed took up almost the entire length of the cell, and in the space remaining between it and the wall was a small protruding shelf. I could not walk round the cell, I could not even cross it. To measure its eight feet by six, I had to walk the length alongside the bed and the shelf, and then, holding my shoe in my hand, crawl under the bed to measure out the breadth. It seemed important to be accurate. Someone might ask me one day---when?---the size of the cell. The

measuring done, I retreated to the bed. There were four main positions to take up: back, stomach, either side, and then variations, with legs stretched out or curled up. In a long night a shift in position had to be as adventurous as a walk. When my knees were curled up they lay level with a pin-scratched scrawl on the wall: *'I am here for murdering my baby. I'm 14 years.'* The wardresses told me they remembered that girl. They were vague about the authors of the other wall scribbles. *'Magda Loves Vincent for Ever'* appeared several times in devotedly persistent proclamation. Others conveyed the same sentiment but with lewd words and too-graphic illustrations, and in between the obscenities on the wall crawled the hearts and cupid's arrows. The women prisoners of the Sharpeville Emergency had left their mark in the *'Mayibuye I' Afrika'* [Let Africa Come Back] slogan still faintly visible. It was better not to look at the concrete walls, but even when I closed my eyes and sank deeper into the warmth of the bed, there were other reminders of the cell. The doors throughout the police station were heavy steel. They clanged as they were dragged to, and the reverberation hammered through my neck and shoulders, so that in my neck fibres I felt the echo down the passage, up the stairs, round the rest of the double-story police station. The doors had no inside handles and these clanging doors without handles became, more than the barred window, more than the concrete cell walls, the humiliating reminder of incarceration, like the straight-jacket must be in his lucid moments to the violent inmate of an asylum.

Six hours before my first view of the cell, I had come out of the main reading-room of the University library. The project that week was how to choose atlases in stocking a library, and in my hand was a sheaf of newly scribbled notes:

pre-1961 atlases almost as obsolete for practical usage as a 1920 road map---evaluate frequency and thoroughness of revision, examine speciality maps, e. g. distribution of resources and population---look for detail plus legibility---check consistency of scale in maps of different areas---indexes---explanations of technical and cartographic terms, etc. etc.

The librarianship course was an attempt to train for a new profession. My newest set of bans prohibited me from writing, from compiling any material for publication, from entering newspaper premises. Fifteen years of journalism had come to an end. I had worked for five publications and each had, in turn, been banned or driven out of existence by the Nationalist Government. There was no paper left in South Africa that would employ me, or could, without itself being an accomplice in the contravention of ministerial orders. So I had turned from interviewing ejected farm squatters, probing labour conditions and wages on gold mines, reporting strikes and political campaigns, to learning reference methods, cataloguing and classification of books, and I was finding the shelves poor substitutes for the people and the pace that had made up our newspaper life.

The two stiff men walked up.

'We are from the police.'

'Yes, I know.'

'Come with us, please. Colonel Klindt wants to see you.'

'Am I under arrest?'

'Yes.'

'What law?'

'Ninety Days,' they said.

Somehow, in the library as I packed up the reference books on my table, I managed to slip out of my handbag and under a pile of lecture notes the note delivered to me from D. that morning. It had suggested a new meeting-place where we could talk. The place was 'clean' and unknown, D. had written. He would be there for a few days.

The two detectives ranged themselves on either side of me and we walked out of the University grounds. An Indian student looked at the escort and shouted: 'Is it all right?' I shook my head vigorously and he made a dash in the direction of a public telephone booth: there might be time to catch the late afternoon edition of the newspaper, and Ninety-Day detentions were 'news'.

The raid on our house lasted some hours. It was worse than the others, of previous years. Some had been mere formalities, incidents in the general police drive against 'agitators'; at the end of the 1956 raid, frightening and widespread as it was, there had been the prospect of a trial, albeit for treason. I tried to put firmly out of my mind the faces of the children as I was driven away. Shawn had fled into the garden so that L would not see her cry. Squashed on the front seat beside two burly detectives, with three others of rugby build on the back seat, I determined to show nothing of my apprehension at the prospect of solitary confinement, and yet I lashed myself for my carelessness. Under a pile of the *New Statesman* had been a single, forgotten copy of *Fighting Talk*, overlooked in the last clean-up in our house of banned publications. Possession of *Fighting Talk*, which I had edited for nine years, was punishable by imprisonment for a minimum of one year. Immediately, indefinite confinement for interrogation was what I had to grapple with. I was going into isolation to face a police probe, knowing that even if I held out and they could pin no charge on me, I had convicted myself by carelessness in not clearing my house of illegal literature: this thought became a dragging leaden guilt from then on.

The five police roughs joked in Afrikaans on the ride that led to Marshall Square police Station. Only once did they direct themselves to me: 'We know lots,' one said. 'We know everything. You have only yourself to blame for this. We know. . . .'

It was about six in the afternoon when we reached the police station. The largest of my escorts carried my suitcase into the '*Europeans Only*' entrance. As he reached the charge office doorway he looked upwards 'Bye-bye, blue sky,' he said, and chuckled at his joke.

'Ninety days,' this Security Branch [Secret Police] man told the policemen behind the counter.

'*Skud haar*' [Give her a good shake-up] the policeman in charge told the wardress.

When we came back from her office to the charge office, all three looked scornfully at my suitcase. 'You can't take this, or that, or this,' and the clothing was piled on the counter in a prohibited heap. A set of sheets was allowed in, a small pillow, a towel, a pair of pyjamas, and a dressing gown. 'Not the belt!' the policeman barked at the dressing gown, and the belt was hauled out from the loops. 'No plastic bags.' He pounced on the cotton-wool and sprawled it on the counter like the innards of some hygienic giant caterpillar. No pencil. No necklace. No snail scissors. No book. *The Chaterhouse of Parma* joined bottles of contraband brandy and dagga [marijuana] in the police store-room.

I had been in the women's cells of Marshall Square once before, at the start of the 1956 Treason Trial, but the geography of the station was still bewildering. The corridors and court-yards we passed through were deserted. The murky passage led into a murkier cell. The cell door banged shut, and two more after it. There was only the bed to move towards.

What did They know? Had someone talked? Would their questions give me any clue? How could I parry the interrogation sessions to find out what I wanted to know, without giving them the impression that I was resolutely determined to tell them nothing? If I was truculent and delivered a flat refusal to talk to them at the very first session, they would try no questions at all, and I would glean nothing of the nature of their inquiry. I had to find a way not to answer questions, but without saying explicitly to my interrogators, 'I won't tell you anything'.

Calm but sleepless, I lay for hours on my bed, moving my spine and legs round the bumps on the mattress, and trying to plan for my first interrogation session. Would I be able to tell from the first questions whether they knew I had been at Rivonia?* Had I been taken in on

* One month before my arrest, in July 1963, Security Police arrested Nelson Mandela and other political leaders in a raid on a house in the Johannesburg

general suspicion of having been too long in the Congress movement, on freedom newspapers, mixing with Mandela and Sisulu, Kathrada and Govan Mbeki, who had been arrested at Rivonia, not to know something? Was it that the Security Branch was beside itself with rage that Joe had left the country---by coincidence one month before the fateful raid on Rivonia? Was I expected to throw light on why Joe had gone, on where he had gone? Had I been tailed to an illegal meeting? Had the police tumbled on documents typed on my typewriter, in a place where other revealing material had been found?

Or was I being held by the Security Branch not for interrogation at all, but because police investigations had led to me and I was being held in preparation for prosecution and to prevent me from getting away before the police were d ready to swoop with a charge? At the first interrogation session, I decided, I would insist on saying nothing until I knew whether a charge was to be preferred against me. If I were asked whether I was willing to answer questions, I would say that I could not possibly know until I was given a warning about any impending prosecution. The Ninety-Day Law could be all things to all police. It could be used to extort confessions from a prisoner, and even if the confession could not---at the state of the law then---be used in court, it would be reassurance to the Security Branch that its suspicions were confirmed, and a signal to proceed with a charge. My knowledge of the law was hazy, culled from years as a lawyer's wife only, and from my own experience of the police as a political organizer and journalist. Persons under arrest were entitled to the help of a lawyer in facing police questioning. If they would permit me no legal aid, I would tell them, whenever they came, that I would have to do the best I could helping myself. So I could not possibly answer any questions till I knew if the police were in the process of

suburb of Rivonia. That house was used as the underground headquarters of the freedom struggle headed by the African National Congress. In what subsequently became known as the Rivonia Trial, Mandela and his associates were sentenced to terms of life imprisonment for directing sabotage and planning the armed overthrow of the South African Government.

collecting evidence against me. Nor, for that matter, I decided to tell them, would I say that I would not answer questions. After all, how did I know that, until I knew what the questions were. If they would tell me the questions I would be able to be in a better position to know what I would do. This cat-and-mouse game could go on for a limited period, I knew, but it was worth playing until I found out how the interrogation sessions were conducted, and whether there was any possibility that I might learn something of the state of police information. If they tired of the game, or saw through it---and this should not be difficult---I had lost nothing. Time was on their side anyway. If they showed their hand and revealed by intention or accident what they knew about my activities, I would have told them nothing, and I would be doubly warned to admit nothing. If fairly soon I was to be taken to court I would consider then, with the help of a lawyer, I hoped, the weight of the evidence against me. There was just a chance they might let slip some information, and even a chance---though it seemed remote the first night in the cell---that I might be able to pass it on to the Outside, to warn those still free.

As I dropped off to sleep the remembrance of that copy of *Fighting Talk* rose again. If the best happened I would be released because there was no evidence against me . . . and I would have withstood the pressure to answer questions . . . but I would be brought to court and taken into prison for having one copy of a magazine behind the bottom shelf of a bookcase. How untidy! It would not make impressive reading in a news report.

I slept only to wake again. My ears knocked with the noise of a police station in operation. The cell was abandoned in isolation, yet suspended in a cacophony of noise. I lay in the midst of clamour but could see nothing. Accelerators raced, exhaust pipes roared, car doors banged, there were clipped shouted commands of authority. And the silence only of prisoners in intimidated subservience. It was Friday night, police raid night. Pickup vans and *kwela-kwelas**

* The African name for pick-up vans. '*Kwela*' means 'jump', and this is the instruction that police shout at arrested Africans.

policemen in uniform, detectives in plain clothes were combing locations and hostels, backyards and shebeens [households that sold alcohol] to clean the city of 'crime', and the doors of Marshall Square stood wide open to receive the haul of the dragnet.

Suddenly the noise came from the other side of the bed. Doors leading to other doors were opened, then one only feet away from mine, and I had for a neighbour, across the corridor, an unseen disembodied creature who swore like a crow with delirium tremens.

'Water, water. *Ek wil water kry*. For the love of God, give me water.'

A violent retching, more shrieks for water, water. I caught the alcoholic parch and longed for water.

Twice again I was jerked awake by the rattle of doors to find the wardress standing in my doorway. She was on inspection, doing a routine count of the prisoners, 'Don't you ever sleep?' she asked.

Suddenly the door rattled open and a new wardress stared in. A tin dish appeared, on it a hard-boiled egg, two doorsteps of bread, and coffee in a jam-tin mug. Minutes later the crow was retreating down the passage. The wardress led me out of my cell, past a second solitary one, into the large dormitory cell which was divided by a half-wall from a cold water basin and a lavatory without a seat. I washed in cold-water basin and half a bucket of hot, put on my pyjamas and dressing-gown, was led out again into my little cell, and climbed back into bed. My first day in the police station had begun.

I felt ill-equipped, tearful. I had no clothes. No daily dose of gland tablets (for a thyroid deficiency). My confiscated red suitcase, carefully packed from the accumulated experience of so many of us who had been arrested before, was the only thing, apart from me, that belonged at home, and in the suitcase were the comforts that could help me dismiss police station uniformity and a squalor. I sat cross-legged on the bed, huddled against the cold, hang-dog sorry for myself.

The door clanged open and a lopsided gnome-like man said he was the Station Commandant. 'Any complaints?' he asked. This was the formula of the daily inspection rounds. I took the invitation. I objected to being locked up without charge, without trial, in solitary. The Commandant made it clear by his wooden silence that I was talking to the wrong man. The catalogue of complaints was for the record, I had decided. I would allow no prison or police official to get the impression that I accepted my detention. But the end of the recital that first morning tailed off on a plaintive note . . . 'and I've got none of my things . . . I want my suitcase, my clothes, my medicine. . . .'

'Where's her suitcase?' the Commandant demanded of the wardress, who passed the query on to the cell warder.

'Bring it. All of it. Every single thing.'

The cell warder went off at the double. Red suitcase appeared in the doorway, tied up with pink tape. The Station Commandant started to finger through it, then recoiled when he touched the underwear.

'She can have the lot' he said.

The wardress, peering over his sloped left shoulder at the cosmetics, said shrilly: 'She can'y have bottles. . . . The bottles . . . we can't have bottles in the cells.'

The Commandant rounded on her. One person would make the decisions, he told her. He had decided.

The cell warder retrieved the pink tape and the suitcase stayed behind the cell. Nestling in it were an eyebrow tweezer, a hand mirror, a needle and cotton, my wrist-watch, all prohibited articles. And glass bottles, whose presence made the wardress more nervous than any other imagined contravention of the regulations, for it was a strict rule that nothing of glass should be allowed in the cells. I was later to find out why.

Throughout my stay in Marshall Square my suitcase was the difference between me and the casual prisoners. I lived in the cells; they were in transit. I had equipment, reserves. Their lipsticks were taken from them, and their combs, to be restored only when they were fetched to appear before a magistrate in court. The casuals were booked in from the police van in the clothes they had worn when arrested, and if they wanted a clean blouse they had to plead with the wardress to get the cell warden to telephone a relative. I could go to my suitcase. I had supplies. I was a long-termer in the cells.

There was a curious comfort about the first day. I had won my battle for the suitcase. I had made up my mind how I would try handling the Security Branch. Aloneness and idleness would be an unutterably prolonged bore, but it was early to worry about that, and for as long as I could, I would draw satisfaction from the time I had, at last, to think! Uninterruptedly, undistracted by the commands of daily living and working. The wardress on the afternoon shift seemed surprised I was taking it so quietly. 'You're catching up on your sleep,' she said. 'But soon the time will drag.'

I tried to translate noises into police station geography. There were three separate sets of rattlings before the wardress stood in my open doorway: there was a door that seemed to lead from the main part of the police station into the women's cells; about eight paces after that there was a door dividing the women's cells from a courtyard; and then there was my cell door. When I heard the first rattle of keys I could expect another two and the lapse of about fourteen paces before I lay in police view. Unless I was fast asleep I could not be pounced upon without warning. However quietly the wardress put the keys in the locks she could not hide her entry. The keys were too massive, the locks too stiff, the steel too ringing-loud. When I saw it I was transfixed by the largest of the keys, the one that opened the first door. Four and a half inches long, yet when I heard its rattle in the lock it seemed to grow in my mind's eye to the size of a poker.

The electric light burned constantly, day and night, but I could tell by the new wardress when it was a new night shift. As on the previous night I rehearsed again the imaginary first confrontation with the Security Branch. I was warming to my role in the encounter and was becoming master of the ambiguous and evasive reply to the questions I invented for my unseen interrogators.

I pushed out of my head a jumble of ideas and thoughts of people, with a deliberate resolve to think slowly, about one thing at a time, and to store up as much as I could for future days and nights. I postponed thinking about how I would try to pass the time. That, too, would be a subject for future hours. This was a time of emergency, and called for strict rationing.

I dropped off to sleep. There were the nightly inspections, the noisy intake of two drunks.

Right overheard, as though someone in the cell above had measured the spot where my head lay, a bottle broke sharply, and splintered on the concrete floor.

The next day was Sunday, but pandemonium. The cell door was flung open and the wardress, the cell warden, and a third policeman stared in, disbelievingly, I thought. There was prolonged shouting from the guts of the station, repeated banging of doors overhead. The Station Commandant had the door flung open a half-hour before the usual inspection. He said the usual 'Any complaints?' formula but was out of the cell before he could reply to my 'What about exercise?' The wardresses were tight-lipped, on edge. A fever seemed to rage in the working part of the police station, and the raised temperature flowed out to the prisoners lying in their cells.

There were four instead of two inspections that night. Trying to reconstruct the noises of the night hours I realized that there must have been an admission into the women's cells, and someone was in the cell opposite me, for there were two mugs of coffee in the hands of the morning shift wardress.

Unexpectedly a high fastidious voice said 'I am due to menstruate, wardress, how do I get some cotton-wool?'

'Anne-Marie!' I shouted. 'Anne-Marie . . . you here! Wardress, I've got cotton-wool.'

The cell doors opened long enough for me to pass out the cotton-wool and to catch a glimpse of Anne-Marie Wolpe---wife of our good friend Harold---haggard and drawn, perched on her high bed.

If Anne-Marie had been taken, Harold must have got safely away. The escape had come off, I decided. Thirty six hours before I had gone into Marshall Square a breakout of the cells was being planned . . .

Lying on his stomach on the floor of the upstairs Ninety-Day detainee Chiba had caught a fleeting glimpse of shapes and sizes under the crack in his door.

'Who's got ginger hair?' he called to Arthur Goldreich, who had played the role of flamboyant artist turned country squire by living in the Rivonia house and providing the front for the secret political work that went on in the outbuildings.

It was Harold Wolpe, brought in between policemen, in his red dyed hair and beard, caught at the Bechuanaland border where his escape bid had floundered, and locked up in Marshall Square with nightmarish fears over fingerprints and typewriters and sheets of paper in his handwriting.

'What've you done about an escape?' Harold asked Arthur in their first stolen conversation.

The two of them, and Indian Youth Congress activists Jassat and Moise Moolla next door, used visits to the bathroom to haul themselves to the bars of the high w. c. window and count bricks to estimate the drop from the roof to wall, to the thick netting over the quadrangle of the women's jail, and down to the ground outside. Messages were smuggled out, and hacksaw

blades smuggled in. Sawing sessions were conducted under cover of loud whistling and repeated pullings of the lavatory chain. Three minutes of sawing and the blades were blunt on the bars of tempered prison steel. Hacksaw blades continued to be inveigled into the cells, blades of every shape and size, the sawing continued, but the bars stood firm. It was young Mosie, with his charm, whom the young warder could not resist, and when Mosie broached the matter of an escape the policeman said he would cooperate as long as it would not appear that he had been an accomplice.

'No four men can overpower me, I'm as strong as a lion,' the warder said, so Arthur was instructed to practice blows with an iron bar and, all escape day, his stomach like jelly, he practiced hitting his pillow with a bar, so as not to kill.

That night the four stuffed their beds with blanket rolls, put on their overcoats and stood waiting.

But four drunken drivers were being booked in downstairs and Operation Escape had to take second place to their examination by the district surgeon and the laboured issue of prisoner's property receipts to the four swaying new inmates of the cells.

The young warder appeared with the keys.

'Okay, Go!' he said, and stopped Arthur from trying a reluctant blow on his head. He would bang his own head against the wall, he had decided. Arthur walked rapidly out of his cell and knocked over a lemonade bottle. The four tiptoed out. On the corner of Main and Sauer Streets three bright lights spluttered and went out, with accomplice timing. The hacksaw blades were turfed into a rubbish bin in the courtyard lined with empty Volkswagens. The four split up. Mosie and Jassat walked off towards the Indian residential area of Fordsburg; Arthur and Harold skirted the block desperately looking for the car that had not come. Two white down-and-outs tried to pick a fight with them. Arthur was piddling in a dark corner when the car eventually picked them up.

'Four 90-day Men Escape' said the newspaper headlines. 'Wives Held for Questioning.' A massive police search for the fugitives followed. 'Goldreich, described as the Security Branch's major detainee, is still on the run. Police

Patrols are at work throughout the land.' The police are being swamped with calls about the escapers.'

'The Net Closes In'. 'A price of R1,000 is on the head of each escaper. Indian homes in the country districts of the Transvaal and homes and clubs in Johannesburg are being searched for the four.' 'Have you seen two European men and two Indian men walking together?' plain-clothes detectives were asking. Descriptions of the four were broadcast over the radio every twenty minutes at the climax of the manhunt, and all whites were enjoined to take part in the chase.

For eleven days Arthur and Harold lived in darkness at a deserted house, eating raw bacon because the cooking made a sizzling noise; unable to use a heater because it gave off a red glow. The creak of a floorboard sounded, to their ears, like a revolver shot through the neighborhood. By five o'clock each evening, dusk and a deep depression set in. 'Like being back in that cell,' said Harold.

Before each decision to act, tension mounted to breaking point, but in movement and action there was relief. From one hiding place to another, and then another. From cover in Johannesburg across the border into Swaziland. For six hours the two lay together under a tarpaulin. Then they could stretch, and move, stand up, and talk, and shout to the winds.

'Goldreich and Wolpe Escape to Francistown' said the newspaper of 28 August. Minister Vorster said, 'They were two of our Biggest Fish'. They had been flown to Swaziland dressed as priests.

In Francistown, Bechuanaland, at 4:15 one morning a knock on the window woke Goldreich: 'We've come to tell you your plane's been blown up.' The second chartered plane landed in Elizabethville with ten minutes' fuel to spare. . . . In the night club black and white jived together to the blare of the band.

In Marshall Square a new prisoner made his appearance in the men's exercise yard: a dimpled policeman, but stripped of his uniform.

A few hours after the escape, before he had time to claim his reward money, Johannes Arnoldus Greeff, only recently out of the Pretoria training depot, broke down and confessed.

On his nineteenth birthday, Greeff's bid for bail was argued in court, and turned down, so the young policeman went back into the cells.

Dr. Percy Yutar, it was obvious to all who encountered him during those months, coveted the job of State Prosecutor in the forthcoming Rivonia Trial. In an admiring circle of Security Branch detectives he was busy in the offices of The Grays, Security Branch headquarters in Johannesburg, poring over documents seized in police raids, and scrutinizing the recorded results of B Ninety-Day detention victims. The Rivonia Trial was still some months off: the trial of Constable Johannes Arnoldus Greeff could be turned into a curtain raiser.

Greeff was brought to trial on two charges: bribery and assisting four men to escape. His motive was really simple. He had needed a pair of new shoes, cash to pay for motor car repairs, more cash still. Half way through the trial he changed his plea to guilty. The Marshall Square staffs wet to court to give evidence. After one policeman had stepped down d from the witness box, he looked across at the dock where Greeff stood, wearing a nervous smile throughout the trial, and winked at him. During court adjournments several policemen spoke to Greeff, the Press reports noticed, and gave him the thumbs up sign of encouragement. But at his home in Rustenburg his mother locked away photographs of him. He had 'brought disgrace to the family,' she said. 'He has done something dishonourable.'

Dr. Yutar said it was far more serious than that. This was a case of a young policeman 'fallen to the evil machinations of traitors who plotted a violent and hellish revolution in the country, planned on a military basis'. The State had a cast iron case against those seized in the Rivonia raid, and their accomplices, now being rounded up. These persons would be brought to trial in time, the time of the Security Branch. Meanwhile Greeff was sentenced to six years' imprisonment.

Chapter 9

Reflections

by

Albie Sachs

Though I note with regret that I am not as strong as my heroes, I am not unduly put out by the fact that the relationships I am building with my captors involve some measure of compromise on my part. At all times I keep my head up high, and must appear to the police to be remarkably buoyant. Behave like a worm and you will be treated like a worm, I tell myself. So I never crawl or abase myself to them. What does worry me is how the other political prisoners might view my chattiness with the police. My primary loyalty is to my co-prisoners and even though I am never able to communicate with them, I know that my conduct and demeanour becomes known to

them just as theirs eventually becomes known to me. I am very anxious to avoid any appearance of being favoured because of my white skin.

If I could have spoken to them I would have said: Yes, it's true that the police converse with me at times in a way they never would with a non-White, and it's true that at last they've given me clean blankets, and it's true that they always want to let me have the big yard for exercise. But when I speak to them and make jokes, it's not only for myself, it's for all of us. It softens the atmosphere in the whole prison, and it shows them that we are bigger and more tolerant than they, that we can take it with a better grace than that with which they can dish it out. And note, I leave the blankets outside in the morning so that you can see them and ask for equality of treatment—I can be a lever to prise out better conditions for all of us. As for the exercise, well, you must have seen how I voluntarily go to the small yard so that you can have the big one. The choice of yards is an infliction rather than a blessing for it means I naturally always exercise it in favour of the small yard so that I have less than my share of the big yard. The only value to me of having the choice is that I can make this solidarity gesture to you. Of course, I am favoured because of my white skin, and because of my standing as an advocate, but the favours are extended to all. Thus you all share in the extra food, you also get those few minutes added to exercise time, and when they come to switch off my light at a fixed hour, instead of whenever convenient to them, they switch yours off too. None of these extras came to me automatically—I had to push hard to get them.

There are many problems which beset a White person who joins in the non-White emancipatory movement. They arise from the fact that while he struggles against racial privilege, in his daily life he enjoys many of the amenities denied to non-Whites. This conflict pursues him even into the depths of prison and, when he is in a state of extreme loneliness, can be the source of considerable pain to him,

especially as he will be virtually helpless to do anything to remedy the situation.

A not unconnected problem which causes me much anxiety revolves around the question of violence. Most non-Whites have for many years believe that the use of violent methods to achieve their liberation is legitimate. Their political leaders persuaded them that they should first examine and try every avenue of non-violent activity. By about 1962, however, the Government had, in word and deed, made it plain that it was determined to defend apartheid with the gun. Heavy penalties, including whippings, made passive resistance, strikes and boycotts ineffective as means of bringing about change, though they could provide powerful support for more direct challenges. While Africans throughout the rest of Africa were increasingly becoming masters of their own fate, in South Africa they were subjected to ever more burdensome legislation. All active African political organizations and leaders were banned, their newspapers closed down and meetings forbidden. No agitation was to be allowed. In the meantime the armed national struggle in Algeria was nearing victor, and open warfare had broken out in Angola. In South Africa itself Africans in a number of rural areas had openly resisted Government measures, killing Government appointees and destroying Government property, whilst the African workers, in the locations sprawled along the outskirts of the cities, tired of being harried and beaten every time they tried non-violent activity angrily demanded counter-attack against the Government. The need for non-violence was no longer referred to, and bomb explosions throughout the country announced the start of a new phase of South African political life.

I have always loathed violence. From early schooldays I would be the one to break up fights and mediate between disputants. Violence might get rid of obstacles, but it did not solve problems. Yet I have never been a pacifist, intellectually I have accepted the right to use

violence in self-defense, to smash the Nazi invaders, to force colonialists to release their grip. Imprisonment is a form of violence and even in socially advanced countries is obviously necessary, in some degree, for the foreseeable future as a means of dealing with serious anti-social conduct. Is it cowardice then that makes me recoil at the prospect of one day being called upon to kill and destroy? Not entirely so, of that I am sure. Nor is it, as many Africans would have it, that a White man can not be expected to kill another White man. It is simply that I find it difficult to hate any man, let alone kill him. What emotional sympathy I possess would in fact favour an African rather than a White on the ground that the Africans, at least historically, have justice on their side. If ever I am forced into the trenches I have no doubts as to which side I will be on. Yet I almost envy the Africans their simple and direct anger and their straightforward determination to thrust aside the human barriers to their liberty.

As I lie on the mat in my cell I think over these ideas in relations to the personae of my restricted world: the police, the other prisoners, and myself. The more I get to know the policemen, the more difficult it is to contemplate ever trying to kill them. How surprised each one would be to know that as he bends to place my food on the floor, I am wondering how I would feel if I plunged a knife into his back and, as he turns to go, I am speculating on whether I would ever be able to fire bullets into his body or crush his skull with some sort of club, or tear holes in his chest with explosives. I think too of the grief of his family. Then I ask myself how the African prisoner across the yard would think. His hatred would have started early in childhood with the first time the police burst into his home at night, searching for residence documents or for liquor, humiliating his parents and terrifying him before they moved on like invaders to the house next door. A hundred subsequent encounters involving himself or family or neighbours or friends would have reinforced this feeling. As the self-declared guardians of White supremacy, the police would have

to be crushed and dispersed before the White supremacy could ever be destroyed. It was the police who beat and shot the people when they demonstrated. If, in the course of the struggle for African freedom, he were to kill a policeman he would be a hero in the eyes of his family, friends, neighbours and associates. Nobody was forced to join the police force and if someone chose to do so he must bear the consequences. No sympathy should be spared for the policeman's family, which happily enjoyed all the benefits of White privilege; it is more important to think of the African families whose parents are separated through the policeman's factions, whose fathers are kept underpaid through his actions. It is he or his colleagues who have been responsible for torturing African people, tying bags over their heads, running electric currents through their bodies, forcing them to drink water and then kicking their stomachs. The whole world knows who is right and who is wrong.

Is my squeamishness, I wonder, merely a cover for the fear that I myself might be killed, and is my lack of hate and anger due merely to the fact that I have never suffered directly from the indignities of apartheid, and what deprivations I have known have been voluntarily endured? It is perhaps fortunate for me, when one considers my moral difficulties, that I have never been called upon to join any active resistance group. I have, however, defended alleged saboteurs in Court, and have tried to explain to as wide an audience as possible why it is that a great section of a people has swung over from a policy of non-violence to one of violence. I have also from public platforms announced that I would go to jail rather than carry a gun for apartheid, expressing the hope that many other Whites would follow my example. I have often warned Whites that their refusal to meet and negotiate with the leaders of the non-Whites was leading the country to disaster, and judging by the Afrikaans press, I must have particularly scandalized a large number of Whites by stating what seems to me to be an obvious fact, namely that in the event of a showdown the Africans must triumph in the end.

Despite the long time I spend in reflection on the matter, I never seem to arrive at any firm conclusion. Looking to the future, I am convinced that the coming years will bring increasing hostility culminating in extremely sharp and widespread clashes. The only role I can see myself filling is that of a propagandist on the side of the Africans appealing to the Whites to lay down arms and negotiate. I would be able to do this with enthusiasm because this would help reduce not only African losses, but also the extent of destruction, both human and physical, in the country that the new Government would ultimately take over. It would be to the benefit of all if the Whites could be persuaded that they stood to gain more by submitting to multi-racial majority rule than by fighting it out to the bitter end. Though it seems inevitable that the greater part of the persuasion will come from the physical effort of a generation of African patriots resorting to armed struggle, I feel that realistic psychological propaganda could be of considerable supplementary value. At times I look even further into the future, and shudder a little at the thought of one day possibly being charged with the responsibility of locking men up just as I and so many others are being locked up now. May I never have to judge men and mete out punishment. Of one thing I am quite certain, and that is that I could never sanction prolonged solitary confinement as a method of punishment or of gaining information, no matter how desperate the situation.

Chapter 10

“My Name is Duggie”

by

Dugmore Boetie

Sisinyana, biggest, and most respected shebeen queen of the early twenties, catered for all the subversive elements of Sophiatown. At her headquarters you found all forms of gambling from dice to the Chinese numbers game known as Fafi.

The first time that Nine took me to her place and she peeped around the door, I could only stare and stare. Man, she was beautiful! She laughed at the way I gaped. When she laughed her whole face brightened up, including the gold filling that sparkled between two sets of pearly-white teeth. What laughed most was her eyes; they were baby blue and they twinkled with all kinds of pleasant suggestions. The very sound she emitted had the twinkle of music. One look at that breathtaking face made you swear never to patronize another shebeen house.

She then opened the door wider and walked in. I very nearly screamed foul! The Maker had played a dirty trick on that woman. A deliberate blunder---a kitchen with the body of a rhinoceros. I once saw her embracing and kissing a man who weighed well over a hundred and fifty till he went insane with desire, then calmly she picked him up and threw him bodily through a closed door. “That’s for taking advantage of the weaker sex,” she called after him.

Her shebeen house was about one brick cottage and two zinc shacks from where me and Nine lived. We were practically neighbors. I went there with Nine or to look for Nine. It was the only place where he hung out.

One Friday I went alone. Three quaver knocks on Sisinyana's door, and I heard a rustling sound coming from within. The door opened partly, and I saw a hole digger concealed behind it. I pushed it open and it revealed an ill lit passage.

I waited for the hole digger to close the door, then followed after him down the dimly lit passage. The passage was long and narrow. Both walls had long stripes of black soot caused by the strategically placed candles. A globeless electric cord dangled from a narrow black ceiling. In gone days, it must have been a pretty house.

On both sides of the passage, facing one another, were door frames without doors. They led to what were known as Skokiaan Drinking Rooms. These rooms were bare of furniture except for four long benches placed four square around the room.

Whenever the police made a raid on the premises, Sisinyana would deny all ownership of them. Besides being used as skokiaan bars for skokiaan drinkers, they were also used as sleeping quarters for the cleaners, hole diggers or barmen.

In the midst of all this squalor there was one room that was furnished like the inside of a palace, and that was Sisinyana's own room. She called it the Holy Spot because of the numerous religious pictures that were hanging from its walls. When we came to the door that led to the Holy Spot, the grave digger, I mean hole digger, knocked.

A voice not without melody bade us enter. As the hole digger turned the knob, his behaviour reminded me of someone who was about to enter a sacred place. I did not blame him, because I felt the same.

"Ah! Little Brother!" she exclaimed with genuine joy. Since my friendship with Nine, I was respected throughout Sophiatown.

"Tell me," she said, "is Little Brother your real name? Nine is always calling you that."

“My name is Duggie,” I stammered. I was forever uneasy in the presence of this woman.

“Duggie?” she repeated. She rolled the name over her tongue as if fearing it would drop out of her mouth. Dreamily she said: “Mmmmmmm Duggie, that’s a nice name.”

I didn’t tell her that I got the name through the circus elephant that I once looked after. The elephant’s name was Duggie. Every time the circus population called the name, me and the elephant would turn our heads in unison. That’s how the name got stuck on me. My second name, which I’m using as a surname, was supplied by the Tokai reformatory authorities. They called me Kaffir Boetie. In the Afrikaans language it means “little kaffir brother’. That’s the name I must have given Nine the night I wanted to beat him half to death and became drunk instead.

“You know, Duggie,” said Sisinyana, “I’m feeling low. A customer just died owing me skokiaan money. Still. “ she shrugged her shoulders helplessly, “it can’t be helped, if the man had to die, he had to die. All I know is that when I die, I’ll collect a fortune in hell and pay my way to heaven with it. I talk too much, I nearly forgot to give you your message from Nine. He wants you to meet him at the Johannesburg goods shed first thing in the morning, come rain or snow.”

“Isn’t he there?”

She shook her lovely head. “No! He said his loins were bothering him and the only person who can relieve him is his girl in Moroka.” After a slight pause, she said, “I pity the girl. Let me get you a drink.”

Moroka! Nine once took me there, and I hated the place. A city of mud and sack. It made Sophiatown look like a dream place; a difficult township to describe, or understand. A flat heap with countless alleys. Smoke from thousands of fire galleys. The reddish

brown mud buildings looked like anything but houses. It was as if the builders had had to finish before the sun went g down.

The latrines were built at a distance from the dwelling places. As a result, when you were at a skokiaan party, and you felt the urge to relieve nature, it was best never to leave your hat behind but take it with you. The precaution was very necessary. Not because your hat was in danger of being pinched or something like that; the danger lay in the fact that you might never n be able to find your way back to the same house from the latrine.

I wasn't surprised when Nine once told me that his girl friend's neighbour used to experience considerable difficulty in finding his own house whenever he came from work. Until Nine sold him an idea. The man took a long pole and tied an old cap on the one point of the pole, then he planted the pole in front of his house. Every time he came back from work, all he did was look for the pole with the cap on.

I wasn't surprised that Nine left without me. He knew how I felt about the place.

Sisinyana, appearing with my six inch mug of skokiaan, caught me studying a picture that was hanging over the fireplace. It was the picture of Jesus Christ on the crucifix. I thought this picture was as out of place here as it would be if it was hanging in the heart of Prince Lucifer's domain.

She looked at the picture then said: "Oh, Him. He's Jesus Christ our Saviour, the only man I pay protection money to."

"What kind of protection?" I asked.

Lifting her lovely eyebrows she said: "Does it matter what kind of protection as long as I'm protected?"

“You know, Duggie, I once paid protection to a white policeman and the bastard kept bleeding me even when it wasn’t necessary. So I fixed him by framing him. Now he’s no more bother. In fact all the police of Newlands Police Station are giving my place a wide berth.”

She frowned. “Ever framed a policeman, Duggie?” When she saw me looking stupid, she said, “Sergeant van der Merwe was the worst among all the police of Newlands. I say was, he’s been transferred.

“One morning I was short of money to buy my stock when the bastard came in and demanded his usual cut. I tried explaining but he just wouldn’t listen. Instead of understanding and coming back on Monday---because this happened on a Saturday morning---he decided to search my place. Under the mattress of my bed, he found four bottles of brandy. He wanted to take me to the charge office, but I begged off. I told him that I was still waiting for my weekly customers to come and square the books. I promised to join him later on at the charge office. He agreed because he knew I was a woman of my word. That was one time I didn’t keep it. I never followed him.

“Monday morning when the court room opened. I was there. I went in and made myself comfortable among the spectators. When the clerk of the court called my name, I stood up. The magistrate read the charge. He didn’t even look up. On the desk in front of the prosecutor stood the four bottles of brandy. I hadn’t even had y time to doctor them. My heart went out to them. Next to them stood the cheerful van der Merwe.

““‘Sisinyana,’ the magistrate said, ‘you are charged with being in possession of four bottles of brandy. How do you plead, guilty or not guilty?’ He waited for the interpreter y to put it across to me. Meanwhile I had heard and understood every word.

“‘Four?’ I said.

“‘Yes, four,’ he said, looking directly at me. I shook my head slowly, then frowned like someone who doesn’t comprehend.

“‘Four,’ he repeated as he pointed at the four bottles of brandy on the desk. There followed a ‘Well?’ He waited for me to say they were two or even less.

“‘Your Honour,’ I said, ‘the bottles were not four, they were a dozen.’

“‘A what?’

“‘The interpreter was forgotten. It was man to man. ‘A dozen, Your Honour.’

“‘Then what the he . . . I mean, what happened to the other bottles?’

“‘I don’t know, Your Honour, better ask the policeman who raided my place.’

“‘He turned to van der Merwe and asked: ‘Is it true what the accused claims, Sergeant---that there were twelve bottles and not four?’

“‘No, Your Honour, there were only four bottles of brandy under the mattress.’

“‘I shook my head, ‘Your Honour, would I want to pay for twelve bottles when I can hardly afford to pay for four? I had to search the bottom of the barrel besides running to friends and relatives for the money I have here. Money for twelve bottles.’

“‘How much money have you there?’

“‘Knowing, Your Honour, that the fine for one bottle of brandy is fifteen pounds---and I’m going to stop selling it as I’d rather stick to skokiaan because the fine is only five pounds per four gallons---I brought along with me, Your Honour, a hundred and eighty pounds for the dozen bottles.’

“The magistrate said to the prosecutor: ‘Count the accused’s money.’
The prosecutor counted.

“‘A hundred and eighty pounds, Your Honour.’

“The magistrate then turned to Sergeant van der Merwe. Where are the other eight bottles, Sergeant?’

“‘I told Your Honour that there were only four bottles!’

“‘Come now, Sergeant, are you seriously trying to tell me that this woman, or anyone for that matter, would prefer paying a fine of a hundred and eighty pounds to that of sixty? Let’s not waste the court’s time, where are the other eight bottles?’

“‘I swear, You Honour, there were only four bottles.’

“‘When you found those bottles, assuming there were four under the mattress,

Chapter 10

Sophiatown or Triomf?

by

Miriam Tlali

Mrs. Stein was worried. She was worried and tired. She had no servant. The woman who had been working for her a long time had been arrested for being without a permit to work in Johannesburg. So she had been endorsed out. There were thousands of servants available, but most of those willing to work in the poorer suburbs were from the outside districts, the Homelands. If you were bent on using cheap labour and did not mind the risk of paying a heavy fine when you were found out, you could easily find a drudge from the country.

'I could call back my previous girl, the one I had before this last one,' mused Mrs. Stein. 'She lives in Johannesburg and she's got a permit. . . but, you know Mrs. Kuhn, she had got so sulky and was very cheeky. She was my best servant, though, as far as cleanliness was concerned.'

Mrs. Stein sighed.

'Oh, I'm so tired. . . My husband said I should write to that cheeky girl and ask her to come back. . .'

Mrs. Kuhn intruded:

'I wouldn't take a girl back after I'd discharged her. She'd always think I couldn't do without her.'

A day or two later an African woman stood at the counter with her receipt book ready. Ms. Kuhn took it and looked at it.

'I see you last paid three months ago. Why?'

'I did not come to pay because I had no money. I had no work. I am looking for work.'

Mrs. Stein looked up. She asked the customer.

'Can you do sleep-out work?'

'Yes, Missus.'

'Where do you stay?'

'In Fordsburg, Missus.'

'With your husband or boy-friend?'

'Yes, Missus.'

'Can you be at Triomf every morning at seven?'

'Where is Trio, Missus?'

'*Triomf, Triomf*. Near Newlands. Just after you pass Westdene...'

Mrs. Stein went on, pointing and directing. But the girl's face was blank. Mrs. Stein tried harder.

'You know that Main road when you come from Brixton? That Main Road passes from Westdene to Triomf, before you get to Newlands.'

The girl shook her head slowly.

'Ko Sophia,' I said.

The girl looked from Mrs. Stein to me and back at her. Suddenly understanding, she said:

‘Oh, Sophia. You should say Sophiatown, Missus. I know Sophiatown very well. My Uncle lived there long ago for a long time.

The girl had got herself a job and it looked as if Mrs. Stein had got herself a clean-looking servant, although I knew it would not be for long, as usual. . .

Sophiatown. That beloved Sophiatown. *Our* Sophiatown. As students we used to refer to it proudly as “the centre of the metropolis”. And who could dispute it? The most talented African men and women from all walks of life—in spite of hardships they had to encounter—came from Sophiatown. The best musicians, scholars, educationists, singers, artists, doctors, lawyers, clergymen. There are a few things for which most of the Johannesburg Africans will never forgive the Nationalists. Amongst them is the removal of Sophiatown.

I had many happy as well as sad memories of Sophiatown. I had always planned to go back and take a look at it some time. I had been told that it was transformed into a township for the lower income-group whites. My visit there, was, however, quite unplanned and accidental.

Robert, the black salesman whom Mr. Bloch did not trust entirely, used to visit the homes of his customers during the day and take their orders. He helped them fill in ‘Particulars Forms’ and sign the Hire Purchase Agreements, which he then brought back to the office. I was then given the job of driving with another black salesman, Henry, during the afternoons and on some evenings and sometimes on Sunday mornings to check and see whether Robert’s sales were genuine or not. I was also to collect money for deposits and to issue receipts. I can’t say I enjoyed venturing into a jungle like Soweto in

the evenings and over week-ends, and leaving my home and children for nearly twenty-four hours a day, but it meant more money for me and I needed it.

One afternoon as I was about to go out with Henry, he said to me: 'It looks like we'll have to take Mrs. Stein to Sophiatown first, Muriel. I heard her ask Mr. Block if she could have a lift with us.'

'How will all three of us fit into the small front seat, Henry?' I asked. 'I hope you're not thinking of letting me sit outside on that open carrier!'

'N, of course I'm not. If she doesn't want to wait for her husband because he'll be a bit late and she's too lazy to walk to the bus-stop after work, then she must just accept what I offer her.'

Mrs. Stein came. I stood apart to see what would happen. She motioned to me to go in first saying that she would be the first one to be dropped off so she might just as well sit next to the door.

As we drove along Henry said to me in the vernacular:

'Muriel, can you see what I see?'

'What?'

'That the lady with us keeps her face turned out to the left almost sticking out through the window all the time?'

'Yes, I see it.'

'I think she is trying very hard not to breathe the air inside the van with us. She wants to breathe the *free* air outside. But look, there are hundreds more like you and me outside this van. If she doesn't want

to breathe the same air with the kaffirs, she'll have to carry her own air about with her like those people who sink into the bottom of the oceans.'

We both laughed.

The van moved down main Road from Westdene, past First Gate in Western Native Township, then past Toby Street, the first street as you enter Sophiatown. It was moving through the hold familiar places. I felt like reaching out and touching them. The van turned right, into Tucker Street, Sophiatown. Some way up the street the van stopped and Mrs. Stein said:

'This is where I stay, Muriel.'

I was not listening, I was thinking. Just a few yards further up, I was led out of my uncle's home to the African Methodist Episcopal Church as a young bride, happy and full of hopes for the future.

I asked Henry to pick me up later on. I alighted and walked up to the corner of Victoria Road and Good Street. I moved slowly over the rocks and broken bricks towards the spot where I had knelt on my wedding day, facing the altar and wall behind the pulpit. The wall still stood, only partially destroyed, with the engraved letters on it vivid and legible below the painted crucifix. They read: GOD OUR FATHER—CHRIST OUR REDEEMER—MAN OUR BROTHER.

As if in open ridicule, a declaration of hope and redemption in the midst of ruin and chaos.

I thought of that week when, all efforts to resist being removed having failed, the women's section of the now banned African National Congress decided that on the Sunday before the day of the removal, all women and children would hold a prayer meeting on

the “Freedom Square” . . . They knelt there, praying to our forefathers, to the gods of Africa. They sang freedom songs of hope, surrounded as expected by policemen while those in plain clothes took notes. I looked at the place where the tears of the African women and children fell and soaked into the soil. I do not think they will ever dry. They, the whites, have built their Triumph on top of them. Whether they have triumphed or not, time alone will tell.

The next day, Sophiatown was virtually under a siege. The residents of Sophiatown were removed under police escort. All the pavements were lined with heavily armed police and soldiers. There was practically no resistance. How could there be? Father Huddleston and the African leaders were removed to the nearby Newlands Police Station.

When the residents had been removed, the bull-dozers moved in like tanks, destroying, smashing, razing, reducing everything to ruin. All around was dust, heaps of dirty bricks, soot and rubble. . .

Henry called me back from the past:

‘Muriel, what do you think you are doing? How long do you think you’ll stand there and admire the beautiful European houses?’

I returned to the van. But a rich contralto voice, followed by a tenor and a bass, repeating a haunting, mournful song, still echoed in my ears:

Mabayek’umhlaba Wetu. . .

Thina Sizwe. . .

Thina Siwesinsundu. . .

Sikalele

Sikalela Izwe Iethu

Elathathwa. . .

Elathathwa Ngabamhlophe. . .
Mabaeke. . . Mabayekumhlaba Wethu. . .

Let them leave our land. . .
We the Black Nation. . .
We weep for our country
Which was taken by the white ones. . .
Let them leave our land alone!

‘What do they call this lace now?’ asked Henry; ‘Trim?’

‘Triomf, Henry. That means *triumph* in English.’

‘What the hell,’ said Henry. ‘What triumph? All those black cockroaches, bed-bugs and lice they have built their beautiful houses on. . .where is all that pride of theirs? All those nice gardens of theirs where they have planted lawns and flowers are fertilized by the urine and stools of the black children who used to run all over naked, neglected and starving, while their mothers cared for their white kids. All those filthy buckets from the latrines the children used to empty into the pavements and streets on New Year’s Day—where’s all their white pride?’

Henry cursed and swore and worked himself into such a state that his whole body was shaking. He fumbled impatiently in his pocket with his left hand for a cigarette, his right hand holding the steering wheel. He found one and put it between his wet lips. He lighted it, puffing and fuming. Suddenly he burst into a dreadful fit of coughing, rocking violently until the sweat came running down his forehead and temples.

‘Why don’t you stop smoking?’ I said. ‘You know that your chest is not so good. What about that spot on your lung? Has it healed?’

Henry did not reply.

Chapter 11

The South Africa I Know

by

Peter Magubane

I was born in what is now called Vrededorp on 18th January 1932. This was an Indian area only two miles west of Johannesburg. The Indians have since been driven out and only whites live there now. My father was Isaac, a tall slender man with “colored” features who spoke the oppressors’ language, Afrikaans. No one ever bothered to explain the reason for this to me. My mother, Welheminah Mbatha, was a pitch black woman who was proud of herself and was not prepared to take a nuisance from anybody.

It was Sophiatown where I grew up. This was a black suburb of Johannesburg about five miles from the city. In those days it was cosmopolitan. I grew up rubbing shoulders with Chinese, whites, Indians, and colored and this was life. It throbbed, you lived at the moment. My parents were later moved from Sophiatown too. So happy were the Afrikaners at the successful removals, they named the white township built on the black man’s tears Triumph—meaning Triumph. History waits to see whether the Afrikaner was as triumphant as he thought.

My father worked hard. He had a vegetable cart driven by horses we loved dearly. From early childhood I remember helping my father sell vegetables. At the age of six I was farmed out to my uncle in Ermelo in the Eastern Transvaal, my mother’s home. My aunt turned out to be a vicious woman who meted out harsh countryside treatment to the city child.

My mother later told me of coming to visit me. She sat in the train chatting with fellow passengers in the third-class “blacks only” coach

as the train approached a siding. Her eye caught the sight of a little boy trapped between barbed wire strands. It was me. The merciless Eastern Transvaal winter wind threw me to and fro between the wires. I wore an oversize coat that I got as a Christmas present from my uncle. The barbed wire had been put up by a white farmer to keep stray animals and stray blacks from wandering into the “baas” property.

I used to assist my father in selling vegetables after school and on weekends. During my spare time I would collect empty bottles and scrap metal and sell them to white-owned scrap dealer shops. My father concentrated on selling vegetables to the white market. Not a day passed without a white woman insulting him for knocking on the front door. In fact, in Mayfair, a white suburb, some entrances were marked “No Dogs and Natives Allowed.” That was not the end of the story. My father was frequently woken up at the dead of night by white policemen who demanded his pass and license for selling vegetables. Often scuffles broke out that ended with my father locked up. He always lost these cases. He was always charged with assaulting the police, it did not matter that they had started the fight. My mother would join in these fights in defense of my father and accumulated her own record of assaults.

My father belonged to no political organizations. He fought his own political battles. My father vowed he would never carry the dreaded “pass” or “reference book,” as he claimed he was no white man’s boy to carry the tag of a number by which he would be identified. But when things were very bad and he couldn’t run his business without certain documents, he decided to take an identity card as a colored—a person of mixed blood. This did not require him to register for employment as did the black man’s pass.

My last memory of my father was after my first marriage, when he again clashed with the law. He was arrested and taken to the

Johannesburg prison known as “The Fort.” I was later notified that my father had been admitted to the Baragwanath Hospital, and when I visited him I found a dying man. This left an incredibly open wound in me. The shock was too great, for I had dreams for my parents. Not long after my father’s death my mother died.

My mother took me as a child to a Roman Catholic school in Sophiatown, but after three days of schooling all the children who were not Catholic were told to leave as the only space available was for Catholic children. So I went to a place called Lutheran School. After passing my Standard Six I attended the Western Native High School, where I did Form IV and gave up school for a job on *Drum* magazine. I had a dream of joining the photographic staff, though I first had to work as a messenger, a tea-boy, a driver. Two of my friends worked there—Can Themba, a reporter, and Bob Gosani, a photographer. They were both blacks and very good in their respective fields, and in those days *Drum* was very good. It still exists but now it is nothing to talk about. It was the only magazine then in South Africa exposing all the inhuman things done to blacks by white South Africans in the government.

While striving for *Drum* I got married to Gladys Nala. My marriage was not very successful because she did not approve of my late home coming and wanted me to leave the job. So I had to choose between my career and my wife. Because I adored photography I chose photography, and later we were divorced.

The picture editor of *Drum* at that time—the early 1950’s—was Jurgen Schaderberg, a young German photographer who was very good at picture taking and very strict to those like me who were learning. I spoke to him about acquiring a camera for me. He did so and it was paid for by my father because my earnings at the time were very little. I used to spend most of my time trudging the streets of Johannesburg at night taking photographs, experimenting. I would

go back to the office to process and finally I would sleep there, because there was no transport that would take me back to Sophiatown at that time of the night. This was one thing that led to my divorce with my wife. It was a great sacrifice but I'm not sorry for having sacrificed. My sacrifice paid off.

Whenever I used to go out with photographers and reporters I watched what they did, especially Bob Gosani. He was a very good photographer, it is just a pity that he did not live long enough to be able to show the world what kind of photographer he was. At the time, those years, journalism was unknown among the blacks. Those among us who worked on *Drum* were fortunate because some of the people on the magazine were whites from overseas who were prepared to teach us. Jurgen Schaderberg used to let me print thirty prints, forty prints and print the whole lot, and sometimes I would have to repeat and print the whole lot, and sometimes I would have to print right through the night. I did not mind because I knew that I was learning.

My first assignment was in 1955 in Bloemfontein, where I covered the African National Congress Convention. I took a lot of pictures using a 2 ¼-by- 2 ¼-inch square camera, a Yashica, the camera that Jurgen Schadeberg had bought for me. I went back to the office with good results and from that day I never looked back.

In 1956 women of all races, well over 30,000 of them, marched on Pretoria. We journalists operated freely without any hindrance from the police. Again in 1956, over a hundred people, black and white, were arrested and charged with treason. The trial was held the same year. It was the longest trial to be held in South Africa and the first major political one. During the treason trial I was arrested three times for obstructing police by taking pictures. I had no police press pass. That was the first time for me to be inside a cell. I was kept there for about three hours and later charged with obstruction. My case lasted

for two weeks, and I was in court every day. At one stage I fell asleep while the court was proceeding. The magistrate ordered me to wake up and warned me that if I was found sleeping I would be charged with contempt of court. I was acquitted. The magistrate decided that there wasn't enough evidence to convict. But I'm sure my police file was opened that year.

Not long after I had another run-in with the police. I got orders from my editor to stand in front of the Grace Building, which was the police headquarters in Johannesburg at the time, and take pictures of each and every person who came out or went in. I tried to carry out the instructions even though I didn't know—and still don't—just why he wanted the pictures. I must have taken no more than ten frames when four policemen started to manhandle me and ask me what I was doing. I told them what my instructions were, but they took me before a Major Spengler, who was in charge of the Security Police. He questioned me, took the film, and said that I should go back and tell my editor that Major Spengler had taken the film. If the editor wanted to see he would have to sue Major Spengler himself. Then he let me go. Nobody sued.

In 1957 I went to Frenchdale in Cape Province to take pictures of the people—political people—who had been banished there. Their life was very sad. In those years they used to banish people to remote areas, very dry areas far from towns, far from other people, giving them only a gag of meal to last them a month and no meat whatsoever. But most of my time was spent covering various disturbances. This was never easy. The police always gave us a bad time, demanding passes and, even though we had them, ordering us out of the area, sometimes at gunpoint. In 1957 a number of tribesmen and women were arrested after disturbances we had covered in Zeerust, a town in the Western Transvaal. They were charged with violence, inciting other people. All pressmen were forbidden to attend the court hearing. Can Themba and I went over

there dressed as tribesmen. I went to the nearest Indian shop, bought a half loaf of bread, concealed my camera in the bread, and walked over to the court building. As the police were arriving with the tribesmen, I was able to photograph them while pretending to eat my bread. When I realized that this was no longer safe, I went back to the shops and bought myself a pint of milk, drank the contents, and concealed my camera in the empty container, pretending to suck on the straw, and got my pictures.

We had many adventures. Once Nat Nakasa and I went to Sophiatown to look round for a story and pictures. We spotted a group of men who were being arrested for not having reference books--what is known as a "pass." We parked the car, and I took a few pictures. A colored policeman who was in charge of the crew ordered me to stop, but I rushed to the car and drove off. He pulled out his revolver, meaning to shoot, and as I drove off I heard him shouting that I should stop, otherwise he would shoot, and once the car was moving I tried to duck. Unfortunately I drove right into the back of a stationary van. Nobody was hurt, but that same policeman arrested us and took us down to Newlands police station, where we were charged with failing to pay our yearly tax and failing to have our passes signed by our employer. Tom Hopkinson, who was then editor of *Drum*, had to come over and speak to the man in charge of the police station. We were let off with a warning that if we were found in Sophiatown again without our reference books in order we would be arrested.

You never knew when the police would turn on you. In 1958 there were demonstrations by women against the issuing of passes to African women. A number of demonstrators were arrested and charged, and while they were appearing in court some of their supporters gathered outside. The police chased them and hit them with batons. While I was taking pictures of this, I was also arrested. They took me into Johannesburg Magistrate's Court, where a senior

officer warned me and said that if I didn't stop interfering with the police I would be locked up. I explained to him that I had not interfered with the police, that I had been working, taking pictures of police hitting women with batons. They finally released me.

I did many stories for *Drum*—in South-West Africa, covering disturbances in Pondoland, reporting on child farm labor. For the last, Nat Nakasa and I went to Nigel, southeast of Johannesburg. We got to one farm, parked the car, and went into the potato fields. Children were working there. While I was taking pictures Nat was talking to the workers. Soon a police van appeared and took us off to the police station. One of the policemen there wanted to beat us up. In my hand I had a light meter. I opened it up and showed it to him and he saw the needle moving up and down. He asked me what it was for and I replied that it was a radio. "It is transmitting everything you say to us here back to our office. Our office already knows that we are arrested and you want to beat us up. If you want to go ahead with beating us up you can do so, but rest assured that our office already knows." He quickly went into the inner office and spoke to his sergeant, who came out and demanded to see the instrument. I showed it to him. He too was satisfied with my explanation and said that we should leave the area immediately. If he should find us there again, he would have to exercise his powers. We left. If it had not been for my brainwave I am sure we would have been assaulted and ended by being locked up.

Nineteen sixty was the year of Sharpeville. What happened was this. The Pan-Africanist Congress launched a campaign against the pass system. Every member of the organization was going to take his pass and turn it in to the nearest police station, saying that he didn't want to carry a pass any more and if they wanted to arrest him they could do so. This was done throughout the country. But at Sharpeville, unfortunately, the police opened fire on the crowd of people standing outside the station. More than sixty people were killed. I had a hard

time getting into the area, which was all fenced off, but I got in there only three minutes after the shooting and was able to take a few pictures. I had never seen so many people dead before; I could not work easily. When I got back to the office Tom Hopkinson was very much angry with me. I did not have the pictures he expected me to have. I had taken pictures from a distance. I did not have the close-ups which would have shown the grimness of the situation. Hopkinson warned me that if I was going to get shocked in circumstances like this I would never make it as a news photographer. From that day I made up my mind that whenever I find myself in a situation like Sharpeville I shall think of my pictures first before anything. I no longer get shocked; I am a feelingless beast while taking photographs. It is only after I complete my assignment that I think of the dangers that surrounded me, the tragedies that befell my people.

When the Sharpeville victims were buried I had a chance to cover the funeral, and this time I made sure to do the job right. The editor was pleased with my pictures. A number of them were syndicated all over the world. I remember, by the way, an incident during that service. Reverend Mahabane was speaking and said, "God has given and now he has taken." He was nearly killed. The people went mad, saying, "God has not taken these people, these people were shot dead by the police. Why don't you say God has given and the South African police have taken?" He was replaced by another minister.

I now can see that Sharpeville was a turning point in many ways. In the 1950's political organizations like the African National Congress and the Pan-Africanist Congress were legal, and demonstrations were also legal. Chief Albert Luthuli, president of the ANC, did not believe in violence. In those days it was mostly older people who took part in the demonstrations. These demonstrations were peaceful. There were no shootings and no tear gas was ever used. At worst, people were baton-charged by the police.

In 1959 there was a split in the African National Congress, and the Pan-Africanist Congress was born. This group had a much younger membership. The pass demonstration of 1960 was their idea. The Sharpeville shootings were followed by violent outbreaks all over the country. A large number of people supporting the Pan-Africanist Congress were arrested and many trials were held, with long jail sentences and many sent to Robben Island, a special long-term penitentiary. Angry protests occurred even in rural areas like Pondoland and parts of Transkei, with houses of pro-government blacks burned and chiefs killed.

In 1961, after the “stay-at-home” demonstrations, both the ANC and PAC were banned and could no longer operate in the open. The government declared a state of emergency and Parliament passed a number of special laws “for the safety of the country.” The detention law had permitted holding people up to 90 days without trial; after Sharpeville this was increased to 180 days, and they could keep on detaining you for additional periods.

I continued to have brushes with the police. In 1962 they arrested me and charged me with obstruction during demonstrations on the City Hall steps against the Sabotage Bill, but there was no case. Again, in 1965 when I had started free-lancing for the *Rand Daily Mail*, a Johannesburg newspaper, I had another run-in. As it was law that blacks cannot occupy the same darkroom with whites, I had to obtain a darkroom somewhere in the city. I found one through an acquaintance. But under the Group Areas Act a black cannot have *any* business in town—including a darkroom. For some time I managed to avoid the police by instructing the girl at the front desk to say I was out whenever they came. But one day when I was at work in the darkroom two black men—one carrying a Bible and dressed as a priest—came in and asked for me. The girl was fooled. They turned out to be the police. When I came out they told me I

should accompany them to the police station. When we got there the police wanted to know how and why I had gotten the place, and said that I must give it up because by law I wasn't supposed to be there. I later moved out and finally had to use the darkroom of the *Rand Daily Mail*.

I must say that the problem wasn't entirely the authorities. Some white staff photographers did not want to have blacks in the photographic department either. But the *Rand Daily Mail* is a liberal newspaper that for many years has employed black journalists even though some of the white journalists resent the idea. Today, with riots in the black township of Soweto, black photographers are able to show their skills. The paper needs their pictures. And to some extent that was true even back in the 960's. There was nothing anybody could do to have me fired. I was not there to worry about what they did. I was there to sell my labor and therefore I did so to the best of my ability. I would not bother myself for small minds.

I was being recognized for my skill as a photographer. The first time was in 1958, when I was still on *Drum* and Tom Hopkinson helped me choose an entry for the South African best pictures of the year. I got two prizes, first and third. That's when I realized that if I worked harder I would be able to be one of the top cameramen in the country. Then in 1963 I was the first black man to have an exhibit in South Africa, at an art gallery in Johannesburg, and the next year I went to London and to Germany to exhibit my pictures. These shows were a success and I went to New York, where *Look* magazine gave an assignment to Nat Nakasa and me to shoot a story on the South. I was never able to do it; my friend committed suicide. He had left South Africa on an exit permit and gone to Zambia, where he was declared a prohibited immigrant, and though he finally got to the United States he wanted desperately to go back to Africa and had no papers. I had known Nat Nakasa for a long time and his death was a

shock to me. I went back to South Africa and started working for the *Rand Daily Mail*.

Now I covered a number of removals, when black people were moved from their homes in places that had been declared white, and trucked off to areas with no toilet facilities, no running water but maybe a river, no schools, hospitals, churches, shops. People had to walk miles to buy food. I covered another story on child labor, and this time was caught and fined for trespassing. But it was in 1969 that disaster really befell me.

In June 1969 I drove to Pretoria to take clothes and fruit to Ms. Nomzamo Winnie Mandela, the wife of imprisoned African National Congress leader Nelson Mandela. At that time she was in detention too. I arrived at the women's section of the Pretoria Prison and asked to speak to a black woman warder to whom I had spoken earlier on the phone. I could feel that there was something wrong. I could feel that I was surrounded. But then I asked myself, why would I be surrounded? I handed over the clothes and fruit to the black warder and was walking back to my car when four policemen grabbed me and threw me to the ground, and throttled me, and then loaded me into a car that was parked next to mine and took me to the Compol Building, where the Security Police have their headquarters. I later found out that they had thought I was plotting to get Mrs. Nomzamo Winnie Mandela out of prison. The entire prison was surrounded.

That day was the start of my interrogation. I was made to stand on three bricks for five straight days and nights without a wink of sleep, and to drink black coffee through the night. At two-hour intervals the two officers interrogating me would be relieved by others. Only when I needed to go to the toilet would they let me off the brick platform; when I needed to urinate they would merely hand me a tin to make use of.

After five days my feet were swollen and I started to urinate blood. They called Major Theunis Johannes Swanepoel (nicknames “The Redman”), who gave me tablets to ease the pain and told them to take me to a cell. In the cell I was held in solitary confinement. They gave me five dirty blankets, two mats, an empty bucket to shit in, a mug, a bucket of water, and a spoon. I complained to the warder about the dirty blankets. It was not a five-star hotel, he told me. If I wanted clean blankets I should go to a five-star hotel.

I had been detained, along with many others, under the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950. Mrs. Mandela was among the accused and so were several other black and colored journalists. The oldest of us was sixty-nine, the youngest only eighteen. After six months we were taken to court and charged, and though the charges were withdrawn we were immediately detained again and put back into solitary confinement and held incommunicado. In February 1970 a court acquitted us saying that we could not be charged with the same offense twice. But the state was not satisfied with that. Once more we went back into prison. At the time we were not told why, but later I learned that we were being held under Section 10 of the Terrorism Act. Only in September 1970 were we finally acquitted and released.

It is against the law in South Africa to write about prisons or take photographs of them. I do not want to talk about communications in prison or to discuss other prisoners; many of them are still being held and I do not want to make it harder for them or for others who will be there in the future. But I can describe what it was like for me in solitary confinement.

When you arrive you are told that you are not allowed to speak to anyone but prison officials or police officers, not allowed to sing, not allowed to whistle, not allowed to peep through the windows, not allowed to read or write. You are allowed thirty minutes of exercise

in the morning and thirty minutes in the afternoon. Once a week you are allowed to have a bath, on the day you wash your clothes.

You are in a world of your own, without company. You listen to the birds sing. Sometimes one would perch on the window sill and look into the cell. I would wish I could speak to it so as to be able to relate my problems. Yet at my slightest move it would fly off. In my heart I would say, "I wish I was as free as that bird." Sometimes I would scream, box the wall, pace the floor, count the nails on the cell door. The only way I could tell the time was by the sun's rays. My light would burn twenty-four hours a day, so I lost track of time. So many things would come into my mind but the last thing I thought of was suicide. You cease to exist, you become an animal, your vocal cords are affected. You become sensitive to sounds. When you hear footsteps coming you think they are for you. You fear them. Yet you want to speak to somebody. Is it the warder coming to take you to more interrogation? Or for exercise?

At sleeping time the ordinary common-law prisoners would sing church songs and say prayers. I deeply wished that I was in their company. But all I could do was listen. In the early hours of the morning I was awakened by the clicking of dishes in the kitchen, getting ready for breakfast at 6 A.M. Lunch was at 10 A.M., supper at 2 in the afternoon. Then we were counted and the cell doors double-locked. It took a long time to go to sleep.

In September 1970, when we were finally acquitted, the government was not done with us yet. Within two weeks orders came that we were banned for five years.

A banning order is signed by the Minister of Justice and means this: a banned person is not allowed to talk to more than one person at once, to attend any gathering, to enter any educational premises or any building containing a printing press, to enter another township

without a permit, to talk with another banned person, or to live in the magistracy of Johannesburg without a permit. Being banned meant that my job as a newspaper photographer was finished, it meant the end of my profession. My pictures couldn't be captioned with my name, and of course I couldn't take a picture of more than one person at a time.

A banning order leaves you naked. Unless you make up your mind to fight it with all your might, you will become a lunatic. At any time of the night police may come to your house and ransack it, keeping your whole family awake, going through each and every piece of paper in the house. You no longer have privacy. You cannot even talk to your wife while the police are there. Should a neighbor come by to offer help, he is threatened with arrest. Your employer will be interrogated, your fellow workers questioned, informers are planted around you. You are no longer a human being, people run away from you, it is as if you have leprosy. Your relatives, your friends are afraid to come near you, afraid even to greet you. I had married again in 1962 but was divorced three years later, and now in the absence of my children I spent lonely days and nights in my five-room house in Diepkloof (a part of Soweto). There was no one to talk to, even my sweethearts ran away like rats. I was not bothered, though; I was already used to isolation, from prison.

During this period I lost all my friends and have since fallen out with some of my relatives. For two years I kept my head by buying carpets, clothes, and furniture and selling them in Diepkloof. But people came to buy and sometimes promised to pay me the next day, then never came back. As a result I lost a lot of money in that project. I was not much of a merchant. Finally I got a job as a debt collector.

The banning wasn't the worst of it either. In march 1971 I was again arrested. Three policemen came into the house and said they had a warrant for my arrest and wanted to search the house. They

examined every negative, every scrap of paper. Then they took me by car to Pretoria. When we got there my hands were handcuffed to a beam behind my back in the interrogation room and my legs were manacled. When I asked for water they would bring it right to my mouth and then fling it in my face. In the morning my feet were swollen. I was taken back to Pretoria Central Prison and spent ninety-eight more days in solitary before they released me. During this time they took me again to the Compol Building, where the Security Police showed me a letter with a Zambian return address and a Rhodesian postmark. It was addressed to the Prime Minister and stated that the photographs taken by Magubane at the African National Congress had besmirched the country's name abroad. It also said that there were plans to abduct the Prime Minister. That letter was allegation number one against me. Allegation number two came from testimony by a man named Peter Cheke who had identified me in a police line-up and had made serious charges against me. This man later confessed that he had been paid by a man in Port Elizabeth to make the charges. Whether this was true, I do not know. In any case, the allegations were dismissed and I was released after ninety-eight days and went back to life as a banned person. Once again during this period I was arrested for violating a technical point in my banning order and held in prison—in Leeuwkop Prison in Johannesburg—for six months. But this was not solitary confinement.

It was a struggle to pull through the five years of my restrictions. I was not able to work as a photographer and I could not afford to take pictures for my own amusement, since cameras and film cost too much. The editor of the *Rand Daily Mail* applied for relaxation of the banning order but it was of no use. Not until October 1975 was it lifted. The newspaper reemployed me as a photographer. But during those long years I had spent a total of 586 days in solitary, six months in ordinary jail, and five years as a ghost. I had never been convicted of any crime.

Only one incident during this time gave me satisfaction. In spite of being banned I had an exhibit at a Johannesburg art gallery. I was forced to submit the pictures first to the magistrate, who denied me permission to show news photos (even though they had been published before), and in the end I was allowed only to exhibit some experimental abstract pictures that I had been working on when I was first arrested in 1969. The show was well received.

What was it like to go back to work after so long? It was like being back from the dead. I was as happy as a child being given ice cream. But it was uphill, because I had lost the photographer's eye I had before my detention and banning and was not accustomed to mingling with people freely. I realized that if I did not work hard I would not be able to take the hard-hitting pictures I had taken in the past. That first day I went shooting with Sydney Duval, doing a story on Johannesburg. I was beaming with joy but unable to get the kind of pictures I wanted. And in the back of my mind I could not help thinking about the more than two hundred others who were still banned or detained.

Soon the action started again. I covered the demonstrations outside the new Johannesburg Supreme Court during the National African Youth Organization political trials; people were chased by police with attack dogs and I got good pictures. Clive Emdin and I covered the bus boycott in Newcastle. But it was in June 1976 that the really big story began. It isn't over yet. Maybe it will never be over.

I mentioned how back in the 1950's most demonstrations were run by serious adult political leaders and how most of the participants were adult too. By the 1970's nearly all the adult black politicians had been detained or jailed and their parties outlawed. This may explain why the riots that broke out in Soweto in June involved mostly children. The South African government, with its police and troops and its version of law, had succeeded in shattering organized black

opposition. Now, almost without any control or organization, black high school students were acting out their anger.

I remember that the *Star* newspaper had a placard on the 15th of June 1977 saying that demonstrations were planned for the next day by Soweto pupils. Soweto is the main black area outside Johannesburg; more than two million blacks live there. The next morning I headed into Soweto to see what was going on and was quickly swept up. I photographed such things as policemen firing at students carrying signs protesting the fact that they had to learn Afrikaans in school, students burning cars, police shooting tear gas into crowds of student, all sorts of scattered violence. This went on for several days. It was difficult to work as a photographer in the township. The police do not like to see people taking pictures when they are shooting or charging with batons. The students too, at least at first, used to resent being photographed. I and my black colleagues were beaten and lost cameras and had our clothes torn by both sides. One time a white policeman pressed the muzzle of a machine gun against my temple threatening to shoot me. I sat praying: for the slightest mistake he could pull the trigger. Three days later I was hit on the head with the butt of a revolver and punched in the stomach, my films taken.

Assaulting the black press was a way of intimidating them, of trying to make them stop telling the truth. In some quarters, white reporters were asking questions about whether the stories told by black journalists were correct. At one point the black staff of the Township edition of the *Rand Daily Mail* threatened to resign because their integrity was being questioned, but it was immediately sorted out by some white reporters who stood by the side of their black colleagues. You will excuse me for using the terms black and white. In South Africa it is the only way you can describe certain aspects of life.

The Soweto riots broke out again in August and I went out again to cover them. I saw, and photographed, people being assaulted by the

police for taking part in “stay-away” days (refusing to go to work in a kind of general strike). On one occasion while I was taking pictures, a white policeman attacked me and smashed my nose; I had to spend five days in Baragwanath Hospital.

I suppose that the worst thing I saw was Zulu men from the hostels who armed themselves with knobkerries, assegais, and shields and went right through the township systematically breaking down doors and windows assaulting people. These were men from tribal areas far away, living as single men in the hostels in Soweto. They resented being told what to do by the students. It was easy for the police to encourage them to fight other blacks, and this is exactly what happened. I saw it myself. When I went to a police station to report what the Zulus were doing the police asked me what I expected them to do. “Why doesn’t black power fight back?” they said. And later that day when I went into another police station and found it full of blood and packed with women and children who had been injured by the Zulus, I was told by an officer in charge that black power must taste its own medicine.

On following days I tried to cover the actions of the Zulus in Soweto and saw how when the residents attempted to fight back, the police would attack them with tear-gas bombs. Several times the police warned me to get out of the area. I knew that trouble for me was on the way. At last on August 26 I was detained again; they had enough of my nuisance. I was locked up under Section 10 of the Internal Security Act, without charges, In Modder Bee Prison in Johannesburg. I was not in solitary, but again my life was shattered, my freedom taken away from me, and my cameras put to rest.

My lawyer went to the Security Police to make inquiry. I was an agitator, he was told, and the police spokesman expressed surprise when asked if I had committed any offense. “The arrest was in connection with Magubane and what he does. We don’t arrest people

because they work for the *Rand Daily Mail*." After all, he said, if I had committed an offense I would have been charged in a court of law.

Now, of course, the reason I was detained was that I had become an embarrassment to the government. Actually they did me a favor by jailing me; I would have been a sitting duck for the police in Soweto, who would probably have simply shot me and put the blame on my people. (I remember hearing one policeman say that they should kill all the bloody black pressmen or arrest the lot, because they write shit.) As it happened, seven of the black journalists covering Soweto were arrested at this time and three others in the Cape. We weren't interrogated but shared big cells in Modder Bee, just waiting. The others were finally released before Christmas of 1976, and I was released three days after Christmas.

While I was still in Modder Bee, the *Rand Daily Mail* asked the prison department to permit my photograph file to be sent to me so that I could prepare an entry for the annual Stellenbosch-Farmers Winery Award. This is a prize for journalists comparable to the American Pulitzer Prize. The authorities refused, saying that it would be an embarrassment to South Africa if I were to win while in detention because I would not be able to attend the presentation. Two of my colleagues, Clive Emdin and Vitta Palestrante, brave men to whom I am very grateful, put together an entry for me and managed to submit it even though it was late. Had they not done what they did I would never have been the proud winner of the Enterprising Journalism Award of 1976, the first black journalist to receive it. A few months later I also won the Nicholas Tomalin Award, which is given by the London *Sunday Times* in memory of a British reporter who lost his life in the Yom Kippur War, and I was able to go to London to accept it.

I do not know what will happen next to me. I will go on working in South Africa, taking the best pictures that I can. I hope they will not all be pictures of violence.

Yet as long as there is no dialogue between the government of South Africa and the black man, there will be no turning point from violence. As long as the government is not prepared to recognize the black man as a citizen and give him his full rights in the country of his birth, I can see no change except for the worse. The black man does not want to drive the white man into the ocean. White and black should share the fruits of the country equally and together.

As long as there are detentions and deaths in detention, the black man can only become more adamant in opposition. I am not an advocate of violence, but we are being pushed to it. My wish is that everyone in the country should share the table and try to solve our problems amicably, with no bloodshed. There is still time and plenty of room for that. It will not help the white government of South Africa to refuse deliberately to feel the winds of change and see the pace of the clock; everybody is marching forward while the government marches backward.

Chapter 12

Kippie's Memories

by

Kippie Moeketsi

The early days of Jazz, the Harlem Swingsters, the Manhattans, the musical 'King Kong', and the emergence of Zenzi Miriam Makeba and Dollar Brand.

In my family we were music inclined. My brother, Jacob, is a pianist—he was taught by a white woman. Father played the organ and mother would sing hymns. The whole family was like that. It is only my sister who was not into music. I took up music at twenty and taught myself to read it. My late brother, Andrew, used to sing bo-Itchi Mama, old harmony songs.

Every time I saw him I would ask: 'Kana, tell me, man. How do I know the clarinet keyboard? Where must I place my fingers?'

He would shout at me, 'Hai, no. Put your fingers there!'

Then I would ask again, 'What is a crochet?'

He would say, 'Aga man, you're worrying me. It's a beat.'

And from there I had to see to it myself. I had to find out on y own what a crochet was. He left me there!

I also read music books. I would say it is the Ortolandi that taught me music. I learnt to play the clarinet with a saxophone book. 'Stre, that's how I taught myself music. I can still play the clarinet. I didn't practice how to play the saxophone, I just play it. Yah, once you know a clarinet, a saxophone is a boy.

The first group I played with, 'The Band in Blues', broke up firstly because I didn't want to play in Denver, esidigidigini. The other guys liked to play at the Jorissen Centre and other such places.

In those days the tsotsis were rough. Musicians used to get a hiding from now and then. They would say to us that we were thinking that we are clever, and better than them.

Sometimes we would play from 8:00 pm to 4:00 am non-stop. It was like that. Sometimes the tsotsis would force us to play right through up to 9:00 am. By force! We played all the songs they wanted.

I remember one incident in which I managed to escape with my dear life. It was in '48 when we were still playing at the Bantu Men's Social Centre. Tsotsis came, man. There were about seventeen, carrying tomahawks, and chopping everybody in the hall for no reason. After they had finished with the audience, they came onto the stage while we stood glued there, frightened.

They then began chopping up our instruments and just then we ran for our lives with the thugs in hot pursuit. One of them chased me down Von Wielligh Street. It was about three o'clock in the morning. He shouted at me, 'Kom hier, jong, Kippie!' His name was Seven. Fortunately for me, a police van appeared and the thug disappeared. The tsotsis were attacking us for the fun of it. They were from Alexandra township. I think it was not yet the Spoilers; it was before their time. Yah, musicians used to have a tough time during those days.

After the band broke I joined the Harlem Swingsters in 1949. We had chaps like Gwigwi Mrwebi, Skip Phahlane, Ntemi Piliso, Randolph Tai Shomang, Norman Martin (if I'm not wrong) and Todd Matshikiza. Sadly, the majority of the guys are all dead.

Those olden days, you wouldn't play in a band if you could not read music. Unlike today, where you just play. That's why I don't like today's music. I don't say I'm condemning it. I don't say it is backward. In fact, some of today's musicians are good. The trouble with them is that they are too commercial. The talent scout tells them, 'Don't play jazz because the audience don't like it.' You understand what I'm trying to say?

A year after I had joined the Harlem Swingsters, the band broke up. Really, there were no reasons, except for financial difficulties.

In those days, big bands didn't make sufficient money. Et those were the days of the best big bands in the country — Jazz Maniacs, Swingsters, Merry Blackbirds, Rhythm Clouds and African Hellenics.

General Duze, Boykie Gwele and Mzala Lepere — I don't know who was the drummer at that time — they made a quarter accompanying the Manhattan Brothers. Duze said I should come and join them soon after the Swingsters disbanded.

I really enjoyed my long stay with The Manhattans (who were THE group at the time), as a member of the backing band called the Shantytown Sextet. Oh well, we did fine some way or the other with our accompaniment.

I think the money was coming in okay — for me personally, and I got better money as we used to perform regularly, all over. Springs, Pretoria, Klerksdorp, Potchefstroom, Nigel and places like that.

We went on playing and then the late saxophonist Mackay Davashe joined us. I think, in 1951. Then Davashe later became our leader. I don't remember how. Dambuza Mdledle was also our leader at one time.

But when we went to Cape Town, we found ourselves stranded, though the Mannhattans were a big name.

We left for Langa location in Cape Town, playing to nearly empty halls. At one juncture, people started throwing stones on the roof of the hall while we were playing inside. Hey, it was terrible!

The people of Langa said we were playing 'nonsense'. Manhattan Brothers and all. They said we were playing the same kind of music the Mannhattans always played. They wanted something new.

A CHAP CALLED DOLLAR BRAND

During that confusion, Todd Matshikiza disappeared from the cast!

And that is how we got a replacement on piano, a chap called Dollar Brand, from District Six.

I don't know how they got Dollar Brand, only Dambuza. .he came with Dollar while we were at a hostel staying in Langa, stranded.

Dambuza came to me and asked me, 'Do you know this guy?' meaning Dollar. I replied, 'Yah, this guy I know. .I saw him once at Rio bioscope in Johannesburg, playing at a concert with me and Gene Williams who was leaving for Germany.

Dollar was scared of us. He was kneeling down, virtually begging us, man, I'm telling you. This Dollar Brand—things do happen, 'strue's God.

He wore big boots, looking like a skollie-nyana so-oo Kane the chap is a good musician.

Hai, we took a train, the whole cast, to Port Elizabeth.

At that time nobody was aware that I had a lot of money with me then, because I used to sneak out every night to play at a certain nightclub. The chap who got me this private job is one of the finest guitarists we've ever had – Kenny Just.

I got ten pounds a night – which was quite a lot at that time – and used to make it a point that the other guys shouldn't know about this. When I ended my stint after a week, Kenny gave me a bottle of whisky and hotel remnants – chicken, sandwiches and things of that nature.

That's also when I started to be a buddy with Dollar.

It was in P.E. that we made a departure in our music. We said 'Now we are not going to play English music any more. We are going to play indigenous music – Xhosa, Sesotho and all that.'

Who came up with this idea? It was Davashe and Dambuza.

You know what was the cause of all this? It is because of the reaction of the audiences in Cape Town where we didn't have a following. So, we got a stoke somehow or the other, that no, man, this (English) music, people are bored with it and we'll have to change it.

Change we did, yah. We could read and write music but were doing it all by ear – quickly. You know, African music is easy, and we didn't bother writing it down. All we did was to write down the keys; the melody line and tune, that's all. Afterwards we would arrange it our own way.

KING'S HOLIDAY

By the way, this show of ours was named 'King's Holiday' —by Dambuza—because we were then living like kings, enjoying life and eating the money. In East London, we played to packed houses for one and a half months.

We stayed in that area for two months, having parties every night after the show! We had made about a thousand pounds which made us feel really good for the cost of living was still low at that time.

Each member got sixty pounds as pocket money, but hey, when we went to Queenstown, none of us had a penny on himself. All we had were our train tickets.

We had lived up to the name of the show —King's Holiday. Dabuza came with all this idea, I'm tell you. Dollar was still with us. He was a small boy then, a 'yes, sir' boy.

We stayed for about a week in Queenstown and spent all the money we had earned, and went back home broke. I'm telling: no penny, no provision. Dollar also returned to District Six.

'MIRIAM—THAT GIRL HAD NO CURVES'

A week after we arrived from the Cape, we went to play in Springs, and the pay I got there was the first that I was able to give to my mother.

Mzala Lepere played bass, Norman Martin returned to play drums and General Duze featured on guitar.

Dambuza Mdledle, leader of the Manhattans, one day said: 'Hey, gents, there is a girl who is singing with the Cuban Brothers. I don't know how I can remove her from them. . . '

That time, the only female singer with the Cuban Brothers was not known. She was nothing, man. She was just another girl who was trying to sing.

'How can we get her? She is a good singer. . . ' Tapyt said, 'I heard her singing at DOCC in Orlando East the other day!'

We coolly said, 'Naw, man, just bribe her with some money. Call her to a corner and talk to her ma-private. . .It does not matter even if you give her a pound. . .'

I don't know how Dambuza solved that, but after a few days, we saw him come with this girl who was singing with the Cuban Brothers. Just like that.

She had joined the Manhattan Brothers. Her name was Miriam Makeba. And it was with the Manhattans that she began to be noticed. To tell the truth, the Manhattans made Miriam famous. In those days, the Manhattans and Inkspots were the best groups.

When I say Miriam was made famous by the Manhattans, I don't mean they taught her to sing. . . As an individual. Miriam was shy and really scared of us. Oh, she was. . .

Well, the three of us—me, Mackay Davashe and herself, we used to sit down and practice-sometimes we would tell her how to use her voice; how to improve her vocal chords and all that jazz. And Miriam would listen attentively.

Before she became the famous Miriam Makeba she is today. You know, I must admit, I never thought Miriam would become what she is now. What I mean is this; at Orlando township while she was with the Cuban Brothers, I thought 'Ag, she'll never make it big.'

I thought she would never make our standards—you know we regarded ourselves then as the big-shots. We thought we were The Guys, if you understand what I'm trying to say. I regarded the Cuban Brothers and Miriam as small-fry, let me put it that way.

They were not bad, on the other hand, because they in fact started close harmonies in this country, based on the American group, the Modernnaires.

To me, Miriam was just an ordinary girl—a novice. Ons was die ouens then—the real guys—thing of that nature. You'll forgive me for my English.

Miriam was not that attractive—I mean, curves and all that jazz. I think our first concert with Miriam was somewhere in the East Rand—singing negro spirituals, you know. But still, I was not yet impressed, maybe because I was so influenced by this Negro guy—Charlie 'Bird' Parker.

Awright, we toured the Free State, Cape and Natal with Miriam. Before the show, Dvashe and I would test her vocal chords, advising her here and there, and she would listen. Because during my schooldays I used to be a singer—yah. . . with Duze, we would tap-dance. My teacher, Mr. Ramokgopa, liked singing and he formed the group Lo-Six.

I came with a composition from the Chesa Ramblers band in Gemiston—boSipho, bo mang-mang. Gange ya Germiston. Their song was Saduva. That later became our closing song in our concerts.

Yah, at 4 am before playing the national anthem, Nkosi Sikelel'I Afrika, we would play Saduva when we'd know its chaile—closing time. It is this song Saduva which really gave Miriam a boost because at that time, Dolly Rathebe was the number one girl singer.

When Miriam got onto the stage with the Mannhattans, singing this song, she got the crowds raving. In those days we dressed smart—the guys with suits and bowties and Miriam wearing long evening dresses.

We played with her for a long time, until she left us and joined Alf Herbert's African Jazz. She was by now involved romantically with Sonny Pillay, who himself was a good singer.

THE COMING OF KING KONG

Then came this guy Spike Glasser, a lecturer in music at the University of Cape Town. Kante all the time Todd Matshikiza was writing the score for a musical work he was performing with us.

We were playing songs from the musical unawares—and I can remember well how we used to play the very overture from the musical—King Kong—at the Selbourne Hall. We were three then—Todd, General and me, at variety concerts.

Spike Glasser, came to us with his wife at Dorkay House, where we were all introduced. We were told he was from overseas and all that jazz.

We didn't know he was a local guy—you know we suffer from this complex that whenever a man is from overseas he's the end in life. 'There's nothing better than a man from overseas! Ha! Ha!

You know, daai gedagte—that kind of impression. Monna ga bare o tswa overseas ra mo sheba, man. Ra mo tshaba—when a man is from overseas we admire him. We go around in England, that guy. Musically-speaking, the guy was there, if you know what I mean. He came with some musical scores—aga man, I was just a scrappikkie of

a laatie then. Wearing my ysterbaadjie and my Hong Kong suite which was rather too tight on me.

Awright, present were the usual Dorkay crowd—bo-Mackay Davashe; Hugh Masekela, Jonas Gwangwa, whom again? I think others like Todd Matshikiza and the late clarinetist Gwigwi Mrwebi. Then Glasser went away, returned some weeks later and chose me, Davashe and Sol to assist him to arrange the music of the King Kong show.

We sat with Glasser for a coupla months—I think two months if I’m not wrong—arranging the score, at Dorkay. At times we would go to Glasser’s home in Orange Grove or Yeoville, spend some nights there. Or, go back home in the early hours of the morning at about three o’clock—with a bottle of whisky! This was to keep stimulating us, let me put it that way.

First stage rehearsal! Miriam Makeba was one of the leading characters together with Dambuza Mdedle playing the part of King Kong himself.

Really, I didn’t concentrate on the play which was by Harry Bloom. Glasser, a jolly guy, not pompous, was the musical director and Leon Gluckman was the director of the whole show.

There I began to realize that this girl—Miriam—can sing!

I said, haw—I nudged Davashe during one of the rehearsals, do you hear what I’m hearing, Mac? This girl! Huh! We performed for sometime with Miriam then poof!—she’s now up there.

Our opening night of the show at the Wits Great Hall had been fantastic—Oh, God, the reception was wonderful, man.

I then realized that 'heh, this Miriam Makeba — she's so clever this cherrie. . . Klaar, klaar, she had recorded the song Lo-Six, the one she had been singing with the Mannhattans. We had some professional jealousy. We toured the Cape and Natal with the King Kong show — I think in Cape Town we played to mixed audiences. At the Great Hall I could not see the audience because I was in the orchestra's pit.

It was not very long after Miriam had left for America, Masekela followed also — before the show went to London Abigail Kubheka was Miriam's under-study — the script and the music.

I went to London a month after the whole cast had left because I had been hospitalized after an assault.

In London, I had to audition for my previous place in the orchestra! About a month after my arrival in London, something happened to my brain. I became berserk and had to be taken to a mental asylum in London — Ferreira Hospital.

Hah, I had to leave the King Kong show. A substitute was found — a white guy took my place.

I stayed for a month at the hospital. Then, one day one of the doctors took me to a concert in London where pianist Oscar Peterson and Trio were playing, including Ella Fitzgerald and her group.

I sat there, you know (the doctor wanted me to find out whether I'm awright, because they suspected that I thought too much, musically, if you understand what I mean). They thought that my liking of music could have been one of the causes of my sudden illness that made me not to be quite normal.

Okay, I went to that concert. Well, I was normal then, you know. . . But when Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown (on bass) and Ed Thigpen (on

drums) started playing there, I felt like standing and jumping, things of that nature. The doctor said, 'Sit down, sit down, Kippie!'

Hey, this Oscar Peterson, Ray Brown and Ed Thigpen.

Second half, came Ella Fitzgerald and her group and the same thing happened. Ella was gone! With Herb Ellis (on guitar) and the other guys—one white and two negroes. I can't remember their names.

After the show, I got an autograph from Ella.

And from there, the doctor said to me, 'No Kippie, I think you're still not awright. You'll have to stay another two weeks in the hospital.' After the two weeks, I was discharged, having been given treatment—like electric shock—three times. That thing can make you stupid, man.

It makes you to become forgetful. Even now, I'm like that—forgetful. I have this tendency of forgetting things—I can hold a pen and forget where I have to put it.

But the doctor said it would do me good. He told me that if one nerve in my brain snapped, I had had it and would eventually become insane, if I kept on thinking too much about music. He said electric shock treatment was the best for me.

Afterwards, I went to this place—I forget it, man. . .Newport Hotel. . .there I met Jonas Gwangwa and the other cast members of King Kong. By the way, the doctor had told me not to booze, but all the same I drank though the doctor had said, 'If you drink, you'll die.'

BACK HOME

Those who returned to South Africa with me were Mackay Davashe and Abigail Kubheka, while several others remained in London

I had to come back home because I could no longer stomach it in London. Oh well, a week after my arrival, I went to Dorkay House where Mr. Ian Bernhardt began to run musical shows for some of us there—including the late pianist, Gideon Nxumalo. We played at City Hall, Selbourne Hall and some nightclubs here and there. Gideon was just too fantastic! I mean, as a musician. I would say, he was a born musician, though he was much more into classic music, ya. But he was a master—he could read and write music well. He could handle that instrument of his!

Oh yah, I remember so clearly now moments in what I believe was the best small band in the country—Jazz Epistles, featuring Dollar Brand on piano, Hugh Masekela on trumpet, Jonas Gwangwa on trombone, and Makhaya Ntshoko on drums, and me on alto saxophone

I now recall ‘Scullery Department’, which I composed and recorded on our first album, Jazz Epistles Volume One.

We were playing at a certain nightclub in Johannesburg. During a musical break, we were taken to the kitchen to have our meal. Yah, we sat down in that kitchen, eating.

Then I said, ‘By right, you know Dollar, this is all nonsense—this idea of us being taken into the kitchen when there’s a break.’

I further said to the guys: ‘Are we kitchen “boys”. Aren’t we here to entertain the people? Aren’t we the “thing” here?’

Dollar replied in a soft and skollie-like voice: ‘Ja, man, jy praat die waarheid ou pellie.’

There and then I started to think of a song. . .to remember the kitchen incident by, but I didn't think in terms of the word scullery. It was suggested by Dollar.

He said, 'Ja, ou pellie, ons kom nou en dan by die kombuis. . .the scullery department.'

And that's how that song was born, because I said to the guys. 'Yes, I should write a song called "Scullery Department"!'

After discussing this, we immediately called the son of the owner of the nightclub into the kitchen and told him:

'Look here pellie, it is not good this thing of you bringing us into the kitchen for our meal.

'You'd better see that we get our own table right there among the customers. We're also important in this whole affair, you know?

'In fact, we ARE the thing here! And do you know, if it were not for us, we're telling you you'd have no business.'

'But you know chaps, my license,' he replied.

We answered back: 'Your license? Why don't they stop us playing in front of whites?'

After that, he went away—and set a table for us right among the customers!

The Jazz Epistles was the best band I ever played in, here in South Africa.

Chapter 13

District Six Boyhood

by

Richard Rive

This is essentially a selective autobiography, since I have judiciously and purposefully selected the autobiographical material I am prepared to write about. I do not want to tell all, since I cannot tell all. Some incidents I have genuinely forgotten. Others I have glossed over. Still others are locked away in that private part of my world which belongs only to myself and perhaps one or two intimates. Many other incidents are too mundane and dreary to record. If, as I understand it, the autobiography is structurally the marriage between personal history and the novel, then I might ask the question what claim to history or literature my own particular life story has. Is my life then unique that it warrants an historical account of its own—albeit selected? All lives are unique, and so many millions of others in South Africa and other countries have shared experiences as important or unimportant as mine. But these experiences which I describe are unique to me and to the way I respond to them and the way I articulate them.

My life story could take different shapes and directions; for example the form and direction of one of the many shattered South African dreams. But then, is there anything left for any Black man's dreams in *Black Boy*?

In March 1979, I was invited to be the keynote speaker at the conference of the African Literature Association of America, at the University of Indiana in Bloomington. I entitled my talk 'The Ethics

of an Anti-Jim Crow'. In it I posed the question whether any Black boy in South Africa could ever dream of being accepted in the land of his birth as a statesman or intellectual or creative artists in his own right. Could any Black boy dream of being part of the meaningful lawmaking processes in his own country? If any Black boy could, it certainly never occurred to me and my ragged friends running wild in the mean streets of Cape Town's District Six. It never occurred to us at that stage what we were intended for anything better than what we experienced around us.

I was born in March 1931, in Caledon Street just below St. Mark's Church, which stands on windy Clifton Hill. When I refer to Caledon Street I have to use the past tense, since it has been wiped out by official decree. The streets of the District then sloped down perilously towards the harbour so that our street was lower than William Street but considerably higher than Hanover Street running parallel to it. Around us were squalid alleys, refuse-filled streets and mean lanes called by such fancy names as Seven Steps, Horstley Street and Rotten Row. Under the Group Areas Act District Six has been reduced to a wasteland of broken bricks and rubble. A few years ago I was driving through the scarred landscape of what had been scenes of my childhood, Bloemhof Flats still remained and St. Mark's Church stood dignified and defiant in its solitariness. My stone-built primary school lay in ruins, and Star Bioscope had been bulldozed and so had the Globe Furnishers which gave its name to a notorious gang, and the Hanover Street Swimming Baths with its black, opaque water, and Velkes Wonder Shop and Maisels Bottle Store. Where were the crowded corners of Tennant Street where we played around lamp-posts in the evenings with the southeaster howling around us? And Langman's musty Indian store smelling of butterpits and *masala* powder? And the Fish and Chips shop with sawdust sprinkled on the floor and the plate-glass windows steamed over with the cooking-oil? All these have disappeared because mean little men have taken my past away.

My birth certificate says that my parentage is mixed; that is, that I come from Black and White stock. By official decree I have been variously labeled 'Coloured', 'Non-European', and 'Non-White'. The first appellation is meaningless, since everyone is coloured. Some are coloured pink, others brown, others black. In the United States 'Coloured' means anyone who is not White. 'Non-European' and 'Non-White' are highly insulting labels. They imply that the persons described are negative entities, non-somethings. It is as insulting as the term Non-Black; or Non-American to describe a Black citizen of that State, or Non-Englishman to describe an Irishman in Camden Town. There must be few precedents in world history of an indigenous people being called by so negative an appellation. The term 'Coloured' I find as offensive in the South African context because it has hierarchic implications, implying inferior to Whites and superior to Blacks.

When I was on the campus of a Black American college in the heart of Mississippi, I became involved in an animated discussion with some students about South African policy. At no time did I reveal my nationality. The students were in deadly earnest; their sentiments were so right and their facts so wrong. To drive home a point, I was forced to reveal the fact that I was a South African.

'South African?' said one student skeptically. 'But you don't look White.'

'No,' I said.

'You don't look Black either.'

'Dark brown,' I replied.

'Oh well,' he said resignedly. 'You must be one of those Coloureds they spell with a *u*.'

I was born of 'mixed' parentage, that much seems sure, but I am vague about my ancestry. I remember a mounted print which had pride of place on our dining-room wall; it showed a man I later learnt was my maternal grandfather. He sported a cheesecutter and a droopy Dr. Crippen moustache and stood next to a racehorse he owned which had won the Metropolitan Handicap. He was unmistakably White. Blacks did not at that time own horses that won races. I must therefore conclude that my maternal grandmother must have been Black or Brown, as my mother was beautifully bronze. Little was ever mentioned about this grandmother other than that she came from the Klapmuts district. About my father and his family I know almost nothing. He died soon after I was born and was seldom mentioned in family circles. Perhaps a dark secret lurks somewhere. I once competed in some athletics competition, and watching was a very important Black American lady under a sunshade. When I had received my prize from her she remarked, 'They can't beat an American boy, can they?' I have never been able to fathom what that meant, and I never bothered to ask. She was a family friend and knew my mother intimately. So possibly the Black strain came from my father and came from far over the Atlantic.

I grew up in District Six in an atmosphere of shabbiness and deprivation at times. I remember, when I was three or four years old, running away from our tenement flat and wandering down Caledon Street, determined to explore my surroundings but frightened stiff. I stopped outside an impressive set of French doors which jutted out onto the pavement. A red light burned in the window in spite of the bright morning sun. I had stumbled by accident on the most exclusive brothel in our street, run by a tyrannical Madam called *Mary Worse* or *Mary Sausages*. I think she received her nickname because of her pronounced lips or pronounced buttocks or both. For

a long time she was the toughest, most generous and ugliest woman I had ever known. As I paused outside her establishment one of the girls spotted me and enticed me inside with a sugarstick. She was fair, I remember, with a rather worn, hard face. She smiled and called to the girls inside that there was a new customer. They all laughed and I could not understand this so began to cry and wanted to return home. She lifted me up and set me down next to her. While she painted her toenails, I told her about our family, how I could almost read, how my sister Georgie was pretty and had long hair, how my brother Douglas went to a large school in De Villiers Street, how my mother could bake tarts and yellow bread with raisins in it. She listened attentively and then showed me the butterflies tattooed on her legs and warned me that they would fly away if one told lies. I did not believe her, because, in spite of what she was saying, they remained on her legs.

Mary and the girls had a ritual every Christmas which I used to watch for many years while we lived in Caledon Street. Around 10 p.m. on Christmas Eve, all the customers would be put out unceremoniously from the brothel, whether ill-dressed local thugs, or Chinese seamen, or well-groomed respectable pillars of our community who came surreptitiously, or down-at-heel White pimps who smuggled illicit liquor the house was closed for all 'business', the door thrown open and the red light switched off. Mary and the girls would wash, put on fresh make-up and don their best dresses. Then, led by their redoubtable Madam (who, rumour had it, was the drum major of the Girls Brigade band in younger and more innocent days), they would march up Caledon Street in double file to attend midnight mass at St. Mark's on the Hill. They would file self-consciously into their seats and cry throughout the service, especially when they felt that the references in the sermon were intended for them. By the time I was a teenager and sang in the church choir, the ritual was still going strong, and I would wink from our pews at any of the girls I knew, and they would reciprocate with wan, tear-

stained smiles. After the service was over they would again fall into ranks outside the church and march down the street led by Mary.

It was then open-house at the brother for all who cared to come. Everything was freely available except sex. The Rector of St. Mark's was invited, put in a brief appearance and said a few encouraging words. Wine flowed and there were plates heaped with chicken curry and yellow rice, boboties, jellies and custards. The radiogram blared 'O Come All Ye Faithful' and 'Hark, the Herald Angles Sing'. By noon on Christmas day it was all over. The guests shook hands and left, the mess was cleared up, and Mary and the girls went to bed and slept like logs for the rest of the day. Later that evening they roused themselves, drew the curtains and switched on the red light. It was business as usual for the rest of the year.

It is notoriously easy to romanticize about slum life and sentimentalize it. In truth the slum was damp, dirty and dank. As children we ran around barefooted in patched clothes, howling at drunks and shouting obscene encouragement at bare-chested street-fighters. Very rarely did the White world intrude into our area and when it did it was in the form of social workers bursting with compassion or priests bursting with righteousness, or policemen bursting with arrogance, strutting around in pairs and brazening it out with their hands always on their revolver holsters.

I endured a harrowing childhood in District Six, where drunkenness, debauchery and police raids were the order of the day. I cannot find any reasonable objection to slum clearance, especially for the purpose of reconstructing decent homes to replace the former tenements. But when District Six was razed it was done so by official decree to make room for those who already had too much. Today, decades later, it has still not been built up. Those of us who had lived there before were shifted out unceremoniously and against our wills to the desolate sandy wastes of Manenberg and Heideveld, and a wind-

swept area which with almost malicious sarcasm has been named Hanover Park. No White authority had every bothered to ask me whether they could take my past away. They simply brought in their bulldozers.

When I went back recently I stood overlooking a wasteland on which trees and weeds were growing. I tried to reconstruct my childhood. I tried to estimate where our large tenement building, which housed over twelve family units, had stood. It was a huge, dirty-grey, forbidding, double-storied structure with a rickety wooden balcony that ran its entire length. There were three main entrances, numbered 201, 203 and 205. All faced Caledon Street. Behind it and much lower, running alongside, was a concrete enclosed area called The Big Yard into which all the occupants of the tenement threw their slops, refuse and dirty water. Below street level, and running under the building itself, was a warren of disused, gloomy rooms, the remains of a Turkish Bath complex; a carry-over from the time when District Six was rich, White and Jewish.

Our section was 201. The green skylight above the door was pockmarked with holes my brother Douglas had shot into the glass with his pellet gun. After you negotiated the first flight of steps, which were of smooth-worn stone, you reached a wooden landing, where, as children, we would sit huddled in the artificial gloom, our thin jackets over our knees for warmth, and tell stories and reel off fantasies about characters in the District. Two sections ran off this floor, in one of which lived Mrs. Louw, who had a pronounced Semitic nose, purpled and veined from too much drinking. We called her Punch. It was rumoured that, although well into her fifties, she had a boyfriend who was not only decades younger than herself but was also a White man. In the other apartment downstairs lived Ta'Stienie, who was obese and vulgar, usually walked around barefooted in a tight dress sizes too small, and had half a dozen simian children from almost as many men. Up another flight of

rickety steps, wooden this time, you turned into pitch darkness. At the top of these was a tiny landing off which ran the two remaining apartments. One belonged to Aunt Becky and her husband. She had left her Dutch Reformed Mission Church because it was far too Afrikaans for her liking, unfashionable and working-class. Now she was a pillar of St. Marks's, which was at least Anglican. She also attended every Communist Party rally in the City Hall and dragged me along. In spite of her pronounced class consciousness she was an admirer of Comrade Bill Andrews, and would often repeat that she would 'live a Communist and die a Communist'. The other apartment belonged to our family: my widowed mother, one unmarried sister, Georgina, and three brothers, David, Harold and Douglas. One brother, Arthur, had been found dead on Rondebosch Common. Another sister, Lucy, and a brother, Joseph, had married and fled the District as soon as possible. The remaining brothers slept in what we called The Boys' Room. It was gloomy, shabby and always smelt of stale sweat.

I ran away from the thirteenth three infant schools I was enrolled at. My objections, even at the age of five, were aesthetic. At the first school two girls wearing tartan pinafores and sporting long pigtailed sat in front of me and cried all the time. I joined in the crying, and when the teacher was in an upstairs room having her tea, I ran home. At the second school we were made to stand in a queue while the teacher, who prided himself on being an amateur artist, drew whatever we requested on our slates. The girl in front of me asked for a mantelpiece, and this was drawn for her, complete with delicately balanced ornaments. I wanted the same drawing, but with my limited vocabulary asked for a house instead. So he drew a house for me; a cottage with smoke curling out of the chimney. I burst out crying, smashed my slate in front of him and ran home again. The third school was held in a converted garage and I objected because Douglas attended a school called Trafalgar Junior, which was housed in a proper building. This time I refused to return after the first day. I

remained at the fourth school, St. Mark's, because I fell in love with my teacher, who was over-powdered, hairy, and smelt of perfume.

I grew up in an atmosphere of shabby respectability, in a family chafing against its social confinement to dirty, narrow streets in a beaten-up neighbourhood. Our hankering after respectability became obsessive. We always felt we were intended for better things. The family spoke Afrikaans, but as the youngest I was spoken to in English. We were members of the Anglican Church. I wore shoes to school, a mark of great social distinction. And when in my loneliness I befriended the local guttersnipes, 'you skollie friends' as they were called when I accepted Tana, Soelie and Braim as bosom companions, and Honger, who didn't know who his parents were and slept on the cold, wet cement floor of the Mokies Buildings in Tennant Street—when we used to sit in darkened doorways, and our silence was full of the hopelessness of our lives—I knew that discovery by my socially insecure family was fraught with danger.

I suffered all the uncertainties of pseudo-respectability. As a child I was never strongly rebellious and acquiesced fairly easily. I joined a church choir and chanted the responses dressed in a cassock, surplice and scratchy Eton collar. I left the church Lads Brigade and joined the Second Cape Town Boy Scout Troop, because marching through the streets behind a blaring, tinny band could damage the image we tried to create. But it was financially difficult to break with our surroundings and so we remained, the family diminishing as members married and left. At twelve I won a competitive Municipal Scholarship which allowed me to proceed to High School to do subjects with a ring about them such as Latin, Mathematics and Physical Science.

Although the White world seldom put in an appearance in District Six, we occasionally ventured out. These sorties were often hazardous and dangerous.

I remember how my ragamuffin friends and I, bewitched by the lights and music of a Whites-only amusement park at the bottom of Adderley Street cautiously advanced into it only to be chased out by a red-faced policeman.

I remember the vice squad raiding all the houses in Caledon Street for illicit liquor, and the huge, scarred detective in charge who poked through our wardrobes with a skewer.

And my eldest brother, Joey, marching off to war in the ranks of his segregated Cape Coloured Corps in order to free Ethiopia.

And the man whom newspapers later hailed as one of Cape Town's most progressive City Councillors, who phoned the police to chase us off Green Point Track because we dare to practice our athletics on the amenity reserved for whites.

My entry into sport was also traumatic. In the usual rowdy street games I was bigger, stronger and faster than my peers. Large-limbed and tall for my age, I had a distinct advantage over the other slum urchins. During school vacations social workers, both White and Black, would invade us and smother us with love, goodwill and dripping-wet charity. They would assemble us on the nearest stony vacant lot, hand out second-hand bats and balls, and watch us whooping and desporting, their eyes tinged with pity and understanding. We masked our resentment but deliberately and calculatedly shocked them by hurling invectives at one another and discussing sexual details as loudly as possible. We would side-spy them for any reactions And indeed soon enough these would come. Raised eyebrows and sympathetic clicking of tongues. Like so many charity peddlers they did not lack sincerity, as if that were enough. We longed for understanding non condescension; for love not patronization. And when these were not forthcoming we bit the charitable hand that fed us. I soon became a favourite with them. I

was an excellent athlete, fairly docile, and, what amazed, already I spoke English more fluently than most of them. These activities usually ended in a gigantic sports meeting at Green Point. Shouting, laughing and hurling obscenities, we would be carted off to the track to compete against other ragamuffins from Gympie Street, Dry-Docks and Bo-Kaap. I gave away my prizes of ludo sets, cheap torches and glass ashtrays to save embarrassing explanations at home.

Once I was older I joined an exclusive, upper-class 'Coloured' athletics club. At first the members, all fair-skinned, were worried about my dark complexion, but relented because not only was I a mere junior but I attended Trafalgar High School. The evening I joined, the club experienced a crisis. A young man wished to become a member whose hair texture, yellow complexion, high cheekbones, poor education and guttural Afrikaans accent socially disqualified him. Most of the seniors resigned in protest against having to mix with him socially. As juniors we were out of all this. And when we trained together afterwards in the twilight of a Green Point evening on the special day set aside for 'Coloureds', with the smell of cinder and embrocation in our nostrils, it was only ourselves, a handful of innocent teenagers, who were prepared to warm-up with him.

I remember the flaming torches carried by hard-faced Black men marching past Castle Bridge in protest against the Segregation Bill.

I also remember the first job I ever applied for. When I was asked to come for an interview because my mathematics marks were exceptionally high, an embarrassed employment officer drew me aside and apologized because the job was for Whites only.

And the White manager of a clothing-factory in Searle Street who guffawed when I meekly indicated that I wished to be employed as a clerk.

And the unemployment queue in Barrack Street. After shuffling to the front I was told that with a Senior Certificate I was overqualified for any work they could offer a Black.

A superficial observer will see a slum merely as a breeding-place for crime and lawlessness. This is understandable because the slum has a sort of anonymity about it. A slum is where *they* live. *They* not only look alike, they also behave alike. But those who are forced to live in a slum know that the uniformity is superficial. There is also a rough ethical system at work, of acceptance or rejection. In a slum set aside for Blacks, Jim Crow is vitally important. You either accept it or reject it, how to feint, how to dodge, how to mask your resentment, how to insulate yourself against hurt by laughing too loudly or shouting too wildly. You learn that the difference between colour discrimination and any other form is that colour discrimination is observable. In the slum you can blend into the background and seek anonymity in the mass whenever the pressure becomes too much. You become indistinguishable from the others, by Whites. But amongst yourselves you are not invisible, you are not fused with others, because the slum paradoxically also teaches you to guard your individuality. When Whites are around, you drop it as a protective device, but amongst yourselves you stake your claim to be different because you *are* different. Beneath your black skin beats a different heart. And your anti-Jim Crow stance starts with the first dangerous thoughts and questions about that harsh, cold, White world outside. And you approach it not as a subservient and a menial but as an equal bent on answers. And this period is the most dangerous not only because of the questions but because of the answers. You are now fully prepared to adopt the ethics of an anti-Jim Crow.

Chapter 14

Notes From A Quiet Backwater

by

Bessie Head

There must be many people like me in South Africa whose birth or beginnings are filled with calamity and disaster, the sort of person who is the skeleton in the cupboard or the dark and fearful secret swept under the carpet.

The circumstances of my birth seemed to make it necessary to obliterate all traces of a family history.

I have not a single known relative on earth, no long and ancient family tree to refer to, no links with heredity or a sense of having inherited a temperament, a certain emotional instability or the shape of a fingernail from a grandmother or a great-grandmother.

I have always been just me, with no frame of reference to anything beyond myself.

I was born on July 6, 1937, in the Pietermaritzburg mental hospital. The reason for my peculiar birthplace was that my mother was white and my father black.

No details were ever available about my father beyond the fact that he worked in the family stables and took care of their racehorses.

A great deal became known to me about my mother when I was thirteen.

At birth I had been handed to a Coloured foster mother to whom I became deeply attached and accepted as my mother. She was paid a pittance of three pounds a month to care for me.

There was sly, secret supervision of my life, which was unknown to me. Each month a social security worker turned up with a notebook to jot down notes and records of my day-to-day existence.

When I was thirteen the foster mother fell into a state of abject poverty and a decision was made to transfer me to a mission orphanage in Durban.

Problems arose when the school holidays came round.

I was called to the office of the principal, a British missionary, who announced curtly: 'You are not going back to that woman. She is not your mother.'

A teacher found me lying prostrate and at the point of collapse under a bush in the school garden. On asking what was the matter, I told her I was about to die as no one would let me go home to my mother.

Thereupon the principal bundled me into her car and for some strange reason raced straight to the Durban Magistrate's Court where a magistrate read something out to me in a quick gabble that I did not hear or understand.

But he looked at me accusingly as though I were some criminal and said, hostilely: 'Your mother was a white woman, do you hear?'

On arriving back at the mission, the missionary opened a large file and looked at me with a wild horror and said:

'Your mother was insane. If you're not careful you'll get insane just like your mother. Your mother was a white woman. They had to lock her up as she was having a child by the stable boy who was a native.'

The lady seemed completely unaware of the appalling cruelty of her words. But for years and years after that I harboured a terrible and blind hatred for the missionaries and the Christianity which they represented, and once I left the mission I never set foot in a Christian church again.

But it was also the lady's delight whenever she had a problem with me to open that file and read out bits of it. So I gained a hazy impression of my beginnings, of a pathetic letter written by my mother in the mental hospital, stipulating that above all things, it was her earnest desire that I receive an education, of a period of emotional instability and depression in her life that had led her to inflict a terrible disaster on herself.

She had been married and when the marriage fell through she returned to the family home.

In a sudden and quite unpredictable way she decided to seek some love and warmth from a black man. But the family belonged to the top racehorse owning strata of South African society.

The family home was Johannesburg and it was necessary for them to hide their skeleton in the cupboard far away from home. She never came out of the mental hospital in Pietermaritzburg and died there in 1943.

In contrast to all this I fear any biographers would be bored to tears by my own life story. There are truly no skeletons in my cupboard or dark secrets swept under the carpet; no real sensation or scandal has ever touched my life and I look back on myself as a personality, plain and ordinary, without any glamour or mystery.

Chapter 15

Return To Johannesburg

by

Ellen Kuzwayo

I gradually settled down at number 1092/2/3 Merafe Street, Pimville, the house of my father, Phillip Serasengwe Merafe.

My father had been a student under his father-in-law, Jeremiah Mokoloi Makgothi, in Thaba’Nchu in the Orange Free State. After finishing his preliminary education in Thaba’Nchu, he went to Lovedale Institution, where he qualified as one of the first black printers. He worked at Mr. Tlale’s Printing Press *Moshochonono* at Maseru in Lesotho. Later, he worked for a short time for the *Bantu World* press in Johannesburg and finally went into business as a general dealer at Pimville. As I have described, he became a champion of civic work in Johannesburg, under the Advisory Boards of the 1930s.

Pimville, in 1947, was by and large a slum, like all the other black areas round the cities and towns of South Africa. In those years Pimville was notorious for its 'tank' houses (Nissen huts, made of corrugated iron) and as a result the area was known as 'Ditankeng', since these houses looked like faceless, tail-less elephants, in height, width and breadth. They were also the size of a fully grown elephant: these were family dwellings, not single quarters, and served as kitchen, dining-room, sitting and bedrooms, as well as bathroom. All these houses (if my memory serves me well) were built below the railway lines, as temporary shelters for the Johannesburg black labour pool. They were fully demolished forty years after their erection—this is how temporary they became!

Merafe Street was the first street east of the railway line in Pimville. Except for a few decent houses-like the Nthongoas' and the Nkomos' next door—most looked dilapidated from overcrowding. One was called 'House Basoabile', which means 'They are disappointed' (by the owner's achievements, I suppose). Next door to each other on Merafe Street were two houses owned by my father. His shop was on the corner, next to the houses. Pimville Station was two minutes' walk away. These two houses were brick-built and finished with a cement rendering. All the rooms in both houses had properly finished ceilings and the floors were of concrete covered with linoleum. One of the houses was rented; the other, in which we lived, was furnished in good taste. Although the rooms were comparatively small, the home was comfortable by the standards of those years.

The very poor houses in Merafe Street were rented to migrant labourers, most of whom came from Lesotho. Their 'town wives' were seasoned 'illicit' liquor traders, and used large quantities of water for cleaning and washing their laundry as well as the pots in which they made liquor. This dirty water was generally emptied into the street, which, neither graveled nor tarred, was perpetually

muddy with pools of stagnant water. As there were no drains to collect this dirty water, the street could stink at times.

The 'bucket system' of sewerage was used in Pimville until the late 1970s when a water-borne sewerage system was built. Considering the fact that Pimville was established early in the century—say round about 1918—that community was using the bucket system for at least 60 years, yet they survived any possible epidemics. It was very uncomfortable, even nauseating, to inhale the smell from the buckets lined up on every street throughout Pimville, before they were collected to be disposed of at a nearby farm, commonly known to the residents as 'Kwa spensel'. The sight of the buckets was very painful to both the eye and to the inner feelings of the residents. We used to tease my father, as a Chief 'Sisunda' on the Advisory Board ('Sisunda' is equal to Chief Councillor), about the filth and squalor in Merafe Street where the Chief himself lived. Come to think of it, Father took such jokes well—although, more often than not, they were truths much more than jokes.

It was to this community that I returned brow-beaten, helpless and lost—but certainly not having lost the fighting spirit which has been my second nature since I have been aware of the world around me. For as long as I remember, I have hated being a burden to anybody, or letting myself be treated as worthless by anybody. It was a very strange time, now that I look back. Strange, because when I came back from Saulspoort and needed someone to help me out, I did not feel free, in this new home, to seek the help I needed. It was a 'new' home because the first time I had come here was when I was on holiday and did not need anything from anyone. My father bought me clothing as a present, not out of need, on that occasion. This time I was next to naked and deeply appreciated the shoes and clothing my father bought me, simple and inexpensive as they may have seemed then.

Without blowing my own horn, I had always been a very industrious girl. With my mother, I could not have been otherwise. I soon realized afresh that my step-mother was a very industrious and particular person too. Her house was spotless. She was also a very good cook. From what I had seen of her during my short visits, I knew she was someone I could live with. I reminded myself that my role in this household was that of a child. My mother's words reinforced my thoughts: 'Remember if you should ever be in your father's house one day, give your mother in that home the same respect and recognition you would accord me.' Among the duties I assigned myself was to get up and clean my own bedroom and the living rooms before my parents awoke. I left the kitchen to the home-help. Within two weeks this had become routine.

It was within these first two weeks too that I decided to find a job. The few friends I had in Pimville, some of them teachers, had indicated that there were no teaching vacancies locally. When I discussed the possibility of going to Orlando East to try my luck in the schools there, they agreed that this might be a good idea.

If my memory serves me well, it was on Monday, 3 March 1947, that I boarded a local train at about 7:30 a.m. But for some reason I can never explain, I passed Orlando Station and alighted at Mlamlankunzi, where I was greeted by the sight of a number of schools, all within a relatively small area. For a moment I stopped, held my breath and seriously debated on which school to go to first: a very difficult decision for a complete stranger to make. There were about two schools to my immediate right, one further on from the two, and two more facing me. Something inside me said, 'Walk straight on, Ellen.' I did just that and walked through the school gate facing me. I cannot say why I preferred this particular school. I passed the one on the left and went into the one on the right.

It was now about 9:00 a.m., and a light-complexioned gentleman was standing in the yard. He was a man of medium height and slight build. He was certainly not impressed by my appearance—perhaps he took me for a parent of one of the pupils. He introduced himself and I did the same, adding that I wished to see the headmaster. Without inviting me inside, he said, with a puzzled look on his face, ‘What do you want to see the headmaster about? Perhaps I can help.’ Rather apologetically, I told him that I was a school teacher by profession, I came from Rustenburg, had come to settle in Johannesburg and that I *badly* needed a job. Still looking doubtful as if in need of an explanation for my appearance, he finally said, ‘Yes, Mrs. Moloto, this is a very strange and rare coincidence. On Friday afternoon one of my teachers left for home without saying a word. This morning she sends me a letter of resignation without any warning, or even as much as serving a week’s notice.’ He turned and faced one of the classroom doors behind him saying: ‘You hear those children making that noise there? That is the class left by the teacher I am referring to.’ As a matter of form I responded, ‘It is rather disturbing for a professional person to act so unprofessionally in her job.’ Deep down in my heart I would have given *anything* to get her job. He then wanted to know if I knew any teachers in the neighbouring schools who could act as referees for me. He told me that the school next door was Orlando High, that the headmaster there was Mr. Godfrey Nakene and, among the staff he mentioned Mr. Randall Peteni. I immediately told him that I used to know Mr. Nakene and Mr. Peteni, but added that I did not think they would remember me as I had last seen them several years before. His face brightened and he said, ‘Wait for me here, I am coming back’, then he rushed towards Orlando High School, jumped a fence and vanished into the building, leaving me there in a state of great anxiety.

After what felt like hours of waiting he came back and now invited me into his office. There he told me of the very favourable response he had received from both Mr. Nakene and Mr. Peteni about my

performance as a teacher. 'Mrs. Moloto, they both say, if I lose you, I lose a jewel in the teaching field,' he ended. There was, however, no doubt in my mind that the headmaster of Law Palmer Primary School—his name was Mr. Mokale—was finding it very difficult to reconcile this 'jewel in the teaching field' with the woman who stood in front of him. I vowed to demonstrate to him that appearance are not always the best yardstick to determine someone's worth at work.

He desperately needed a teacher at that moment and I was the only person available to take over the class, who were now shouting at the top of their voices. 'Mrs. Moloto,' he said, 'Let's go into the classroom.' I stood awkwardly before the children as he introduced me. It was very clear the children were not in the least impressed by me. After reprimanding the class for making so much noise, he firmly told them to behave. Then, appointing one pupil to keep order, he invited me to follow him into his office, where he gave me the class register, a timetable and a few textbooks. I then returned to the class. I had hardly been with the class for five minutes when the bell for break rang, and the pupils flew out of the classroom, as if grateful to get away from this stranger, their new class teacher.

After putting the record books in their place, I glanced through the window only to see a very smart group of teachers, both male and female. The women were very attractively dressed, as was usual. I didn't know whether to remain in the classroom or join the rest of the staff. Embarrassment was about to get the better of me when a vivacious sprightly teacher walked in. She seemed unconcerned by my appearance and shook hands, saying in a very friendly tone, 'Welcome to Law Palmer. Come and join us. I am Caroline Ramalebye.' In a more subdued tone I introduced myself: 'Ellen Moloto, Mrs. Moloto.' I was acutely aware of my shabby appearance as I followed her to join the group of very lively teachers, chatting and laughing on the verandah. I shook hands with all of them and we exchanged names.

As we had nothing in common to talk about, I listened to their conversation, but without really assimilating the content. I would have given any excuse to get away, but I lacked the courage to do so. When the bell finally rang I could have shouted 'hurrah'.

Among the group, there was one woman who was not like the rest of the staff. In fact, she was not very different from me in appearance as far as I could see. At the end of the school day, she told me she had only been at the school a week and that she came from the Cape. We both shared our hard-luck stories. I had a lot in common with Ms. Leila Mthimkulu as regards our immediate past family life, but we were poles apart so far as our outlook towards life was concerned.

Within the first two weeks, I found myself drawn towards the sophisticated, vivacious Caroline Ramalebye as my companion. The difference in our appearance did not act as a barrier between us. Caroline, now Mrs. Caswell, had, and still has, a very strong personality, and with Mrs. Gladys Molestane, born Mathabathe, another teacher at this school, had a marked influence in the school.

Except for Mr. Mashala, the carpentry instructor who lived in Kliptown, all the staff members lived locally and did not have to commute between home and school. It was for this reason that, after school, we went our separate ways and I saw very little of them outside school hours. I occasionally traveled home by train with Mr. Mashala.

At the end of two months, things changed drastically for me when I joined my uncle's family in Orlando. The move meant that I could live more cheaply because I could walk to work; but the change brought many other blessings as well as hardships with it. I lived more or less in the same neighbourhood as Leila and I found myself in her company more often than not, particularly on our way back

home. It was in her company that I first made contact with the local shopkeepers in Orlando. Now that I lived away from home, I missed the opportunity of using my father's contacts for purchasing the goods I needed, and as a stranger in Johannesburg, this was a real need for me—a situation which the established residents of this city may find funny or not real. Through Leila, I was introduced to the local traders, and thus perhaps appeared as a more respectable citizen of their community. Through this new network of contacts I was able to put myself on a par with my colleagues in my dress, and so gained self-confidence and dignity and became independent in my own right, as a person.

By the end of 1947 I was an integrated member of the staff at Law Palmer Higher Primary School. Besides my regular classroom duties, my assignments included training the senior school team in basketball, conducting the senior girls' choir for music competitions, running the Girl Guides and supervising groups of pupils assigned to clean the school premises. Later, some of my colleagues shared with me the private impressions they had had about me when I first joined the staff. It was great fun and very revealing to get an honest assessment. I knew then I had made it in that school. I remained there for six years. It was from there that I brought home the 'Girls Choir Trophy', as conductor of the district music competition.

Not far from our school, just outside the nearest railway station, Mlamlankunzi, stood a reformatory for delinquent boys whose offences varied in degree of severity. Their ages ranged from twelve to eighteen years. Apart from Law Palmer, all the other schools in that neighbourhood refused to take any of them. For as long as I taught at this school, I shared this rare responsibility with the rest of my colleagues, and became very concerned about and attached to these boys. This concern and interest opened a new direction in my life. The boys were a challenge to all of us, including the headmaster. I was drawn closer to them when, in my second year in that school, I

was assigned to teach some subjects in standards 5 and 6, where most of these boys were pupils. My direct contact with them helped me to get to know them as people with weaknesses and strengths. Some of them were very lovable and intelligent. There was no doubt that some who had landed in this institution were victims of circumstances. The fact that some were children from broken homes increased my concern for my own sons, particularly after my divorce. In the struggle to settle down after the shocking experience of my marriage, I immersed myself in some of the events taking place in my community, such as youth work, training and running youth clubs in Pimville and Orlando. This occupied me in the afternoons after school when there were no extra-mural activities.

Later in the year, my interest turned to the youth section of the African National Congress. The ANC Youth League had been launched in 1943, four years before my return to Johannesburg. The leaders of this movement, Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu and Oliver Tambo, were young black radicals who saw the ANC as a n organization of the black elite. Their aspirations were to produce a mass grass-roots organization. I remember the glamorous Nelson Mandela of those years. The beautiful white silk scarf he wore round his neck stands out in my mind to this day. Walter Max Sisulu, on the other hand, was a hardy, down-to-earth man with practical clothing—typically a heavy coat and stout boots. Looking back, the third member of their tri, Oliver Tambo, acted as something of a balance, with his middle-of-the-road clothes! Most of my leisure-time in the evening was spent n that. I worked very closely with Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, as well as Peter Mila and Herbert Ramokgopa. I wish I could explain why there seemed to be no outstanding women in the ranks of the ANC movement at that time. If they were present, for some reason or another I missed them. I heard of Ida Mtwana but I did not meet her to work with her. I regret that to this day.

My involvement in the community as a teacher and a community worker brought me in contact with many people, and as a result, my circle of contacts and friends grew by the day. I specially valued and appreciated some of the dear friends with whom I could share the tormenting experience of being separated from my children as well as the uncertainty about the outcome of my marriage. I became active in the church, at school and in recreational programmes to keep from pining.

Towards the end of 1947, I got a rude shock when I received a summons to appear in court to show cause why my marriage to my husband, Mr. Ernest Moloto, should not be terminated on grounds of desertion. Much as I had anticipated that my departure from Rustenburg might possibly end in this way, the receipt of the summons really shook me. This was my first experience of coming face to face with a lawsuit of any kind. I was at a loss what to do and turned to my father for guidance. After receiving legal advice, as Father suggested, I adjusted my mind to appearing in court, the thought of which really troubled me. I could not bear the thought of going to court to expose our family life differences in public, much as I was very hurt and humiliated by my husband's treatment of me. Do not be fooled; it angered me more than words can tell.

I found the support of some of my closest friends invaluable during this time. Among these few friends was Dr. Mar Xakana, whom I had first met when I was at Lovedale and she at Fort Hare University. She was a woman of very few words, yet in her silence she communicated care, warmth, support and silent concern. I found her a true friend, and so she has remained. The continued communication with my father and with one or two friends I trusted soothed my fears about this trying, challenging 'monster', divorce. I instructed my legal adviser—a white lawyer, for there were no African lawyers at that time—to arrange for an out-of-court settlement with my husband, for in spite of all the hurt and

humiliation I had suffered at his hands I was determined never to wash my dirty linen in public. This I am glad I succeeded in avoiding.

When the day arrived, I found that I had sufficient courage to stand firm in my approach. The only setback was that my legal representative was a totally different person from the man I had spoken to previously when I visited my lawyer's office. Not that I wanted that particular lawyer, but this representative had a completely different make-up and composition—in his physical appearance and disposition, as well as his attire. The man I was relying on to carry me through this experience was tiny in stature, and timid and apologetic in manner and approach. His attire, in particular his trousers, was shabby, dirt and creased. The gown he wore redeemed him to a certain extent, but it was also just not up to the mark. I looked at him once, and immediately lost confidence in him. I there and then told myself, 'Ellen, take charge of this boat, whether you sink or swim.'

After he had asked my husband and his legal adviser to join us, I gave him no chance. I addressed myself directly to my husband's lawyer, a tall, handsome, neatly dressed gentleman with a very strong personality, and open and forthright in his approach. But I refused to allow him to intimidate me in any way.

I stepped forward and introduced myself as Mrs. Ellen Moloto. My dear father, who had accompanied me to court, appeared nervous at that stage. He must have seen my disillusionment in my legal adviser, and was torn between me, his loving daughter, and the representative of the firm of lawyers he had introduced me to and had spoken so highly of. My husband, who expected us to fight it out in court, must have been perplexed and completely put out by the developments of those few minutes. On the other hand, I was determined to have it my own way and to carry out my intentions

In a few words I told his lawyer that it was my wish not to go into court but, if possible, to settle our dispute outside court. The only demand I made was that, when my husband had got the divorce he wanted, I must have free access to see my sons at any time convenient to me, and that the court should protect me from any abuse by my husband when I went to see my sons. At that stage I read in my husband's lawyer's face a great deal of surprise and a desire for more explanation. My own lawyer stood there quite dumb. Continuing to address myself directly to my husband's lawyer, I told him that the only people who knew the whole truth about our differences were myself and my husband. Directing my eyes to my husband, but still addressing his lawyer, I emphasized that he, my husband, and I truly knew the painful experience we had gone through and that I had no intention of going into court to disclose publicly the shocking, hurting and embarrassing experiences I had suffered at my husband's hands.

On that note I continued to plead for a settlement out of court on the condition that I had free access to see my sons if and when it was convenient to me. The lawyer turned to my husband for his reaction and pointed out the constructive importance of my offer. My husband, who I suspect had expected a great deal of resistance from my side, was left with no alternative but to accept it. I later learned that the carload of relatives he had brought as witnesses were both deflated and disappointed.

As he moved away from us towards the court building, his lawyer called me aside and this is what he said to me: 'Mrs. Moloto, in my practice as a lawyer, I have not come across many women who made this type of decision. You may not trust me because I represent your husband, but this one thing I wish to say; you have made an unexpected, wise decision. Although our husband may decide to hold on to the children, this must not disturb you. My experience in

this practice is that the parents who force the children to remain with them and deny them the opportunity to see the other parent stand the greatest chance of being rejected and deserted by those same children when they grow older. Mark my words.’ And on that note we parted.

The divorce was granted. As truly as the sun rises in the east and sets in the west, in 1957 I saw my eldest son walk into my new home at 11376 Orlando West Extension, Soweto, and six or seven years later his brother followed. They are now married and settled with their families. My elder son is in Soweto, the younger one at Umlazi in Durban. The pit of it all is that I was not able to see the gallant lawyer to say to him: Yes it happened as you predicted.

With my divorce behind me, I felt that a heavy load was removed from my shoulders. I started to plan my life all over again. I told myself, ‘Ellen, you tried your very best and it was not good enough. You cannot moan over what happened; your duty is to stand up and live your life to the fullest.’ Side by side with this feeling of being free from a marriage which lasted only six year, I was left as if empty — the type of feeling one has after working very hard for a stiff examination. Once that examination is over there is a sudden empty feeling, as if something is missing. For two or three months I was caught up in this uncomfortable feeling of emptiness. The longing for my sons doubled. I suddenly felt very distant from them as if I would never ever see them again. I suppose the marriage link which was snapped when we divorced had a psychological effect on me.

My ears, eyes and mind were very alert to register the challenging, interesting happenings round about me at that time. I was determined to keep myself occupied without realizing that I was really trying to blot out my past experiences.

Round about that period, word got round that a certain overseas film company wanted potential actors and actresses to come forward for auditions. Without wasting time I presented myself at the studio—I cannot remember now which one—in the city. Other black men and women, some of my age, some younger, some older, arrived in large numbers. I found the audition unnerving, yet very exciting. The director, Zoltan Korda, was a very interesting person. On arrival we introduced ourselves, but were not given anything special to do. Korda had a remarkable memory for people's names, for out of the blue he called my name. I turned to him and he smiled. Our communication was without any words, yet I knew I must have made a mark. It was fascinating watching proceedings throughout the auditioning. I remember how Winnie Ramatlo and I competed for the part of a Skokian Queen. I was finally chosen to play the part and Winnie was my understudy. The film was *Cry the Beloved Country* based on the famous novel by Alan Paton. The film absorbed me completely—physically, intellectually and emotionally.

Acting in the film helped me to discover my untapped potential and, unknowingly, it became a great healer of the hurt I had recently incurred. The possibility of going abroad for the first time was raised, although not fulfilled. Winnie Ramatlo, Albertina Temba (the lady playing the leading role in the film) and I were a threesome from the Youth Club Association. We made a mark for ourselves, for the youth clubs and, above all, for black womanhood.

Looking back, I have every reason to believe that if we had known better about the benefits and implications of filming then we could have made a better financial deal. But as a section of the population which had been exploited over the years, the lump sums we received were accepted with pleasure and excitement, for they were a great financial reward compared with our salaries.

What is more, we saw ourselves as actors of standing and reputation for we shared the set with famous personalities of Sidney Poitier's caliber. I personally enjoyed working with him directly, for he played the young priest who entered my Skokian Queen's house—a house where there existed every vice and vile practice. One actress who had great potential, but who for one reason or another did not fulfill her opportunity to the fullest, was Ribbon Dlamini. If my memory serves me well, we were engaged in this film on and off from some time in 1949 to some time in 1951.

It was during the years 1948 and 1949 that in my numerous movements and engagements I met Mr. Godfrey Rosenbaum Kuzwayo, a man in his early forties. There was no doubt in my mind from my first meeting with him that he was a man of character and great experience and achievements, but that he had had his share of hardship and misfortune. He was a refined, soft-spoken gentleman, with a rare sense of humour. He told me that he had been very active in the Church as the Treasurer of the African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Africa, but he had lost interest in this work because of the disparity in the wages of the ministers of his Church who were serving the towns and those who were stationed in the country. This issue was very close to his heart. He felt that the ministers stationed in the country who were receiving very low wages were exposed to a great deal of suffering, while those in town were reasonably comfortably settled and protected.

G.R., as he was popularly known, was a compositor in the printing trade. I found out later that he had his own business in the city registered as 'Africans' Own'. Later he was compelled to sell this printing shop against his will, following the implementation of the Group Areas Act which denied black people the right to trade within the city of Johannesburg. His sense of humour and commitment to duty reduced some of the pressures and frustrations he was going

through at that time, some of which were personal and linked with his private life, while others were much more of a business nature.

We shared each other's problems over a period of nine to twelve months. His problems certainly weighed very heavily on him. I got to know more about his past successes and his prospects of a very bright future. And I also learned from some of his close friends, both women and men, about some of the issues which contributed to his present situation.

When his family life completely disintegrated and he asked for my hand in marriage, I was scared, and turned down his proposal. I feared to take responsibility in that type of situation again; perhaps also I was still enjoying the few years of freedom after my first marriage. However, he persisted, and some time in 1950 I reconsidered my decision. Two main issues influenced me in accepting his proposal. My childhood longing for a home I could see and refer to as mine, even if I shared it with someone, was still unfulfilled, and remained a burning issue within me. Secondly, I had never at any stage accepted failure and allowed it to remain unchallenged. The failure of my first marriage inside six years was a very sore point in my life. I had tried to reflect on this matter very objectively and with an open mind to see what had really gone wrong, and, more than that, where I had personally erred. G.R.'s proposal would give me the chance to test my capability in this field again, and so I accepted.

We married in 1950 and decided to start a home in Kliptown because of the shortage of houses in Soweto at that time. We found accommodation in a neighbourhood known as Paardevlei. The houses were reasonable well built and finished, constructed as three-bedroom cottages joined together into ten to twelve units. They shared a common set of toilets built outside the cottages, which were a real hazard. The tenants were a mixture of coloureds, Indians and

Africans, under an Indian landlord. The problem of relations between the race groups was non-existent. You chose whom you wished to associate with and the level to which such an association was carried. One thing was certain: we were a community with a spirit of neighbourliness which accorded respect and recognition where it was due.

Our marriage was blessed with the birth of a son, Godfrey Ndabezitha Kuzwayo. This gave me three sons in all. My husband had one daughter by his first marriage so we could boast of one daughter and three sons.

For a long time, even after my second marriage, I shut thoughts of my earlier married life out of my mind. The only time I ever came near facing it with some maturity was on one of my visits to see my sons, when I shared with my ex-husband my concern for our children, particularly in view of the fact that he was not prepared to part with them. I expressed my concern to him about the boys, and emphasized to him the importance of their being happy for the sake of their general growth and well-being. To me one very important aspect was that his new wife should be happy and comfortable, as I saw this as the only guarantee that the children would remain happy and secure. To bring it home to him, I shared with him my deep-felt wishes for the very best for both of our new homes, for the benefit of our two boys, regardless of where they were at that time. Even though my own sons were not living with me, I felt totally committed to having a happy home for my second husband's children who did live with us and, I deeply hoped, for my own children when they came to visit or to live with us. The fact that I was reasonably settled in my new home meant that I was able to make my family happy.

Ernest's unexpected second divorce came to me as a real shock, and I was only too happy to have my two sons eventually come back to me as a result.

It was during our stay in Kliptown that I met Dr. Mary Xakana again and we picked up those loose ends of our friendship, when she was preparing to get married to Mr. Wally Xahana. I was on the committee which planned and ran their wedding programme. It was very heartening to me at that time to realize that my old circle of friends still accepted me and wanted me to share with them in their affairs, despite the stigma of my divorce.

I soon discovered that my husband and Wally Xakana were also friends of very long standing. Mary and I were now drawn together by our common interests as married women, mothers and old friends from Orlando. We lived within walking distance and so it was no problem calling on one another. Our stay in Kliptown gave me the opportunity to know Mary as a doctor, mother and wife as well as a community worker and friend. Mary attended me as a doctor during my pregnancy and attended the birth of my youngest son, Godfrey. Her eldest daughter was born about nine months before my son. For six years we were very good neighbours.

Chapter 16

Twenty Thousand Strong We Marched

by

Helen Joseph

We shall not rest until we have won for our children their
fundamental right to freedom, justice and security.

I shall never forget what I saw on 9 August 1956—thousands of
women standing in silence for a full thirty minutes, arms raised high
in the clenched fist of the Congress salute.

Twenty thousand women of all races, from all parts of South Africa,
were massed together in the huge stone amphitheatre of the Union
Buildings in Pretoria, the administrative seat of the Union
government, high on a hill. The brilliant colours of African
headscarves, the brightness of Indian saris and the emerald green of
the blouses worn by Congress women merged into an unstructured
design, woven together by the very darkness of those thousands of
faces.

They had marched that 20,000, pressed solidly together, not in formal
ranks, from the lowest of the Union Buildings terraced gardens,
climbing up those many steps, terrace by terrace, behind their
leaders.

Lilian Ngoi, Rahima Moosa, Sophie Willilams and I, Helen Joseph,
together with four women from more distant areas, had led the
women up to the topmost terrace and into the amphitheatre. I turned
my head once as we came up. I could see nothing but women
following us, thousands of women marching, carrying letters of

defiant protest against unjust laws, against the hated pass system, against passes for African women.

We represent and we speak on behalf of thousands of women—women who could not be with us. But all over this country, at this moment, women are watching and thinking of us. Their hearts are with us.

We are women from every part of South Africa. We are women of every race; we come from the cities and the towns, from the reserves and the villages—we come as women united in our purpose to save the African women from the degradation of passes.

Raids, arrests, loss of pay, long hours at the pass office, weeks in the cells awaiting trial, forced farm labour—this is what the pass laws have brought to African men. . . punishment and misery, not for a crime, but for the lack of a pass. We African women know too well the effect of this law upon our homes, upon our children. We who are not African women know how our sisters suffer. . .

We shall not rest until all pass laws and all forms of permits restricting our freedom have been abolished.

We shall not rest until we have won for our children their fundamental right to freedom, justice and security.

We took those letter of protest into the Union Buildings, to the offices of the Prime Minister, Johannes Strijdom. He was not there. We flooded his office with them and returned to the thousands of women waiting for us, packed so tightly together, overflowing the amphitheatre. We stood on the little stone rostrum, looking down on the women again, and Lilian Ngoi called on them to stand in silent

protest for thirty minutes. As she raised her right arm in the Congress salute, 20,000 arms went up and stayed up for those endless minutes. We knew that all over South Africa, women in other cities and towns were also gathered in protest. We were not just 20,000 women, but many thousands more.

The clock struck three and then a quarter past; it was the only sound. I looked at those many faces until they became only one face, the face of the suffering black people of South Africa. I know that there were tears in my eyes and I think that there were many who wept with me.

At the end of that half hour, Lilian began to sing, softly at first, "Nkosi Sikelele" (Lord, give strength to Africa!). For blacks it has become their national anthem and the voices rose, joining Lilian, ever louder and stronger. Then I heard the new song, composed specially for the protest, by a woman from the Orange Free State, "Wahint' a bafazi, wa uthint' imbolodo uzo kufa" ("You have struck a rock, you have tampered with the women, you shall be destroyed!"). It was meant for Strijdom, the Prime Minister, the grim-faced, dedicated apostle of apartheid and white domination, implacable enemy of the struggle of the black people for freedom and justice. As it was always sung in the Sotho language, the implication of the last phrase usually passed unnoticed by whites.

The protest over, the women went away, down the terrace steps, with the same dignity and discipline with which they had come, but now singing, down to the public road and the lovely gardens stood empty again. Yet not really empty, for I think the indomitable spirit remained. Perhaps it is still there, unseen, unheard, unfelt, for the women that day had made the Union Buildings their own.

That was on 9 August 1956. Today, nearly thirty years later, it is celebrated as National Women's Day, both here in South Africa

amongst those who carry on the struggle for freedom and in other lands where the liberation movement, led by the African National Congress, is known and honoured. How it came to pass that we made our protest that day at the Union Buildings—the most hallowed seat of white government—is a small part, but nevertheless a part of the history of our country, South Africa.

It is even more a part of the story of South Africa's liberation from fearsome racist oppression and domination. It is a story that continues even to this day. It is a story that will be told by others in the years to come, perhaps by some now in gaol. Some who have fled South Africa have already told parts of the story. It is a story that must be told and because I played a small part in this great struggle, I am proud to be one of those who help to tell it.

The Federation of South African Woman came into being in the early 1950s, at the same time as the effect of the notorious Suppression of Communism Act was being felt. The Act had been passed in 1950, two years after the Nationalist Party had come to power. It was ostensibly to combat the threat of communism, but its real purpose was to harass and hamstring all opponents of the government. B this Act, the Minister of Justice could, through "banning" orders, restrict the freedom of association and movement of any person whom he "deemed" to be furthering the aims of communism.

By the end of 1953 a temporary halt occurred in the flood of repressive restriction orders issued under the Suppression of Communism Act. A banned man had appealed against the validity of his banning orders on the grounds that he had not been granted a hearing before they were served on him. He had taken his case to the highest court in the land and there his appeal had been upheld. Overnight, people had found that their banning orders were invalid.

Although this freedom was not to last for long (by the following May the Act had been amended to provide for the banning of people without a hearing), the loophole had allowed, in those few months of respite, two banned women to bring into being a new and unique multiracial women's organization. They were also able themselves to attend and speak at its inaugural conference.

Ray Alexander and Hilda Bernstein were two feminist stalwarts amongst the leaders in the liberation struggle. Ray was a well-known and much loved trade union leader. Latvian born, with an accent she was never to lose completely, Ray won all hearts with her outgoing warmth and her "My dear. . ." and she meant it. In trade union circles she is a legend. Many tales are told of her early union organizing days, going from two to town by rain, from factory to factory on foot. A staunch Communist Party member, she was elected to Parliament by Africans when they still had three representatives, but was barred from taking her seat through the provisions of the Suppression of Communism Act.

Hilda Bernstein was in many ways like Ray—a warm-hearted communist, free from the chauvinism so often a feature of communism. She was elected by whites in 1943 to the Johannesburg City Council—the only communist ever to achieve this. During the Sharpeville Emergency of 1960 we were detained together in Pretoria Central gaol and her gay spirit helped all of us there. Hilda's intense love for her own children flowed outwards into deep concern for the sufferings of all women and particularly for black women.

Undeterred by their previous banning orders, these two women set about realizing a dream they shared of a mass women's organization of all races that would take its stand on women's rights and play its part in the struggle for the liberation of both men and women. I am sure that they could not have foreseen the amazing progress of this

new organization, reaching its peak in that gathering of 20,000 women at the Union Buildings on 9 August.

I heard from Hilda about the plans for an inaugural conference to launch this new body of women, unique because of its multiracial character. Many women of all races would speak on issues close to them and to their daily lives. Additionally, Olive Schreiner's book *Women and Labour* had impressed me greatly. I was thus delighted to assist with the organizing of this conference, with their sights set on their own rights as women. However, by far the most organizing was done by Hilda and Ra through their widespread contacts with women, built up over many years. They had the eager help of the African National Congress Women's League and several trade unions.

The conference drew over 150 women from all over the country, some wearing brilliantly coloured national dress, all eager to participate in the proceedings. Interpreters were sometimes hard put to accommodate the variety of languages – English, Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho and Afrikaans.

An impressive Women's Charter was presented to the conference and adopted. It had considerable feminist emphasis but also reflected clearly the conditions of oppressed black people. The conference was highlighted by the speeches of the women from the floor during periods of discussion.

Lilian Ngoyi protested against Bantu education, the government plan for separate and inferior education for blacks. "Bantu education makes African women like fowls laying eggs for others to take away and do what they like with!" she declared. Then she spoke of the shanty towns where she herself had once lived: "where a man must dress with the blanket between his teeth because his family sleeps in the same room".

Lilian accused African husbands of holding back their wives from the conference. She was a widow but I doubt that any husband would have been able to hold her back. That was the first time I saw Lilian Ngoyi, later to become the greatest leader of women in the 1950s. Soon afterwards she came to see me in my office, a slender woman dressed simply but smartly in a black suit, wearing a little round black hat. I never saw her in anything but one of these little black hats. She did not wear the customary beret of so many African women of that time.

Lilian was beautiful then, beautiful and black; in her forties, but looking only thirty, head often tilted a little to one side on her slim neck, laughing eyes and a flashing smile to show an enchanting little gap in her front teeth. I could not of course know how closely our lives would be bound together as leaders in the Federation of South African Women, in and out of gaol together, on trial together for over four years, banned and separated from each other over long periods— or that we should walk together leading 20,000 women in protest against passes. She became one of my closest and dearest friends—a joy and a delight to be with, even though this was not to be very often.

The conference allowed, for the first time, the voices of the women of South Africa to be heard. They listened with interest to the scheduled speakers on women of India, of China, on the need for a women's organization, on the need for world peace. Their own emphasis was on the struggle of men and women together for freedom and justice, on the need to stand together in that struggle and the determination of women to fight for the rights of their children.

My own most worthwhile experience of that conference was in fact afterwards, when the other organizers had returned to their homes and children and I was left to entertain twenty black women from

other areas until their departure later in the day. Entertaining black friends from South Africa is always a problem because of the lack of multiracial amenities, but we were soon off on a black bus for a picnic with boxes of minerals, fruit and buns. I think this was what I had been waiting for so long—complete acceptance as a person—and I had got it. Songs, laughter, dancing and then to the railway station and a joyous farewell, with anticipation of another conference.

That first conference of the Federation was a very deep experience for me and I was moved when I was elected to the national executive, for I had been quite happy to be a backroom person at the conference.

The conference had indeed been held just in time for Ray and Hilda to speak there, for it was only a few weeks before the new amendment to the Suppression of Communism Act was passed and both women were soon re-banned. They had used their respite heroically to bring this new organization into being, for it was undoubtedly to become the most dynamic of women's organizations in the history of South Africa.

Lilian Ngoyi and I grew to know each other quite well and since she worked in a Johannesburg clothing factory, we would occasionally meet for a sandwich in a car during her short lunch break. I began to understand better the acute transport problems for African people, especially women; long bus queues stretching around two sides of a street block, unbelievably crowded trains, passengers clinging outside onto closed doors, and the dangerous walk home from the railway station or bus stop through dark, totally unlit streets. These difficulties made evening meetings for the Federation women impossible, so we had to rely on weekends which meant that again the women had to travel in from the townships. Nevertheless our first Transvaal provincial conference was successful.

Josie Palmer, veteran leader of African protest against location permits even in the 1930s was elected Transvaal President and I became Honorary Secretary. This time I was not a white woman doing things *for* black people but a member of a mixed committee headed by a black woman. It was different—and better than anything I had known before.

Towards the end of 1954, the Johannesburg Municipality announced a sharp increase in rentals for Soweto, the sprawling, spreading township housing the ill-paid workers and their families, the people who had no money for an increase in rent. The Federation too up the issue, calling another multiracial conference. Once again women spoke from the floor, describing their pitiful homes and their inability to meet any increase of rent.

I wished that the hall could have been filled with housewives from white suburbs to hear them. But it wasn't, nor was the Federation ever able to attract more than a handful of white women from the Black Sash or the Liberal Party to attend its conferences. Our identification with the African National Congress and the liberation movement saw to that. It was a small price to pay for the tremendous feeling of oneness with the national struggle for freedom.

From its early days the Federation had felt drawn to the Women's International Democratic Federation, formed in Europe at the end of the Second World War, to unite women in defence of their rights and to work for peace and social progress. It claimed to represent 140 million women from all parts of the world, through its affiliated organizations. Both Ray and Hilda were in close contact with the International Federation and cherished the idea of the South African Federation affiliating to it. We certainly maintained contact with it, but never got as far as even debating affiliation, certainly not in the Transvaal.

This International Federation had what was, for us, a most attractive policy of inviting women to attend their conference in Europe and then sending them on sponsored tours, mainly to the Soviet Union, Hungary, Romania, even as far as the People's Republic of China. I am sure the Federation would have gladly accepted invitations to conferences and sponsored tours to the West just as happily, but none came our way. The World Federation was to hold a World Congress of Mothers in Lausanne and the Federation was invited to send two delegates to the preparatory council meeting in Geneva in February as well as to the congress later in the year.

The Transvaal and Cape regions were the best established areas of the Federation so we were to send one delegate from each region. For us in the Transvaal there was one outstanding choice, Lilian Ngoyi. We knew that this great speaker and leader would not merely hold her own with women from other lands but would be our ambassador to bring the sufferings of black people and the struggle for liberation to the notice of women outside South Africa. Dora Tamana was chosen as the other delegate.

We began to prepare for the women to go. In those days it was not yet illegal to leave South Africa without a passport, although travel companies were reluctant to carry passportless passengers for fear of compromising themselves with the South African authorities. Passports for white political people were not impossible to obtain, though often difficult. For blacks there were almost insuperable difficulties. Radically political blacks just did not get passports, so means had to be found to get them transported without documents. There was no difficulty at the London end, merely separate queues for those with and those without passports.

I was going to Europe on leave for a few months, for the first time in nearly twenty years. I was therefore delighted when arrangements were made for me to fly from London to attend the Geneva Council

meeting as an observer, in addition to our two special delegates. I still had a valid passport so would have no difficulties and I should hear from Hilda when and where to meet the two women on their arrival in London in January 1955.

I reached London just after the New Year and found letters from Hilda to tell me that the plans for sending Lilian and Dora by sea had misfired because they had been discovered, passportless, on board ship before it sailed from Cape Town. The captain had refused to transport them, despite their paid passages. They had come undaunted to Johannesburg, from where they would be sent somehow to London where I must meet them.

On the day they were expected, I waited for hours at the airport, fearful for them. Then I found a friendly porter to take a note through the customs and immigration barriers to say "I am here, waiting for you." They came at last, triumphant and excited, and we hugged each other, a little surprised that no one thought this in any way odd for a white and two blacks.

They told me of their adventures. On the ship they had hidden themselves in the lavatory waiting for the ship to sail before they dared to come out. They had been terrified when loud knocks and a command to come out had been heard. How they were found out none of us knows and we never shall. They could do nothing but open the door. The plan had failed somewhere along the way.

Once in Johannesburg, it had been easier to get onto an aeroplane, but they were very apprehensive until the plane actually took off. Racially-mixed air travel was still comparatively rare in South Africa and at first the two black women encountered hostile looks and whispered comments from the passengers. Then the captain announced that this was his plane and that there would be no apartheid on board. All his passengers were equal.

After hearing this, I was convinced that nothing could daunt Lilian and Dora. They would overcome all obstacles. We had a couple of weeks together in London and were preparing to go to Geneva when International Federation officials informed us that it had been decided that Lilian and Dora should not go to Switzerland at this stage for the council meetings as they might encounter difficulties there about passports and might even be sent back to South Africa. It would be simpler for them to fly direct to East Berlin from where they could set off on extensive travels, returning later for the Congress of Mothers in Lausanne. It would not matter so much if they were then sent back to South Africa because by that time they would already be on their way back.

I went alone to Geneva for the preparatory council meeting, now promoted to delegate, feeling very inadequate about representing South African women at this large gathering of women from all over the world. But I went, and there I met women from Burma, Indochina, the USA and Canada, the Argentine and near East countries and from every country in Europe.

I listened carefully to their speeches, in many cases accounts of suffering and disabilities comparable to the South Africa scene. From others I heard affirmation of their countries' achievements and a will to assist others still striving for basic human rights. I sat there, full of admiration for these dynamic, eloquent women leaders. I think I had not fully realized the implication of being a delegate and no longer an observer, for I was startled when I was asked on which day I would be ready to address the conference and report on South Africa.

I was still an inexperienced public speaker and no orator. I was white and had no real right to describe the unshared sufferings of others in my colour-ridden land, whereas these hundreds of delegates could and did speak from their own experience.

I drafted a speech for one of the organizers to consider, but she said it was too flat and I am sure it was. Then we talked about my life in South Africa and I told her, not only of our Federation, but also of the unjust conditions of life and particularly of the government plan forcibly to remove the African people of Sophiatown in the western areas of Johannesburg to another area and the growing protest against it. Since I left South Africa, news of the impending removal and the Congress Alliance protest plans had been sparse in the overseas press, but I had learnt enough to know that the government intended to go its own ruthless way. The forced move would be taking place in February and the African people would try by all peaceful means to resist that move.

My thoughts turned away from Geneva and back to Sophiatown and the protest. When I had finished, I was told "that's it! That is what you must tell the women tomorrow."

When I faced those women from all over the world, I wanted them to understand the agony of Sophiatown and the oppression of the people by their white overlords. I spoke for Lilian and Dora, I spoke for the women of our Federation and for the black women of our land, and I wanted to convey the strength of our hope for the future. When I came to the end I affirmed, "where you stand today, we shall stand tomorrow!"

Then the miracle happened. That gathering of women rose to their feet in a standing ovation, not to me as a speaker, but to the women of South Africa whose message I had brought. For me it was a tremendous moment of disbelief but also of joy and of complete unity with the women there.

I went back to London to find that Lilian and Dora had already left on their great adventure so I could not tell them about the conference.

I had hoped, secretly, and vainly, that perhaps I too might have been invited to visit some other country, for there seemed to be many invitations floating around, though almost entirely to black women. However, it did not happen. I think my disabilities were that I was white and not ideologically committed.

Chapter 17

Other Faces Of Kofifi

by

Don Mattera

A hideous face belonged to squalor or poverty or sickness or death. There was no real difference: the greater part of Sophiatown was a deplorable, sickening slum. Blacks had freehold rights and some houses were comparable to those of whites living in the adjoining suburbs, but Sophiatown was rotting at the core because the Johannesburg City Council did not accept full responsibility for its maintenance. Public amenities such as sports fields, recreational facilities? There wasn't a single football field in the whole township.

Basketball and football were played in the school grounds and in the streets. Church halls, classrooms and zinc shacks became the boxing stables that produced many champions, and killers too. One such boxer was King Berry, who was hanged for brutally murdering his wife because of jealousy. The women composed a song which ran: 'King Berry the champ killed the only thing he loved. He must have been bewitched. . .'

But Sophiatown also had its beauty; picturesque and intimate like most ghettos. Double-storey mansions and quaint cottages, with attractive, well-tended gardens, stood side by side with rusty wood-and-iron shacks, locked in a fraternal embrace of filth and felony. Among the wealthy were African, coloured, Indian and Chinese people.

One rich man, Mabuza, owned a double-storey house which he filled with the most expensive furniture, to the tune of about thirty thousand pounds. Added to this was a three-storey building with a huge dairy and butchery on the ground floor, five bedrooms on the upper storey and a big restaurant sandwiched between them. Mabuza, whose son Early became a famous jazz musician, owned

another large restaurant on the outskirts of Johannesburg. In Sophiatown, no-one could choose their neighbours, so that alongside the wealthy Mabuzas or the Xumas or the Makhenes or the Rathebes lived the miserably poor and the wretched. All that the rich could do, at the time, was build high walls with broken glass cemented on top of them to keep out thieves.

The rich and the poor, the exploiters and the exploited, all knitted together in a colourful fabric that ignored race or class structures. The children mixed freely whether their families disagreed or not. Children in their innocence hardly recognize the differences. There were no separate bourgeois areas or elite concert halls, just long streets and thousands of people who moved over each other like restless, voracious insects: blacks exploiting blacks. And what needs the white authorities failed to provide in the way of social amenities, the Catholic and Anglican Churches met at great cost. The rich landlords, among them many whites and Indians, never channeled any part of their huge profits back into the township; it was a dog-eat-dog world, harsh and yet tender in a strange, paradoxical way.

Sophiatown had two Jewish-owned cinemas: the Picture Palace, also named Balanski after its owner, and the Odin owned by a man called Lakier. The Odin was said to be the largest cinema in the whole of Africa, with a seating capacity of about 1,100. It was also used as a concert hall, a church and a venue for mass political meetings by organizations such as the African National Congress, the Anti-Removals Committee, the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign Committee. The internationally known singer Miriam Makeba, now in exile and prohibited from returning to South Africa, also performed at the Odin—where knives and guns were carried and often brazenly used by members of the audience. Sometime between 1948 and 1950, while I was at school in Durban, Lakier also opened a Harlem-USA type milk bar and juke-box saloon complete with slot-machines and peer-in movie boxes.

Almost everything we wore or ate was fashioned after American styles. Some gangs and gang members chose the names, habits and mannerisms of film stars such as George Raft, John Garfield and John Wayne, who was nicknamed *Motsamai* (swaggerer). Some fashion shops actually overpriced their clothes on the recommendations of the Americans gang who wanted—and were prepared to pay for—the exclusive privilege of wearing USA imports such as Florsheim, Nunn Bush and Jarman shoes. What they probably did not realize at the time was that the shops would bequeath the high-price legacy into the sixties, seventies and eighties. ‘Made in the USA’ became the sole criterion and any rubbish that carried the USA label was desirable for that alone. And Sophiatown had many shops and tailors—invariably Jewish or Indian owned—that raked in huge profits on the ‘Made in the USA’ craze. Even the traditional African herbalists used brightly painted signs to advertise their USA aphrodisiacs, blood mixtures and lucky charms. And if you rejected the American fad, you would quickly be dubbed *moegoe* or greenhorn.

The Face of Religion beamed like colourful fluorescent advertisements from the countless Christian sects and Hindu, Moslem and Buddhist segments that preached and sold their understanding of penitence, redemption and reconciliation with God. There were the rituals of the African *amaZioni* with their frenzied worshipping through cymbals and drums that rose and fell from midnight hour until dawn. Men, women, old and young and children called frantically upon their God as if He was on a long, long holiday. Churches competed for the redemption of souls; trying as it were to sell God at a bargain price to people who had stopped buying, not because they had no money, but because they had no faith. . .

And salvation was going for a song but men, it appeared were not buying. Only older people opened their ears to listen to the song as they gave the remnants of their wasted and broken lives in final

compensatory service to the Great One—the *Umkhulumkhulu*; the *Modimo*, the *Thixo*, who ruled the earth and the sky.

Then there was the mad rattling of tambourines and cymbals, which told of the pace and effort with which people sought refuge from themselves and from beliefs and superstition that were stronger than reason and even Christianity; the throwing of bones or charms often determined a life or a death. Many grew weary of placing the fate of their loved ones, and of their own souls, in the hands of the Unseen God in whose name they were being ruled and reviled. They turned to their traditional doctors when all else failed.

And at dead of night, in the secret of his heart a man will call on his 'doctor'.

Patient: '*Baba, Mukhosi*—Father, King there is this thing which troubles my sleep and brings a shadow upon my house. *O Baba, O Mukhosi Sizwe*—O Father, O Ruler of our nation I seek your intercession with our sacred *amadhlozi*—our ancestors.'

Doctor: 'I hear you, son of the troubled shadows whose house is without the peace of sleep. These *amathambo* (bones) are the voices of your dead kin; they will reveal to us the thorn of your affliction. In a moment all will be known—nothing is hidden from the *amadhlozi*.

Say yes, *vumani-bo*.'

Patient: '*Siya vuma, Makhosi*—We agree, Lord.'

And in the dim, flickering candlelight the *nyanga* (traditional doctor) will mumble his incoherent prayer and solicitation, rattling the sacred bones in his ochrous and beaded hands. The candlelight will move to the heat of his breath; now there, now here. And he will call and pray and invoke the ancient wisdom of his tribe as well as that of his patient's ancestors.

Doctor: '*Makhosi, Makhosi, vumani-bo, vumani-bo!*'

Patient: '*Siya vuma, siya vuma, Makhosi. . . .*'

The bones will then roll onto the sacred rug and the wise tongue lick the eager round lips; the eyes will deepen and stare without a wink. Then will the head shake and the eyes—the perceptive and penetrating eyes—search and scrutinize the position of the bones. Then again and yet again will the bones rattle and dive onto the sacred rug where no foot or shoe may touch.

Doctor: 'Speak *Makhosi*, speak; your son of the shadow troubled by sleeplessness awaits your voice. *Vumani-bo!*'

Patient: '*Siya vuma* (yes). We are united with your spirit!'

Then the bones will speak and the message will be delivered from the face that drips water and the tongue that licks the lips. The patient will listen attentively, and with his head bowed in deference to the presence of something greater than himself, greater than all that lives upon the ear, he will accept the message and await the prescription. The ancestors have spoken through their messenger, *Siya vuma*, we are obedient.

Perhaps the ancestors will demand a life for the 'life' that is given to the patient; blood for blood. Then only will the shadows go to sleep and peace be restored.

And the man or the child or the woman or the lamb or the goat will be slaughtered and the blood be given up. Then shall the shadows walk no more, and then will the long sleep return to purge the pain and the fear.

Vumani-bo, vumani-bo. . . .

The Roman Catholic and the Anglican, the Methodist and Lutheran Churches towered above the splintered Christian groupings like great pillars of strength. Ordered, organized. But badly outnumbered though respected by the various sects as the cradle of their

adopted Christian faiths. But was their own African religion not older than the one the early Christian pioneers had brought to Africa from across the great waters? And was it not their own African worship that called the lightning and thunder and the rain when the land was warped and wanting? *Vumani-bo, Makhosi!*

The Catholics and the Anglicans built huge mission schools alongside their churches, as did the Lutherans and the Methodists—all with funds provided by their white sponsors inside South Africa and across the seas. These parent Churches had strong Christian commitments to human dignity and social justice which were epitomized in men and women, nuns and priests, such as Fathers Rakale, Singleton, Sidebotham and Trevor Huddleston whose personal contribution to the people of Sophiatown cannot adequately be expressed on paper.

But as I saw the good among the men of the cloth, so to did I see the bad and the evil. Preachers among the Christian sects used their churches for personal, financial or sexual gain. They accrued vast wealth in the name of God; sold bibles, crosses, ornaments and salvation rods covered with bright cloth, as well as leopard skins and sashes. Some clergymen had many women and actually ordered others to leave their homes and follow the Church—inevitably to bed. The preachers bought cars and lived in huge mansions—their cabins in the sky. All in His name. . . .

And people understood and accepted this as 'the will of God'. This was Sophiatown, where God was going for a song; going at a bargain price. . . . *'Vumani-bo, siya vuma!'*

A swimming pool can be an oasis of fun and revelry to underprivileged children who have no recreation except football, boxing and street-fighting—if the latter can be seen as recreation. The pool

then becomes a central meeting place where the bottled energies and frustrations peculiar to children living in a desert of hopelessness can be released.

The pool at the Anglican Church's St. Cyprian's Primary School in Meyer Street attracted children from far and wide. All hues, all shapes and sizes flocked faithfully—like war-torn and weather-beaten refugees to 'San Ceepee', as the school was called. 'Dipping pool' would have been more appropriate because overcrowding made swimming virtually impossible. Diving also had its risks. You would be wading on top of somebody and the next minute another dark body would dive on you as if you were invisible. But the pool brought us together—children of the rich and the poor, and the orphans, to expend our energies and renew those links that the Group Areas laws had severed through forced separation. It was also a place for pranks and mischievousness.

A friend of mine, Tolla-Tolla, once brought a small beehive to the pool. Many boys who could not afford swimming trunks were allowed to swim naked, and so we waited until the pool was teeming with children. Tolla-Tolla covered his head with a hue towel and flung the bees into the pool. Talk about a quick evacuation! In no time the place was deserted but for a few brave heads that bobbed up out of the water—bees or no bees—for those vital whiffs of fresh air. Priests and pranksters scattered for the safety of the toilets, washrooms and vestries as the angry insects attacked everybody including the parish cats and canines. What Tolla-Tolla's head did not receive in stings, his exposed bottom got abundantly. My eyes were so badly puffed that I was admitted to the hospital. On my return to the pool two weeks after the incident, I was roundly condemned, and received a few stokes from Father Rakale's thick belt. I was prohibited from using the pool for several weeks. But Tolla-Tolla was not. At the pool, he smiled wryly at me.

'My head was covered, boy. What they can't see they can't blame,' he said, tapped me on the head and jumped into the water.

My behaviour improved to the point where I was trained as a lifesaver and sadly helped to retrieve the bodies of a girl and a boy in a single week.

The Anglicans also operated a small but comprehensive school library, from which I borrowed my first copy of Peter Abraham's *Tell Freedom* and *Native Son* by the late Richard Wright; books borrowed but shamefully not returned. They made an impression on me which was to help influence my thinking. From Ekhutuleni soup kitchen, behind the chapel, the nuns distributed food rations which my Tswana cousins and I collected for the family. We were also given two slices of bread each, thickly smeared with peanut butter or jam, and a mug of milk—all with the compliments of Father Huddleston's African Children's Feeding Scheme. The Catholic Church offered literacy classes for young and old as well as film shows and a library which was housed inside a nunnery called Notre Dame.

What Sophiatown lacked in recreation halls and sportsfields Western Native Township had in abundance: an up-to-date library with lots of reading and study space and neat desks and chairs; a community hall and a well-equipped youth centre. There were three football fields, two tennis courts, a cloakroom fitted with toilets and showers and a huge centrally-situated public washroom with baths and showers. I recall with a feeling of deep nostalgic joy the legendary Dorcas crèche in Western where, as a child of about five years, I was cared for after being lost for a week. The township also had spacious lawns and beautiful pine, fir and bluegum trees—all well tended and trimmed—and a children's park, complete with swings, see-saws, slides and rocking horses.

There was a massive exodus to Western on certain weekdays and especially on Sundays, for those traditionally rival football matches that often ended with brawls when police vehicles, with swinging doors from which hung laughing, excited constables, would zoom onto the field and with their whistles screaming law and order, would chase and grab anything on two feet.

And as the people ran, if you were looking far enough beyond the dust of the speeding police vans and the running feet, you could see the setting sun roll and fall gently into a hole at the southern edge of Western Township to give birth to his neuter offspring called twilight. Then you could see the fading shadows and the silhouettes of tired sportsmen and their supporters trudge wearily through the surreal cloud of dust. People and their dogs moving homeward; children asleep on their mother' backs moving from light into semi-darkness and finally into night itself; half free, half slaves.

And if you were listening hard enough with your heart and ears close to the breast of the night, you would hear the strong chorus of chirping crickets greeting mankind. Yes, only if you were looking beyond the screeching police vehicles and the dust of running, anxious feet were you part of that wondrous transition.

No foreigner ever visited Sophiatown and remained quite the same, or left South Africa untouched by the unfathomable magic of the condemned township, and the madness that throbbed in its restless brain. In January 1942, while the Allied forces battled tirelessly against the German army—which was openly supported and abetted in South Africa by the fifth column *Ossewa Brandwag*—an unarmed cleric of the Anglican Church in London visited our country. He stayed for several weeks in Sophiatown's Priory of Christ The King in Meyer Street. The priest administered the sacraments to his melanic flock and trudged all over the sprawling township, meeting and talking to people from all walks, and pitfalls of life. Before his return

to England, he wrote a short piece on Meyer Street, Sophiatown which appeared in *The Star*, 'A Little Glimpse of Sophiatown' may illustrate the bewitching effect that Kofifi had on people.

'... I have found a street in this city which is unique in my experience of streets. I have seen nothing like it in London or in all England, or in France, or in Spain, or still less in Australia, which is the other new country I know. Just as the average Londoner has never been to Madame Tussaud's or the Tower, so it occurs to me that most Johannesburg people may never have been to Meyer Street, Sophiatown. If you wish to explore, you can take the Newlands car to stop NO. 36, and it is on your right. The beginning of the street is ordinary enough, running uphill for 200 yards, with tarmac and footpaths and gutters. After that there are no footpaths, no gutters, no tarmac and the houses are innocent of waterbourne sewage. You had best look where you are stepping, partly because the road is rock and there are a good many loose stones, and partly because of the local dustbins. If you go, as I did, on a Saturday afternoon, you will find it extremely populous. The street mounts sharply, and if you pick your way to the top you will find a church, a school, a hospital, a house called 'Ekuteleni', where lady workers live, and a clergy house, which may be why my steps were dogged by grubby urchins who grinned at me and said, 'How d'you do, Farder? Goodbye, Farder! Good afternoon, Farder!'

At the top of the hill the street drops, and the intrepid explorer finds an outcrop of rock. If you came thus far by car you made a mistake and you had better get out, because there is no way through for a car. However, you can walk down and cross the intersection of Edward Road. Then, straight ahead of you, there is a pond. I can't help thinking that if you want ponds in your streets they would look better if they were not quite so oozy and slimy. This one is deepest along by the containing wall in

front of some houses, and is about three-quarters of the width of the street. At the moment it is about 50 yards long, but I daresay if the weather turns dry there may be rather less water and rather more smell.

It happened I wanted a small job done, so I turned into a yard which had a notice, 'Boot and Shoemaker herein. Beware of the dog. Trespassers will be prosecuted.' There was smell of hens. A man met me and said, 'no. He's been gone from here a long time.' The smell was asserting itself. I fled, and walked the rest of the way to the end of Meyer Street. It ends abruptly with high iron railings with spikes at the top. If you peep through the railings you see the country, clean and unspoilt.

That, no doubt, symbolizes something, but what? . . .'

Other men of the sacred cloth also visited Sophiatown to see first-hand what their parliamentary representatives called 'the place of sin and iniquity' and 'the cyst of the cancer of communism'. The mission of these Pharisees was not to clothe; to feed; to comfort; to share; to visit and to bury 'the least of God's creations'. No, they came that the scriptures of apartheid might be fulfilled in their granite temples and in their parliament. This was the law; blind to pain and blind to human beauty. They came only that the scriptures of power and separation might be fulfilled according to the Covenant of their austere and unsmiling God.

It was the Law. . . .

Chapter 18

The Cuban Brothers And The Manhattan Brothers

by

Miriam Makeba

We are happy amateurs. Whenever there is a community sing, or a fund-raising activity for the church, or an amateur contest, the Cuban Brothers are there. I am the band's female vocalist. Like the others, I do not get paid. It's just fun for me. I like my friends in the group, these young boys. It seems as if my nightmare marriage to Gooli was from some other time, and I am starting over with this new life of mine. Of course, I am only twenty years old.

I guess I am as tall as I ever will be, which is five feet three inches. This is not very tall, is it? And I am very shy, too. I am just this way by nature.

Except when I sing. Then, watch out! "*Come on-a my house I give you candy!*" The hit songs from America make their way over to us. We include some in the Cuban Brothers' performances, along with ballads and dance tunes in all the tribal languages. We are getting to be known in our township of Orlando East. People come to the Donaldson Community Center to hear us. They dance. We have a good time.

But it is difficult for a young woman to be on stage. Many people in our society look at it as something bad. The old thing that women are not supposed to go on stage and show themselves take some time to die. I have heard the neighbors gossip; "So-and-so's daughter is a whore because she is on stage." I can imagine what they are saying about *me*: "She left her husband to show herself on stage! Why isn't she at home raising her child, instead of having her mother do it so she can sing?"

But my mother has made up her mind when it comes to my singing. She encourages me to do it because it is what my father would have wanted if he had lived. My father was a very musical man. He played piano and composed music. My mother would sing and he would accompany her. My mother tells me that my father wanted me to study music. It was his one real hope for me. Now that I am singing with my nephew Zweli's band, my mother thinks it is fine.

But I am not to be a female Cuban Brother for long. Some men show up at the Donaldson Center during one of our shows. Maybe they have heard of us. Maybe they just came by chance. But here they are, and one of them is a singer named Nathan Mdlhedlhe. Mr.

Mdlhedlhe is the leader of one of the country's most popular bands: the Manhattan Brothers.

Everyone has heard of the Manhattan Brothers. We listen to them on the radio. They put out records, and they tour all over the country. When I finish singing with the band and Mr. Mdlhedlhe comes up to introduce himself, I can't believe it.

As I do whenever I meet someone who is older or someone I should respect, I curtsy to him. This is the way I have been brought up.

"I really enjoyed your show, Miss Makeba," he says. He is a tall and large man, very commanding. A thin mustache of the debonair "Manhattan" style runs above his lip. His suit, I notice, is a nice one.

I thank him for his compliment, although I think he is just being polite. Surely an amateur band like ours is beneath his notice.

But he seems sincere when he says, "You have a lovely voice. It's the voice of a nightingale."

I must look very surprised and embarrassed, because he smiles down at me. "I'm sincere. And I want you to come audition for us. The Manhattan Brothers need a female vocalist."

If I could manage to speak, I might argue. I would say that he surely does not mean *me*; that the Manhattan Brothers can choose among any female singers in the country as their vocalist; that I have never sung professionally before in my life. . .

Zweli and the others are too amazed to complain that they might lose me. It's only an audition, I tell myself and everyone else. It's so farfetched.

Yes, it is farfetched. Very far. But somehow, I don't know how, I fetch it. The men listen to me sing In addition to Nathan Mdlhedlhe and the musicians, there are the singers Joe Mogotsi, Rufus Khoza, and Ronnie Majola. They like the way I look, the sound of my voice, and the way I behave on stage. I listen to their compliments in a daze. And when they tell me I am hired, I really think I am dreaming. How did this happen? One day I am singing with an amateur band with Zweli, and the next moment I am to be with one of the biggest groups in the country. Life has not been easy for me and it never made much sense to dream of things that are too impossible. I never wasted my time dreaming of living a life in show business, or of doing what I like to do more than anything else in the world, which is singing. But now, all of these are coming true as if it is, well, a dream!

They tell me that the job does not pay a lot of money. The travel is hard. But if they pay me a shilling it will be more than I have ever earned before as a singer. And the travel I think of as an adventure. All I can answer is: "When do you want me to I start?"

"The first thing you'll need is a name," Nathan tells me. Even though he is the leader of the group, he won't allow me to call him Mr. Mdlhedlhe. 'Miriam Makeba sounds better than Zenzi Makeba. We'll use your English name."

New handbills and posters are made for the Manhattan Brothers. They say: "And Introducing Miriam Makeba, Our Own *Nut Brown Baby*."

Rehearsals begin at Nathan's house. I learn right away that with four men singing behind me—Nathan, Ronnie, Joe, and Rufus—I have to be *loud*. There will be times when I won't have a microphone to help me. On their own, the men sing American songs by the Ink Spots and the Mills Brothers. When we are together we sing native African tunes as well as popular songs in English. Because we are black,

however, we are not permitted to record songs in the English language. Six musicians make up the band: a sax, trumpet, straight-up bass, piano, and the drummers. I listen carefully to what everyone tells me. The men are older than I by at least ten years, and they know a lot about show business. I am very eager to learn. Everyone is kind to me, and encouraging.

My older cousin, Peggy Phango, is also a big help. She takes me to the movies, and we talk. Peggy is a good singer and actress. She was just in a movie that was made here in South Africa called *Cry, the Beloved Country*. The story is about South Africa. The great old actor Canada Lee is the star, and also a young man by the name of Sidney Poitier.

Peggy is full of advice. She teaches me all about clothes and how to match colors. During the performances I am to wear Western-style outfits: the stiff petticoats that flare out. Sometimes I wear tight, strapless evening dresses. I am very tiny, but my proportions are good, and with Peggy's help, I can even look glamorous.

She tries to pluck my eyebrows, but it is too painful. "Please," I beg her, "leave me alone. Makeup does not agree with me, either. I don't like it. My mother says, "Don't put all those things on your face. They don't look right on you" Of course, there is nothing non-African about makeup. In the old days, people had different colors of clay that they used to make designs on their bodies and faces. The Egyptian women used makeup three thousand years ago But today, ladies' makeup is manufactured by white companies for whites. It does not suit the color of our skin. A black girl looks as if she is wearing a mask. Her face is a different shade from her neck.

I am to be paid five pounds per show. This is not much money, but it is a living if we give five performances a week. The shows, held in concert halls in the black townships, are long. We sing for four hours,

from eight in the evening until midnight. The audience sits in chairs, which are removed for dancing afterward. The musicians then play until five in the morning. But I do not stay to dance. I'm too tired. Also, if we are in the Pretoria area, I rush home to my mother's so I can be with Bongi. She is a beautiful three-year-old; thin like me, but already growing tall like her father. My separation from Gooli is permanent, now. Son we will be getting a divorce.

A journalist from the big African newspaper *The Bantu World* comes to one of our shows. The next day someone gives me the paper and there is my first review. The Manhattan Brothers gather around to see if their hunch about me was correct. I am too nervous to read, so I give the paper to someone else. The reviewer writes that I "sing like a nightingale."

"What did I tell you!" Nathan says. Everybody whoops it up and is very happy.

"Oh, my!" I say. I am proud, but very embarrassed by the attention.

Now when Nathan introduces me during the shows, I am no longer the "Nut Brown Baby." I'm "the nightingale."

In South Africa, there is a new dance every week. The couples like to show off before the bandstand. But they are not the only ones who are showing off. Gangsters come to the clubs. I have been warned that these are very rough places. There are fights, shootings, stabbings. Some of our shows end in riots. It's very dangerous. The gangsters do whatever they want. Blacks are not supposed to drink, but these men come in, sit in front, and pull out their bottles. They put these before them on the table. Then they take out their guns and put these in front of them on the table, too. We are all supposed to look, and we can't help ourselves: We do. They are like actors, these gangsters, although they do not play. In South Africa, movies are

taken very seriously, and there is a movie in the cinemas now in which Richard Widmark plays a hoodlum. They call him Styles, and he dresses up in a hat, a belted jacket, and those Florsheim shoes. The black gangsters o out and dress just like him. In the movie, Richard Widmark eats an apple after each of his crimes. So, all the African hoodlums have gone out and gotten apples, to! I see them right there on the tables between the bottles and the guns.

I am singing in Alexander Township. The club is known to be very, very rough. I look down from the stage and I see all these gangsters in front. They sit back with their feet up on the tables and they look at me. I can tell they want me as their gangster moll, I'm nervous. A girl may like them or not like them, it does not matter, because if they think they want her, they take her. I sing one of the Manhattan Brothers' most popular songs: "Saduva." When I am finished, the gangsters make me sing it again. Nathan and the boys play the number once more, because we know these men mean business. But the gangsters are not satisfied. They make me sing "Saduva" again, and then another time. It becomes a game to them. I am scared to death. All the musicians can see the guns on the table. The gangsters can start shooting up the place anytime they want. I am forced to sing "Saduva" over and over, until I have sung it twenty times. I am about to collapse from nervous exhaustion. Nathan steps forward and says the show is over. He is very brave. I hurry off stage, and with another singer who is there, Susan Rabashan, we leave through a side exit.

We are in the alley when the gangsters come out and spot us. I think they are probably drunk and might try to do something to us right there. Susan and I run to the street to try to get a taxi. The men chase us. A car comes with other men inside. They signal for us to jump in. We do, and we find ourselves in the company of a rival gang. Susan is truly scared, but, fortunately, among these men I recognize a distant cousin. Siphon is his name. I know that even though these men belong to a gang, I am once again safe in the embrace of my extended

family. I thank Sipho for rescuing us. His friends are amused and maybe disappointed that they can't have their way with us, but really, Sipho would just have to kill them if they tried anything. So they take us home.

Home, at the end of 1953, is my very first house. Blacks are not allowed to own property anymore. We can only lease. I can't afford to buy a house, anyway, and I rent a little place in Mofolo. Mofolo is one of the black Southwestern Townships of Johannesburg. Because of apartheid, all of the Africans are being herded into these townships that the government is building. My house in Mofolo is a gray prefab one just like all the others. It has four rooms: a kitchen, a living room, and two bedrooms. The bathroom is outside. The yards are not big, but the people of each house make nice little flower gardens in front. In the backyards there are vegetable gardens, and sometimes chicken coops. We shop in clean, modern stores that are run by blacks but owned by whites.

My mother comes to live with me. For the first time in her life, she no longer has to work. I can support her. And Bonggi comes, too. My house is truly a home. I am not so busy with the Manhattan Brothers that I cannot appreciate this happiness. I watch my daughter run down the block, a happy little four-year-old, past all the gray houses with the little trees tied to the lawns with strings. The land is flat, and as far as the eyes can see there are gray houses. Where the gray of Mofolo ends, the white houses of White city township begin. My brother Joseph lives in the Dube Township, two train stops away. Other family members have been relocated here. We make the best of these settlements. Having relatives around helps. We are all in the same boat. But this is nothing new for Africans.

The Manhattan Brothers are recording stars for Gallotone Records. I join them in the studio many times to make 78 rpm recordings. We

are paid for these sessions, and that is all. I receive two pounds ten shillings for a day's work. We don't know anything about royalties, and Galltone is not offering. Even if we compose songs that are published, we are not paid royalties. There is a musicians' union in South Africa, but we are not permitted to join because we are black singers to sign on, there is no guarantee that we will be recognized by the record companies.

Work begins when we rent a three-story building in downtown Johannesburg. We call it the Artists' Union Center. There are meeting rooms here, and places for us to rehearse. Classes are offered for children who want to be musicians. Everyone volunteers to make the Center work. Some of us pose for advertisements for a piano manufacturer, and the company gives us a piano that we need. Not only professionals, but others who love music come and teach the young people.

At Galltone one day, I am asked to make a record on my own.

"With the Manhattan Brothers backing me?" I ask.

"No," they tell me. "You'll be solo on this one. It'll be a Miriam Makeba record."

My very first record! The song is originally a Xhosa tune: "*Lakutshuna Ilangu.*" Mankhewekwe Dvushe wrote the beautiful love song, which is about a lonely man who sits before the setting sun. He does not see his lover, and he is asking what has happened to her. He says, "*I will come looking for you everywhere/in the hospitals, in the jails/until I find you/Because as the sun goes down, I can't stop thinking of you.*" Hospitals and jails: The Africans know what this means. Whenever one of us is missing for a time and we don't come home, the first place the family looks is the hospital or the jail.

The song sells very well. I am asked to record other records on my own, but this one was my "breakthrough." They play my record on the radio. The song travels overseas. In America, a songwriter likes it and writes some English lyrics. Gallotone asks if I will rerecord the song. I wonder how I can do this, since it is forbidden for a black person to sing on a record in the English language. But the company knows a hit when they see one, and they insist. I guess color barriers are broken this way. I go back into the studio, and once again I record the beautiful song that now goes by the strange title, "You Tell Such Lovely Lies."

What has happened to my wonderful Xhosa song? The American version has nothing to do with the original. The new lyrics are terrible: "*You tell such lovely lies with our two lovely eyes! When I leave your embrace, another takes my place.*" Everyone who hears the Xhosa version and the American version is disappointed. They are nothing alike. But the new one sells well.

People begin to recognize me on the street. Some say, "How do you do, Miss Makeba?" Some even thank me for a performance. But this is all. In my culture, no one wants to be impolite or pushy. In the West, show business people are always asked to sign their names on pieces of paper. It seems that their admirers find some magic in these signatures; they can say they now own a piece of the celebrity and a part of their idol's glamour. Someone tells me it's like the Aztec Indians who ate the hearts of mighty warriors killed in battle so they could obtain their enemy's strength. These Westerners are very superstitious people.

Just because we are performers does not mean that life is easier for the Manhattan Brothers or myself. Nothing can change the fact that we are still black. The apartheid laws bind us just as tightly. In fact, life is even more difficult for us because we have to travel, eat at

restaurants, and stay at hotels all the time. Nathan makes sure that all our papers are in order. Still, this does not guarantee that we will not be harassed.

One night we are traveling from Pretoria to Johannesburg. Our bus passes the International Airport, and a moment later we are stopped by the police. Two young men order us out. The policemen search the car, looking for anything from alcohol to weapons. Guns and knives are illegal for a black to possess, of course.

The policemen are irritated that they cannot find anything. Nathan steps forward and says, "Here are our night passes"

Nathan has made a bad mistake. He has spoken to the policemen in English. There are no English policemen, only Afrikaners, and they hate the English. We hold our breaths.

The young policeman is stern. "Can't you speak Afrikaans?"

Nathan apologizes. He explains who we are and says we are returning from a performance. It is sad to see this tall, proud, and handsome man forced to humble himself before two blond pimple-heads in uniform.

"You say you are a singing group?" one of the policemen asks in a sarcastic manner. I wonder what is going to happen, since he can do anything he pleases with us.

"Okay, then," he says, "sing."

And they make us sing. The Manhattan Brothers, one of the country's top groups, is forced to stand beside the road in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night, and serenade two arrogant white

kids who are probably police because they're too dumb to be anything else. Nothing is more humiliating than this.

The police are enjoying their play. They finally wave us away when they are bored with us. We are stopped twice more that night before we make it back home. At least we do not have to perform again.

Many times we are stopped so the police can inspect our night passes. Even though we always take the precaution of having these, a policeman in a bad mood sometimes says, "We're going to lock you up." It's useless to protest, unless you want to get beaten. I end up in jail a lot. It is really bad when it happens on a Friday night. The courts are not in session until Monday. We must spend the weekend in jail. Our Saturday night performances have to be canceled, and we all lose the income. When Monday comes, we stand before the magistrate. Depending on his mood, we must pay a fine or face a jail sentence.

There are times when each African wonders how much longer we can stand living the way we do, as subhumans. The whites do not want to treat us like human beings because it is easier to keep us know if they think we are animals. But we know we are human beings. We know we are as good as anybody. We also know that something got to happen. There is only so much anger, resentment, pain, and fear that can build up in a person before there is an explosion.

One night we perform at a place where some men are meeting to try to keep that explosion from happening. They want change, but change through nonviolent means. I recognize the group's flag with I enter the hall. Its three colors are black, green, and gold. The black represents the African people. The green is for our fertile country. And the gold represents our land's great mineral wealth. Black, green, and gold: the colors of Africa, and the colors of the African

National Congress. Over forty years ago the ANC was founded by the same type of black lawyers and educators who are meeting this day. After the Manhattan Brothers perform, we are introduced to them. I am very shy. Politics is something I know nothing about. I curtsy and do not look the men directly in the face when we shake hands. There is a bearded young man with a kind, round face to whom I show the same respect. His name is Nelson Mandela, and he says he enjoys my singing. I thank him and quickly leave, because everyone is busy with something called the Freedom Charter. In this document these men are about to declare: "South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white." This is revolutionary. I fear the government is going to shoot them all.

The fame of the Manhattan Brothers spreads beyond the country's borders. Nathan arranges for us to tour Swaziland, Lesotho, and the Portuguese colony of Lourenco Marques. Lesotho is our first stop; an easy trip because the little British protectorate is completely surrounded, like a dot, by South Africa. In Lesotho blacks are permitted to drink all the alcohol they want. This doesn't mean much to me, because I don't drink. I guess all that beer I had to make for my mother-in-law made me dislike the stuff. But the musicians have a real good time after the show. We drive back to the South African border, and the bus is loaded down with bottles.

Of course, the customs police won't let us in with the loot. "You can't come in here with that. Either you leave it here and go inside, or else back you go."

No one wants to part with a single bottle. The band piles back into the bus, we drive back into Lesotho for a mile, and then everyone sits down on the ground and starts to drink up everything they bought. I can only stand by and watch what happens. Plenty does. The Manhattan Brothers get *so* stoned! Somebody starts a fight, and I have never seen a fight last so long. The musicians, the singers,

everybody is in it. Some try to step in and stop the fight and they get a punch. They punch back and now they are a part of it. I am going from group to group, trying to get out of the way, but saying, How are we going to get home?" Nobody pays me any mind.

We spend the night here in this field, in the middle of nowhere. Everyone is either too stoned or too bruised to continue. I sit in the bus that night curled up in a blanket. The boys straggle in the next morning, all these puffed-up faces and black eyes. Everyone laughs about it, but it will be a funny-looking group at tonight's performance.

The longest tour that we make starts in the countries of Southern and Northern Rhodesia and ends up in the Belgian Congo. This is the type of Africa the West likes to think of when someone mentions our continent: dense jungle, wild animals, miles and miles of unspoiled forests. But we are not tourists, we are traveling professionals, and the going is very rough. We travel by train and car. Many nights we have to sleep along the side of the road in our car when the driver is tired. The windows are always tightly rolled up, because we are strangers here and we are never certain whether we are in a game park or not. In the darkness I hear the monkeys chatter and a lion roar. Lions eat at night. The men tell me not to be nervous, but even to them a lion is no joke.

By day we pass the herds of giraffes and springboks, the elephants and gazelles. And then, just where the forests of Rhodesia are the thickest and the monkeys are the noisiest, the car turns a corner and there I am: ten feet high, smiling from a great big billboard with a bottle of Coca-Cola in my hand. I have seen this picture all over South Africa. But here? The advertising men never told me it would go this far. They came to see me at the recording company and offered me 150 pounds. I was not going to turn down that much money. My daughter Bongi saw these billboards around town, and,

very excited she came home to tell me how happy she is to have a famous mother. I had to smile, because I was down on my hands and knees at the time scrubbing the kitchen floor.

This is the way I like my life, though. And there is excitement and adventure in my days that I never dreamed of. This day, for instance, we take a break from our tour of Rhodesia and go to the famous Victoria Falls. We make our way down to the bottom, which is a very difficult journey. I have never seen anything like this great waterfall. The ground shakes beneath our feet. The sheer, vertical drop of white water reaches all the way up into the sky. We just stand, look, and listen. The Superior Being is always with us, but there are places where he really lets you know it.

Nathan, Ronnie, Rufus, I, and the others write our names on the rocks beneath Victoria Falls. I wonder how long our names will last. It doesn't matter. Our lives are so short compared to the falls, which will go on and on. But for now, here is little Miriam Makeba, writing her name on a rock. I am twenty-two years old. If you want, you can buy my records. You can hear me on the radio or see me give a show with the Manhattan Brothers. And I'll look right back at you from the pages of a magazine or from a billboard with a bottle of Coca-Cola in my hand!

Who would have ever imagined that any of this could happen so fast, and all at once? I forgive myself if I enjoy it, because there is too much danger and oppression in my country to think that any of it will last.

Chapter 19

Who The Hell Is This Newcomer

by

Godfrey Moloji

The township was singing 'Nonsokol'egoli' — Ben Mngadi and the Otto Town gang — Time of the gmbagumba — Lucky the Spade — Nice Time Sweepers versus 'Pass zonke!' — 'Many are invited but few are chosen' — I meet the Cuba Brothers — Moffat ungu — Dodgers and doorkeepers — The Prehistoric Men — 'Every man out the way he came in' — Yster baadjies, dambuzas, and voetsaks — 2 p.m. at the Rio — 'The Scaramouche' — If it's a boy I'll call him Jomo — The Manhattans, the Ink Spots, and the young Gibson Kente — The little girl who carried my trumpet case — 'Julie raas vir die baas' — The final scene at Climax Clothing.

In the train Cleopas and I swapped farm stories about the birds and the bees and the Gumedes until we fell asleep, now and then disturbed by noises we didn't bother to investigate and shaken each time the wheels of the train hit a cross track. We got to Voksrust and the electric engine gave way to a locomotive which puffed through the rest of the night until, like a tired black monster, it drew slowly into Platform Twelve, Park Station, at 6:30 a.m.

Johannesburg on that Tuesday morning in 1952. The place looked a little faster, a little busier. What was I expecting? I remembered how in December 1948 I had attended a students' reception which also marked the opening of the Donaldson Orlando Community Centre (D.O.C.C.), a night not to be forgotten. In that show we had the Manhattan Brothers led by Nathan (Dambuza) Mdledle, the Black Broadway Boys led by Mahlasela, and Thandi Mpambane singing the Cow Cow boogie which earned her the name Thandi Cow Cow. Now this veteran singer is known as Thandi Klaasen. That was the night I saw Chips Mazambane doing his thing on the dance floor, and heard songs like "A Dipsie Doodle", 'Captain Rhythm' and a lot more old-time goodies.

Those were the memories that came to my mind as I alighted from the 'Mafufunyane' train at Orlando Station, going into the subway and out on the western side. I went down the footpath that led past where

the Pelican Club is today, to the little river where I had to pay to get across the 'Penny Bridge'. On the other side the streets around Number Three Shelters reminded you of some scene in busy Calcutta, India. Now the girls were wearing figure belts, bobby socks, brown and white golf shoes and gabardine skirts. The township was singing '*Nonsokol'egoli*'. I went through and up Nomali Avenue, a short passage which went past Nomali Msheng's shebeen to 7795 Phomolong where I had come to stay with my uncle, Patrick Moloji. This passage still exists today.

One thing I noticed when I got to my uncle's place was a speaker at the top corner of the house which played continuous black radio programmes, whereas I had only known the programme which played on medium wave daily from 9.00 to 9.30 a.m. This new development was called Radifusion (*Umsakazo*). I vividly remember some of the announcers of the time like Gideon Nxumalo, Stanley Nkosi and Stanley Mtshali, whom I saw this morning in Ptchefstroom Road stopping traffic for the children to cross. He is now some second-hand traffic cop.

Without anybody seeing me, I unwrapped the *Natal Witness* newspaper which had contained the nice boiled chicken my mother had given me as provision. My gun was there, the one I got during the 'Indian Riots' of 1949 at Umkhumbane. I had hidden it inside the chicken carcass. I again chose a brick in the wall and hid it there. I did not know anybody I Orlando West at that time. I had last known the area as a barren wasteland where we used to catch locusts (*I'ntethe*) way back when I was a pupil at St. Mary's Primary School. Now it was a built-up area with a railway station of its own. So I crossed the line to the east, the place I knew better. I got to Orlando East to find that all the people and things I enquired about were already history. Most of the people had left the neighbourhood or were dead. This was bad.

The Otto Town gang was riding the crest in this area. I met Ben Mngadi the Indian whom I knew from Pietermaritzburg. Let me tell you a little story about Ben Mngadi the Indian. One day in Pietermaritzburg, Ben and I went to look for a job at a certain bakery in Longmarket Street. The foreman there, who was an Indian, came out to us and told me, 'Hay khona lo msebenzi.' That meant there was no work. He then turned to my friend Ben and said something in an Indian language. I expected Ben to say something, but to my surprise he said, 'Leli' Kula lidakiwe' meaning this Indian is drunk. We walked away. I asked Ben what the man had said to him. He got cross and told me to ask him myself. This was a big joke when I related the story to friends. Actually there was no job for me, but the Indian foreman had a job for his Indian brother, Ben. Unfortunately Ben was only Indian by looks, otherwise he was a pure raw Zulu. He never understood a cough of Indian. That's it.

But now, in Orlando East, Ben Mngadi was a full member of the Otto Town gang. Of the gang I can mention quite a few like Otto, Mabling, Nkani, Exchange, Thupi, Gwiks, Maphondo, Lucky (Spade) and makerest the *gumbagumba* man. All thieves, robbers and killers, not one of this bunch would ail to give you, on the strength of his half-a-mile-long police record, the inside map in detail of the famous 'No. 4' (the Johannesburg Fort prison).

It was the time of the *gumbagumba*—a dance session which began with a tent in someone's yard; a few benches provided seating facilities. Music was provided by a gramophone connected to an amplifier and a speaker. In Orlando East, Makerese was the man to contact when you wanted to have that *gumbagumba* music. He owned one of these combinations and could produce quite a sound.

The difficulty in these sessions was that the operator had to be next to the gramophone all the time in case of scratches on the record. There was also the risk of getting the records broken or stolen. Changing

the stylus was a problem on its own, the stylus so minute and the box in which it was packaged so small you could hardly push your two fingers in. While you fiddled to get the stylus out, some off-course dancer would bump you or the table by accident, throwing the box to the ground and scattering its contents on the dust floor. How hard it would be to find those needles in the dimly-lit tent. The operator also had to keep the record turning by hand, winding the gramophone. But the worst moment was when the motor-car battery which provided power to the amplifier got flat. The poor music-maker had to carry the battery on his shoulder to get it charged some distance away. There would be no music for some time.

Home brew was sold at these sessions in scales made up from *Illovo Syrup* containers selling for 'one-up a time' (one shilling a scale). The brew was usually the favourite *umqombothi* ('sqo' for short). It was not advisable to sit close to the wall of the tent in these gigs because you ran the risk of ending up with a *Three Star* knife sticking out of your back. Besides the usual Glen Miller music played in these places there were also tunes of the moment like '*Hamba nonsokol'egoli*' and Alpheus Nkosi's '*Lizzy Lizzy Wam*'.

I was never a trouble-seeker in my time till today. Now this town was driving me into what I was trying hard to avoid. It was rough times and survival called for toughness. I remember walking with some girl by the name of Milela when Lucky the Spade appeared and shouted, '*Wat maak jy met die worsie?* What are you doing with that bum? I was on him in a second. He was out of circulation for a considerably longer time.

This was the time of the most terrible thing ever created by man against man, the 'Mureksie' or 'Section', the Pass Raid. It was an enormous task to acquire your pass and keep it satisfying to the demander, the cop. There used to be these raids any time, anywhere. I remember there was a football game arranged between our club, the

Nice Time Sweepers of Otto Town, and the South African Police from Orlando Police Station. These games went on quite well, drawing good crowds. They were played on Wednesdays on the grounds just opposite the Police Station, and behind the Donaldson.

All would go well if the cops had the upper hand or a draw was on the cards, but once the score climbed too high in favour of the Sweepers, the cops would immediately announce that they were on duty and start demanding. One of them would shout, '*Pass zonke!*' and hell would break loose as we all ran in different directions for safety. The players would lose their belongings in the chaos, and obviously the game would draw rapidly to a close.

As early as six o'clock in the morning the cops used to congregate at the station subways. One would approach the station unawares and go into the subway where things happened. The scriptures say, '*Baningi abamenyiweyo kodwa bancane abakhethiweyo*. Many are invited but few are chosen' So it was with our subway. Very few came out compared to those who went in.

Many times I, too, was a victim of this devilish thing. I was ordered to get proof of where I attended school, which I got from St. Mary's. That didn't help. I was ordered out of Johannesburg within 72 hours just because I had been to college in Natal. I struggled for a long time before I got my dirty pass. Aunt Norah, the mother of my cousin Dululu, helped me a lot during my struggle for it. I won't forget her.

I had no job but I had to live. I met a friend, Maurel Msimang, whom I knew through the Msimangs of Edendale in Pietermaritzburg. He took me to D.O.C.C. one Sunday morning. Maurel now works for Heyns Films. That morning as we walked into Donaldson I heard the tune '*Shiy'umhlaba ne'nto zawo*'. It was the Cuba Brothers in those three beautiful voices of Zweli, Peter and Robbie. Their pianist was the capable John Dlamini. That day I also saw the Gay Rubineers

under Bra Fats Ngwabeni whom I knew very well. He was a prefect way back at Indaleni High School in my school days. Here I was, now, in the game I liked best—music, not fights.

Maurel introduced me to Zweli Ngwenya who led the Cuba Brothers, telling him how good I was on the trumpet. John, their pianist, was playing some eight-bar sequence on the keyboard when I saw a trumpet lying on a chair and grabbed it. I moistened my lips, found the key, which was B Flat, and joined in beautifully to the little crowd's delight. The bass player joined in and then the drummer. We matched nicely. Soon people were jiving while others were busy asking each other, 'Who the hell is this newcomer?'

After that little jam, Zweli, who by now had taken a liking to me, and said he would introduce me to some guy who had sung with them previously. Zweli hoped this guy would put me through with a trumpet. We got to this man's room, which was built of tin and cardboard, in the backyard of a two-roomed house a few streets from Donaldson. His cardboard walls were decorated with pictures of nudes, pin-ups and jazz artists like Duke Ellington, Louis Armstrong and a few more. I was impressed. But to my disappointment this punk only scanned me from top to bottom with his wide eyes. I think he saw some nasty creature in me because he never gave us any reception at all. We went out with our tails between our legs. This man was Mr. Moffat Zungu who later became one of the country's best press photographers. Then he entangled himself in politics and picked up a long period on Robben Island. He is out now. I saw him last month, staying in Meadowlands.

I later got myself a second-hand, much-dented *Conn* from Magnet Music Saloon and joined the Cuba Brothers playing background. We went on very well, though riding the crest at that time were of course the Manhattan Brothers, the Ink Spots and the Broadway Brothers.

There used to be jive sessions on Fridays, concert dances on Saturdays, and concerts on Sundays. The admission fee was usually two and six (25 cents). Some of us would stand outside the door of the hall for the whole night just because we didn't have that two and six. Quite nasty scenes usually occurred between these non-payers and the doorkeepers. Let me tell you another one.

A lady singer of the time, by the name of Martha Mdenge, had two brothers who were twins. I called them The Prehistoric Men. They were short, squat, and not on very good terms with their bath flannels. They walked bare-footed and their step was the short-stroke shuffle. Their faces were covered with rich vegetation; they had never learned to recognize the barber's striped pole nor did they know about the comb. They were Bra Siphon and Bra Mzamo.

One night at the D.O.C.C. Bra Siphon was the doorkeeper. The Harlem Swingsters were on the stage. He had a sjambok and had promised the promoter that he was going to clean up the place of non-paying *tsotsis*. He almost did it, too, because he demanded proof of admission when you were as far as twenty yards from the door or even in the toilets. If you did not have a ticket, you were in for a real hiding from his sjambok. This went on for quite a long time. The place was next to clean though nobody wanted to call it quits and go home. *'Ek moer hulle almal, van hier af tot daar by die deur,'* he kept on saying

There was a certain Joe Phungula—we called him Mighty Joe Young—a well-built weightlifter. He was also at the hall that night. A little boy came to Joe and asked for some money so he could pay at the door. While Joe was fiddling in his pockets for the money, Bra Siphon was suddenly there, throwing his sjambok wildly at the little boy plus Joe. This was enough. Joe got hold of the sjambok plus Siphon, lifted him *voetstoets* high up and dropped him hard on the floor, really breaking his cool. Siphon didn't think he could take

anymore, so he broke loose and ran for his life out of the hall, through the restaurant, and out into the street.

It was drizzling outside and the street was a bit muddy. A taxi had stopped and a well-dressed couple were just turning towards the steps when Siphso burst out of the door. He threw a powerful right as he came, catching the unsuspecting gentleman in his white *Mirror Test* suite on the jaw and dropping him like a mealie bag in the mud. He jumped over him and continued his run up the street, shouting, '*Jou broers, hulle moer my daar binnekant!*' That was it. . . .

These admission fee dodgers were quite a problem at the dance sessions. I remember some used to get into the gallery inside the hall, which was not used during such functions. It was easy to get in there without entering the main hall. Inside the hall there was a long, sturdy pole that was used to open and close the high windows. One thug would pay his admission fee and enter lawfully. Then, unnoticed, he would take this pole and position it firmly against the gallery wall. The dodgers, having gained entry into the unused gallery, would slide down the pole, land on the dance floor below, and immediately join the dancers in step. Everybody would be too busy to notice the swelling inflow. Next thing there would be nobody hanging around outside the door and the hall would be full.

Among doorkeepers I remember Radibi 'Skipper' Moalusi. He has now lost one of his limbs and stays in Phomolong. That time he was very tough and well-built and packed a powerful punch. People talked about the time he dropped a guy by the name of Fox Murukujue. Skipper's blow landed on Fox's jaw with such an explosion you could hear just from the sound that plenty damage was caused. And sure enough Fox spent a long time nursing that broken jaw.

Now one night at the Donaldson, Skipper was the doorkeeper. He also had a sjambok that night. He walked about mingling with the dancers, asking to see the mark which was stamped on our arm as proof of admission. If the *tsotsi* did not have that stamp, Skipper was on him with the sjambok, chasing him around the hall and insisting that he leave—but not through the door this time. ‘Every man must go out the way he came in!’ was Skipper’s rule that night. This was a real problem for anyone who had slid down the pole.

Trying not to get involved in these skirmishes and to keep out of trouble, I made the most of my chances as a spectator. I sat pretty on my expensive ringside chair. Now the boys were wearing the ‘*yster baadjie*’, a khaki jacket; the ‘*dambuza*’, a black fisherman’s cap; and ‘*voetsaks*’, a kind of half boot with car-tyre soles, which has ended up as a standard shoe for the Z.C.C. clan to this day. The favourite bioscopes were the Harlem next to Faraday Station, the Casablanca in Malay Camp (Ferreirastown), the Broadway in Fordsburg, the UNO or the Good Hope in Commissioner Street, and the Rio as it stands today. In these places you’d find the *tsotsi* at his best on Saturday afternoons as he came down dressed to kill with his moll to the 2 p.m. show.

On one of these afternoons I walked down to the Rio. Just at the corner of Market and Mooi I met a girl, and immediately made advances. I invited her to show and paid admission for her. We went in, and were enjoying the show. There was a smell of dagga in the bioscope. I did not like it as I was no dagga smoker. One thug from the row of seats behind us tapped me on the shoulder but I ignored him as I was busy exploring the wonders of God’s creation with my hand. The thug tapped me again, a bit harder now. I turned around and he handed me a long zol of dagga. I shook my head, indicating I didn’t use the stuff, but he hurriedly indicated that I should pass it to another guy in the next row in front of me. Just as I took the zol and

tapped the guy in front of me, I was blinded by the light of a torch all over my face.

I tried to look in the direction the light came from, at the same time shaking the jacket of the man in front of me, who seemed not to be taking any notice. A loud voice was saying, '*Jy, jy met die tarrie, kom hierso*. You with the dagga come here!' I tried to hand it back to the owner, who was now concentrating on the picture in such a way that you could feel you were disturbing him and that he had never been involved in what was happening. The voice repeated, '*Hey, tsotsi, kom met die dagga, jong!*' I stood up and went in the direction of the voice, hoping to explain. What happened? I was grabbed by my *yster baadjie* collar and thrown out. I tried to explain what had happened but nobody would listen to me. I waited outside for some time hoping my girl-friend would come out, but she probably wasn't the faithful type. I lost my money and my new girl before I even knew her name.

We all meet our friends in different ways. I think of one man in particular who was to be a friend to me for a long time. We had the fullest respect for each other—actually I think the relationship was based more on respect than friendship. I had known him since the days he attended school at Musi High, Pimville. I felt pity for this youth as I knew his father to be a blind man who spent his life weaving baskets and selling them to make a living and to educate the boy.

This young man was Shangaan, and in those days Shangaans were taken to be an inferior race. They were always ridiculed and scorned at, given silly names like '*mkongwane*', '*mafikizolo*' and even associated with some cheap polony called '*mashangani wors*'. It is also worth remembering for the sake of the story I have to tell, that these were the times of 'sword hero' movies like *The Three Musketeers*, *The Mark of Zorro*, and, especially, *Scaramouche*.

This young man joined the Orlando Boys Club where physical training was supervised by the toughie mentioned earlier, "Skipper Dollies" Moalusi. This club brewed a bunch of youngsters who earned it the name of the 'Rough House'. The boy I am talking about was the most competent pupil of this institute and that paid him dividends. All of a sudden he became very pugnacious, got involved in fights almost every weekend, and started climbing the ladder to fame. This two-fisted little devil started beating up guys left, right and centre. Smelling victory, he started raiding gambling schools, picking up fights there and winning them. He made himself a 'sword' from thick wire and carried it with him on his raids. He would pounce on his victims, whip them with this wire, and challenge anyone who trusted himself to come for a fair fight—which, for sure, he would proceed to win.

From this sword he gained himself the name and actually called himself The Scaramouche. He was now a threat even to the bigger boys. I had liked the boy, but now I didn't trust him. So I avoided contact with him, making it obvious that I didn't like to mix with him. He sensed my attitude and started doing silly things to me in the dance hall, like bumping me while jiving or pretending to stumble against me. I didn't like to engage myself in fights anymore, but this I didn't like either.

I told Maurel Msimang about this. Maurel called on him and told him of my feelings, telling him how I would like to keep away from trouble and asking him to keep away from me. I thought this mad lunatic would explode, and I was ready. But to my surprise this man became so frank and told me how he had always envied me and had seen that I was avoiding him, so he wanted a way to gain me. What a straight talker. I still didn't trust him for a while, until he proved himself beyond doubt. From then on I respected this man wholly and he did just that to me in return. In all the troubles I got engaged in, no matter how angry I was, if he asked me to stop, I would stop. The

same with him. There was no man I respected like him. I was very sorry when he died.

From his Scaramouche days nobody ever ridiculed this man. Nobody called him names. I tell you, people were even scared to use the word 'Shangaan' in his presence. I actually believe that he is the man who freed all Shangaans from being looked down upon. This an was none other than Eric Bamuzi Scaramouche Sono, later known as just 'Scara'.

I remember we both went to look for a job at the United Tobacco Company at the same place where you will find it today, in Crooesus. The *induna* asked us for qualifications. I told him of my standard of education thinking I'd make it as I was a little above my friend Eric Sono. But to my surprise he got the job and I failed. Why? Only because he told the *induna* he played football. He worked for this company for a long time, till he left it for the Badge Company in Mayfair. Around about then he got himself a girl at some mine village called Mavumbuka. It was the time of the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya. One day Moola, as I called him, told me his girl-friend was expecting a baby and he was hoping the baby would be a boy. He went on to tell me he had prepared the name, which would be *Jomo Kenyatta*. If you don't get my drift, ask a football fanatic what I mean. . . .

I got a job at the Climax Clothing factory, 22 High Road, Fordsburg. This was my first job in Jo'burg. I worked with a boy called Mafisto. I've never really got to know his proper name. He is still alive—I saw him last week. This Mafisto picked a liking for me. We drank *maiza* together. The word came from *mai mai*, some municipal brew pumped from big tanks in the beer halls and sold for as little as a tickey a scale. At the time you could only find it at three beer halls—Von Wielligh Street, Western Township, and Eastern Township. We also drank 'sqa', or home brew, at Nuku's joint in No. 2 Shelters.

My main interest now was music. I played and composed for the Cuba Brothers and we staged shows throughout the Reef. But I still envied the big guys, the Mannhattans who were backed by big guns like McKay Dvashe, Kippie Moeketsi, Mzala Lepere, Willie Malang, Grey Mbawu, and of course, the General Duze. Most of these guys are dead now, except General. I am sure of this because I met him today. Hey, that reminds me of another man I must never fail to mention. I never saw him play an instrument nor have I heard him sing. But this man was and is still fantastic. He is none other than the Honourable Mr. Gibson Kente. You know, this man was already such a good composer—way back in those heydays. He used to compose for groups like the said Manhattan Brothers. I recall one of his works I so loved, a religious song with the title 'All Are Welcome in Heaven Above, All the Young and Big and Small'. I take off my hat to this man whose religious leaning shines through to this day in his renowned musical plays.

There came up the Ink Spots with Elijah Nkwanyane, the golden trumpeter from Payneville in Springs. I remember their famous signature tune '*Ndibe Nomona Ngawa*'. Oh, let's forget. It's true past days never return. Those were the times. That was 'TJ'.

The Cuba Brothers staged shows at Victory Hall, Atteridgeville, in Lady Selborne, in Eersterus. We stayed with Zweli's aunt when we were in Eersterus. His aunt was a *sangoma* who had living with her a little girl, her daughter. I remember the five-roomed house built of mud which was rather too big for this family. This little girl used to bring us washing water each day in a rusted basin, its bottom patched with blue soap.

One by one we took turns in washing. I always preferred to take the last turn, telling them they had to be ready first because they were the vocalists. As a matter of fact, you know, I wanted to have a little

chance to throw a word or two, you know, to the eh, eh, I mean to the cousin, the little girl. The next thing, I was the one who accompanied her on her errands, to the shops and so on; and she was the one who carried my trumpet case as we walked back from shows. I also had my shirt and undies washed for me, privately of course. And eventually we took to disappearing among the shacks now and again after everyone was asleep.

We went on quite well with this lady who occasionally joined us in song when we rehearsed at her home. Wow, she had a beautiful voice. I eventually persuaded her and encouraged her to come to Johannesburg and sing with us as our lady vocalist. She liked the idea. How were we to tell Zweli, and how to leave her mother alone? But I was now the boy-friend and she the girl-friend. It just had to happen my way.

Our love was quite exciting, me and this girl. She told me a lot of stories, the most interesting of which was that she had a gun hidden somewhere. She told me she got it from some Chinaman. I didn't bother to know how this came about; my interest was to get it. It didn't tax me much effort to persuade her into it, so we went and dug it out and now I had another gun. After the string of shows we staged in that area we came back to TJ wit her and she stayed at Zweli's place just above the Donaldson. She became our lady vocalist, and she was to go places. Her name was Miss Miriam 'Zenzi' Makheba. This surname only came about because the whites couldn't pronounce the letter 'g' properly in this instance. The true name is Miss Miriam 'Mazenze' Mageba.

I remember one day. We had finished rehearsals at D.O.C.C. and were on our way to Orlando West. It was a Wednesday and we were crossing the railway line just next to Orlando Station. It was Zweli, John, Peter, Miriam and me. We saw two railway policemen running towards us. Zweli said they were coming to arrest us. I asked him

why. He told me, for crossing the line. I said no ways. He went on to say, let's run for it, I said what about my girl. Just then they caught up with us. And for sure we were taken not very smoothly to their office on the station platform. A bully white cop sat behind a big desk. He looked at us as if he held a university degree in The Inspection of Toilets. '*Wat is julle name?*' '*Waar is julle pasboekies?*' '*Waar werk julle?*'

'*Ons werk nie, my baas,*' said Zweli. '*Wat doen julle dan?*' '*Ons e-e-e, sing, my baas.*' '*Nou ja, sing dan, sing!*' What could we do We started to sing but were told to sing in turns. Zweli started his solo only to be told he was 'making noise' and ordered out. Next was Miriam. She bailed us out because I heard one say, '*God, die meid kan sing! Sing weer.*' Oh Lord, what a job. But eventually it was, '*Gaan julle, uit, julle raas vir die baas.*' Just imagine.

Back at work at Climax Clothing, it was the 12th of December, closing day for the festive season, and Mr. Kay had thrown a party for his employees. There were all sorts of drinks. I had never seen such a variety. Everybody was in high spirits. The party really went well. By about twoish people were very drunk and some were even vomiting. Some were already on their way home, mixing with crowds from the other factories on our street, when I saw Mafisto being assaulted by one Daniel who was our *induna* at work. Mafisto was bleeding badly. I had had a little bit too much myself, my belly was full of brandy, but this I did not like. I tried to reason with this big guy who was a second-hand boxer to let go of Mafisto, but instead the punk caught me with a terrible right to the jaw that dropped me hard on my bum—to the delight of the little crowd that had begun to gather as he assaulted Mafisto. I stood up but he dropped me again, polishing his *Edwin Clippe* a few times at my expense. This was bad. I was in trouble again. This man was far stronger and experienced in this kind of thing. I couldn't land a single punch on him. On the other hand, he was landing them on me at random, and for sure he was enjoying the

situation. He had completely forgotten about Mafisto now and was concentrating on me. Have you ever seen a cat playing with a half unconscious mouse, tossing it around? That was what Dan was doing to me.

Each time he landed a blow the girls would scream 'Yoh!' and the boys would shout 'Moer 'om!' I tried to run for it but the guy tripped me from behind and I fell. Eventually I managed to run into a nearby shop. He tried to follow me but was blocked by the shopkeeper at the door. This gave me some breathing time. You know, this guy was real strong. I had been able to see his big fist coming, and had picked my guard, but the force of his blows had gone right through me, guard and all.

Inside the shop I saw a board with a few *McGregors* marked two and six each—this was a pocket knife with a handle decorated in Scottish colours. I grabbed one of these and went back out into the street. I was covered in blood by now and still bleeding badly. I shouted his name and screamed my battle cry. The crowd gave way. They seemed to pave a long winding passage to my man.

He threw one punch, I went under it and in so close to the punk I could smell him. I thrust my blade into his side and held on. He jumped high, taking me with him, but mother gravity pulled us down. I held on. He tried all the tricks in the book of punks to shake me off but I was stuck to him like a flea on a dog's hide. Now he was bellowing like a mourning ox as I twisted the steel in his innards. Now the boys were shouting, '*Steek hom!*'

The boss, Mr. Ka, came down and kicked me in my ribs. I let go of Dan and chased my employer around he crowds. Now everybody was running in different directions. I was soaked with blood, both mine and Dan's. I was in a trance. I drove Dan, boss, the lot into the

factor where they locked themselves in the office. I pointed my knife at them, warned them, and left.

I went up Central Avenue in the direction of Mayfair Station. I could see people coming towards me as they walked on the pavement, then dissolving as they saw the mess I was in and crossed to the other side of the street to avoid me. On the way I decided against Mayfair Station, thinking of the people in the train and the police. Instead I crossed the line and went to my uncle Abednigo's place in 24th Street, Vrededorp 'Feed us', we called it).

This was trouble. The cops would be after me and Godfrey Moloji was on the run again. Fortunately, I had just got my back-pay. By the following week I was back in my old stamping ground, Sobantu Village.

Chapter 20

The Road To Holly Cross

by

Maggie Resha

When I was about ten or eleven years of age, my aunt decided that I should go back to live with my parents. One of the main reasons was that there was a better school, with classes up to Standard VI, near my parents' home at Ramohlakoana. By now they had left St. James, but when that event took place I do not know. So here was my aunt preparing to send me to college, even though she was earning only fourteen shillings a month, working for a white shop-keeper as a domestic servant and seamstress, when the school fees for most black colleges in those days was between £14 and £28 a year.

By the time I got back to my home, my mother had four children. She used to complain that my aunt and my grandmother had spoilt me. Then, every school holiday I was on my way back to my grandmother's place, about 70 miles away. I used to walk all that distance to go to report to her about how I was doing at school and about how I was being treated by my parents. My grandmother used to get furious; she begged me to leave the school and come back to

her, but my aunt disagreed with that; she was determined that I should go to college and become a teacher.

Ramohlakoana school had many children—some had come from as far away as Lesotho, others from far-away farms where there were no schools—and about six or seven teachers. The subjects taught were: English, Sesotho, Arithmetic, History, Geography, Physiology and Hygiene, Nature Study, Music, Sewing, Cookery. When the girls studied Sewing and Cookery, the boys engaged in sports. Girls also took part in sports after school. This was the time when I got my first pair of shoes and my first overcoat. Before that, we used to wear light-weight blankets, called *lepae*, which were not to be used for sleeping, and which we would wash every Saturday. The principal of the school, who was very old at that time, was Mr. Ryne Thipa; it was said that he had taught my father.

In 1939 I was sent to study for my Junior Certificate at the Welsh High School in East London, where I took English, Xhosa, Latin, Biology, Physiology and Hygiene, Cookery, History, Geography. Music and sports were also done, but not as subjects. Here I specially liked English, Latin and Biology.

I was now sixteen years of age. Unfortunately, before I had completed my Standard VI, my aunt as well as my grandfather had died. Furthermore, on the insistence of the congregation, my father had to return to St. James to take my grandfather's place as Catechist. Anyway, as father had been sickly since he had stopped working on the railways, and could not find other employment, this was a good idea, even though the stipend was very small. The mission, however, allowed him to hire four fields from its farm, and that was how he could maintain his family; the soil was fertile and produced good harvests.

My elder sister had, meanwhile, been sent to an industrial school, called St. Margaret's; there she studied cookery, knitting and weaving. In those days, the most popular courses for girls were either industrial or teaching courses; the former was preferred because it was said to be useful, as it could be done at home. It was certainly going to be extremely difficult for our parents to educate the two of us. To do that they needed to sell grain and cattle, which my mother supplemented by doing a lot of sewing for people, often working well past midnight by candlelight or paraffin lamp. Luckily, when plans were well advanced, at the end of 1938, to send me to Mariazell College, my mother's sister of the senior house offered that she could pay for my schooling in return for what my dead aunt had done for them.

This offer was not well received by the rest of the Tsiu family, especially by my father's mother, who tried hard to influence my father to reject the offer. Her main argument was that I was too young to go to such a far-away place, and that they would never see me again. Although my father was inclined to agree with his mother, my mother did not want to hear a thing about such 'useless obstructions' as she put it. This was the time I saw the power of my mother. The arguments caused great tension in the family, and my father was torn between his mother and his wife. What was strange was that although we lived within a stone's throw of each other, my grandmother did not want to discuss the matter with my mother, but only with her son.

One day father came back from my grandmother with a new story. His mother thought, he said, that it was useless to send girls to school because they would soon get married without helping their parents. And, he said she had told him, Junior Certificate was 'education for boys'; no girl from our area had ever undergone that education! My mother's answer to that was that she wanted her daughter to be the first to take 'boys' education.

She was an extraordinary woman, my mother; not only was she an orator, but she was also very witty and hardworking. She was the power behind my father. Many people feared her because they knew she was a woman of no nonsense. The farmer's daughter had, I think, learnt a great deal from her father. One of her tricks was hardly ever to leave out the words 'the law says' from her arguments. She was outstandingly rational.

I must emphasize that both my parents were strict, but also gentle. I cannot remember either my elder sister or myself ever being punished. Both my father and mother disciplined us by explaining things to us thoroughly. The only one who was ever punished by my father was our brother Rantsiuoa, and that was for dodging church services. What had made him dodge going to church was that, after three services including Sunday School, father that evening, after prayers had asked us one by one what had been said in church. My brother hated this so much that he decided not to go to church at all. This became such a big case that it involved my grandmother as well, because my brother had gone to tell her that father had wanted to kill him. So grandmother came from her kraal, holding her walking stick, shouting: 'Tsekiso, you must remember that Rantsiuoa is your grandfather. How dare you touch him!' Father would usually have no chance of explaining, because of grandmother's threats that she would take my brother to live with her. The custom that children should not talk back to mothers had the effect of cowing him.

When we grew older, we (my brothers and sisters and myself) used to talk a great deal about our mother. We all thought that we owed her a lot for the sacrifices she made and the love she gave to us during our tender years. We were thankful that, by the time she died in 1985 when she was in her nineties) each one of us had tried in several ways to show how we thought that she was a 'Golden

Mother'. I was very sad that I was the only one who could not be present to lay her to rest.

The day I left to go to school in East London, my father, together with two of my cousins, took me on horseback to the station. I was to take the railway bus to the town of Maclear, (where I spent the night sleeping on a bench in the waiting room) and from there take a train to Sterkstroom, where it would connect with another train from Johannesburg to East London. Although I was frightened at the thought of making such a long journey for the first time, I traveled in a motor vehicle and later, for the first time, I traveled in a motor vehicle and later, for the first time, in a train. Our main means of transport in those days was our own feet; for the lucky ones (who might be one in a thousand) there were other forms like horseback, ox-wagon, or horse-drawn carts.

The sound of the thumping of the wheels of the train on the rails enchanted me. I also looked out of the window the whole time to watch the engine or to count the number of carriages whenever the train took a curve. I really enjoyed it. I remember that I was given sixpence for pocket money, and this made me very happy. I also had with me two roasted chickens, two loaves of bread, and two bottles of homemade ginger beer and some peaches in my provision basket. Anyway, one of the chickens went bad and I had to throw it out of the window. It took three or four days (I cannot remember exactly) to get to East London. I do remember, however, that at Sterkstroom I slept in an empty carriage, waiting for the train from Johannesburg, which was due only the next morning. When I told a guard who had come to lock the doors about nine p.m. that I was going to East London the next day and that there were no waiting-rooms, he said that I should come to sleep in his carriage. This offer I declined; I did not trust this white man. The station was deserted, and I prayed to God to protect me that night.

The train from Johannesburg arrived early the next morning, while it was still dark. I had not slept well on the hard wooden bench, on which I had tucked myself in my traveling rug with one flap on the bench, with the other covering my body, fully dressed. I got up immediately and, taking my little suitcase, I boarded the train. This time the Third Class carriages had cushions. I was now feeling great-I was actually going to be traveling on the much talked about train from Johannesburg! The next station on from Sterkstroom and I could hear only Xhosa, and more Sesotho. So I realized that I was now in the land of the amaXhosa. I was fetched by two girls at East London station, it presented a bit of a problem; they knew not a word of Sesotho, and I understood only very little Xhosa. However, all went well. 'As long as I do not get lost', I said to myself.

I think I arrived in East London on a Saturday, because on the following day we went to church with the other girls. On the Monday, when I got to school, I had no problem about talking to the teachers; they spoke to me in English. However, as all the other pupils were Xhosa-speaking, I was soon the centre of attraction, everybody wanting to talk to me in their language. Every day there were groups of students around me, wanting me to talk, some actually laughing at my pronunciation of Xhosa words. But, they, too, could not pronounce Tsiu properly; some called me 'Tseo'.

The principal of the school was a Dr. Wollheim, while our teachers were young black graduates from Fort Hare. The most senior was a Mr. Ebenza Majombozi, who had been Principal before the arrival of Dr. Wollheim. In fact, I soon found out that Mr. Majombozi had founded the school; it was said that he had started it by teaching (in his house) some pupils who had been unable to go to boarding school, but that he was soon overwhelmed by the numbers of pupils. The East London City Council then allowed him to use its large Peacock Hall for holding classes while a new school was built across

the valley on a site about two miles away. Indeed, we moved into the new school building towards the end of that year.

On the walls of the Peacock Hall were huge framed photographs of four African men: Rev. Rubusana; Mr. Mapikela; Mr. Godlo; Dr. Aggrey. Each student seemed to venerate these pictures; we were told that these were the men who were fighting for the liberation of Africa. This was the first time since my grandmother had told me, when I was a child, about how our country had been taken away from us, that I had heard that there were Africans who were fighting for the restoration of our land.

Before we moved to the new school, we had a meeting of all the pupils, at which Dr. Wollheim asked us to choose a name for it, because it had had no name before. One student, Loli Jamela, who was in her IVth year, proposed the name of 'Majombozi High School' because of the work that teacher had done for the school. This was promptly seconded, but the Principal explained to us that we needed the name of a well-known person so that our school could get help from white people. He recommended 'Welsh High School'. I do not know if the majority of us were already brain-washed to believe that our prime interest was that the school should get donations from rich white people, but we all cheered the Principal for his proposal. Later on, we all started to blame each other for rejecting the name of the man who had taken the initiative to uplift his people with much devotion and under enormous difficulties.

Mr. Majombozi left at the end of the term; later we learnt that he had opened another school somewhere in Ciskei. Still later, when I began to take part in politics, I regarded Mr. Majombozi as a hero, because in fighting for your country and your people education is a weapon as powerful as a gun. Indeed, the successes and failures of a country depend largely upon education. I still feel a sense of guilt that there

was not even a reception or a card sent in his honour to this son of Africa, who loved, and fought for his people so much.

The opening of our new school building was a great occasion. For many months we had been feverishly practicing entertainment activities such as sketches, music, poetry and folklore dances. Many personalities, both black and white, had been invited. The teachers all wore their graduation gowns, which were mostly black, except for that worn by Dr Wollheim, which was a brightly-coloured pinkish silk one—I think his doctorate was in Divinity.

An academic atmosphere filled the air as we waited for the guests to take the places reserved for them. Then, from a distance we could hear 'Kwete .. Kwete ... Kwete'. The sound became louder and louder, so that we were all attracted to the direction from which it came. Someone cried out 'Ah! Imbongi ye sizwe! (Salute the poet of the nation!) The atmosphere was electric when the poet S.E.K. Mqhayi appeared, walking slowly towards the stand. He wore a beautiful animal skin, thrown carelessly over one shoulder, while the other one was free. As he uttered golden words in praise of education and of the school, the people silently echoed his last words in appreciation. I remember very well, to this day, one of the things he said, and which I heard then for the first time: *'Uyavuya yena umtu onenyeke ngokuba xa ehleka uhleka nge nyama'* (Happy is the person who has a hare-lip because when he laughs, he laughs with meat).

When the next term started, we had three more white female teachers. I think that this was a time I enjoyed very much in my life. I certainly worked very hard, especially in Xhosa, because it was a subject which I had to pass to achieve my certificate. But the subjects I liked most were Latin (for which I used to get passing marks of 90%), followed by English and Biology. We were taken on visits to museums, aquariums and many other places connected with our lessons. Because our school was not well-equipped, Dr. Wollheim, a

devoted man who wanted good results from the school, got permission from the neighbouring Selborne High School to do some lessons there. This was a boys school for white children, and we had to wait until after they had finished their lessons before we could go there for our lessons in Biology, Physiology and Hygiene. We also had sports matches, both home and away, with other black schools, but never with the whites.

Then, early in 1941, which was my last year in school, I had to visit the Frere Hospital because I was suffering from a severe toothache. It was the first time I had had a toothache. In general, our teeth were good while we were at primary school; there were no children with either tooth decay or fillings. We scrubbed our teeth with white ash which we carefully scooped with a spoon from a fire that had been made with dry cattle dung called *lisu* (plural) or *sesu* (singular).

There at the hospital I was received by two smartly-dressed young nurses who were very kind to me. I also watched them very closely when they were attending to other patients. I was really charmed by their kindness, smartness and cleanliness. Thus it was that, by the time I left the hospital, I was debating fiercely with myself about why I should not take up nursing. My mother had, on several occasions when I was still at primary school, suggested that she would be happy if I took up nursing, but I had rejected the idea. The reports which were circulating in the community in those days were that nurses were cruel to their patients, that they bet them up when they refused to take their medicines. But my second reluctance to take up nursing was that I was too horrified to look at open wounds and extensive burns; it was just unthinkable that I should be able to handle such things—the image of the little boy I had seen at my grandmother's place, which I mentioned earlier, was still vivid in my mind.

I was helped in my decision by the knowledge that a few other pupils who were, like myself, in Form III, had already declared their intention to take up nursing. I therefore wrote at once to my mother to tell her that I had changed my mind about taking up teaching, and that I had now decided to take up nursing. My mother took quite a long time before answering my letter. When her reply came, she made it clear that she, as well as my father, were delighted and that he had already contacted the Anglican priest, Father Wordsworth, to seek his advice. The priest, in his turn, suggested that I go to the Holy Cross Hospital, in East Pondoland, where he had missionary friends. Later, they sent me the full address of the hospital, in order that I should start making application.

My application was successful, and by the time I left East London in December 1941, I already knew the date on which I was to start at Holy Cross. That was July 1942. I was very happy to have a break of six months before I had to start studying again. Although all students were happy at Welsh High School, towards the end of our time there was much gloom and uncertainty because of the Second World War which had started. Every day, when the siren sounded from the city centre, everybody would stand still for a prayer for five minutes. During the night, the street lights were off, and we had difficulty going to our night studies. East London being a seaport, it seemed as if the Germans were about to land there at any time. Then, when I went home for good, the trains were really packed with soldiers, black as well as white. At every station the train passed there were men in uniform. It was a great difference from the time I first traveled to East London. But, in general, we pupils did not talk much about the war. I think the reason was that it was more important for us to get our education in order to improve ourselves.

In January 1942 the results of my Form III examination came, and I had passed. It was a great relief to me, because I was so worried about my Xhosa. My parents as well as the rest of the family

(including my grandmother) were very happy and proud that I had been successful in getting 'boys education' as they called it. The family were even more pleased when my father came back from one of the quarterly meetings and reported that Father Wordsworth had told him that I would be getting a higher training in nursing, one that would enable me to work anywhere in the world. During those days in South Africa, several black nurses were often given only a Hospital Certificate, and not allowed to take State Registration, because their standard of education at entry was considered to be very low.

As I had six months in which I could do nothing, I paid a visit to my mother's mother, which whom I stayed for two months. She, as well as the rest of the family were delighted; it had been three years since I had last visited their place. When I told her that I was going to take up nursing, my grandmother's advice to me was that I should not lose my temper with people who were ill. As I went backwards and forwards in the next few days, nostalgia for my youth came back. I remembered the days when we used to run in the meadows, chasing butterflies and grasshoppers; I recalled how we used to ride on goats and how I used to practice balancing a clay carrier full of water from the well on my head.

Coming from a big city, I was now comparing traditional life with western civilization. For instance, I saw a balloon for the first time in East London. When we were young, boys and girls in our village used to make balloons by washing out the bladder of any beast that had been slaughtered, inflate it, and tie the top with strong grass—the same grass that would also be used for making skipping ropes. We had copied this from children of two villages near ours; we had called those children *maqaba* (illiterates), and they had responded by calling us *makarammele*, which I think was a corruption of *makeresete* (Christians). They also referred to us as *mathisa*, meaning that we had not gone to initiation ceremonies. This remark was intended to hurt us, but as Christians we could not go along with that custom. These

people, who neither went to church, nor used coffins for burial, also did not send their children to school. But we liked them: they were a peaceful people, who taught us a great many of the traditions of the past, as well as their language, which had remained pure and uninfluenced by contact with others.

Their men took more than two wives, and girls, like boys, were sent to initiation schools, at the end of which period a big feast would be held, where the girls would parade, well-groomed, with their breasts exposed and their bodies covered in red ochre and wearing v-shaped skin *sebeto* (skirts) very short in front to expose their thighs. As they marched slowly in a line, being seen for the first time in three months, young men would stumble over each other in their rush to plant feathers on the heads of those they wanted to marry, while the women would ululate as the older men beat the drums for the girls to march in step. Young men who could afford to do so, would festoon the girls they wanted to marry with beads, with colourful chiffons or flowers. On that day the girl would not even know who had planted the feather on her, because she would have to look down all the time; it was the older men and women who kept a close watch on the movements of the young men.

These people used to have large flocks of sheep, goats and cattle, but now, three years after, I found their flocks to be terribly diminished. The landscape, too, had changed; the grass and shrubs were all gone. But what I noticed were the great changes with the people. Many of the boys and girls with whom I had gone to school were no longer in the village; some had married, but most were reported to have gone to the cities—mostly Durban and Johannesburg—to seek work. I also noticed that only about six of us from our village and the neighbouring ones had managed to get to colleges; there were only two girls (their father was a teacher) who had taken Junior Certificate: the majority left school after completing Standard III.

As I painfully debated these matters with myself, I even thought how nice it might have been had Mr. Majombozi come to Maatiele. I recall how, before I had left to go to Holy Cross, my grandmother called me one day and showed me a chicken which, she said, would be part of my provisions on my way to Pondoland, and had gone on to talk about the olden days when her father had had so many sheep and cattle that they ate meat every day; she blamed the increasing poverty of the people on the coming of the whites. That was the time I said to myself that, for an African child to get education, was like a camel passing through a needle's hole. I left towards the end of the second month of my stay with my grandmother; by now she was sleeping with her great-grandchildren. She died in 1954, having seen my two children.

In those days, only one train per day came to Matatiele; it arrived at about ten o'clock and left at four o'clock in the afternoon. So, from home I took the bus which transported migrant workers between Mtatiele and Lesotho. For the first time I traveled Second Class, which meant that I could reserve a seat. But I still had to carry all my provisions, since there were no services on the trains for Africans; these were reserved exclusively for whites. From Kokstad I took a small railway bus to a small town called Flagstaff, which is in Pondoland. From there it was easy to get the transport going to Holy Cross because it was well marked, and had a regular route: after collecting the hospital post in the town, it would go to the railway bus stop to collect any passengers for the hospital.

Holy Cross itself was a conglomeration of all types of building set in an area of some thirty to thirty-five acres. The most conspicuous building was the church, with its spire that could be seen from a great distance. Then there was the hospital itself, together with the usual quarters for doctors, nurses, and domestic staff. In addition there was a post office, a primary school, and a boarding school for boys between the ages of twelve and sixteen. This boarding school

was renowned for its discipline. The pupils were Pondo children whom the mission had offered to educate in order to equip them to help their people in the future. For recreation for the residents there were two tennis courts, as well as a hall for concerts and dances.

The atmosphere at Holy Cross was one of friendship and benevolence; people got to know each other very well because of the daily rubbing of shoulders at work, in church, at places of recreation. We also got to know people from the neighbouring villages, as many of us, especially the young nurses, used to pay regular home visits for chats when we were off duty. Perhaps staying at an isolated place, like a mission, for four years, made many of us homesick, but these village visits were helpful in that we learnt the Pondo dialect from its roots; that helped us to translate for doctors from abroad, several of whom did their housemanship at Holy Cross. There were no trained African doctors then, only African 'Medical Aids'. It was only in the final year of my training that the first African doctors to qualify at the University of the Witwatersrand came to do their housemanship at Holy Cross.

Although my enthusiasm to take up nursing was influenced by my visit to the Frere Hospital in East London, when I actually started, I found it a great challenge. For the first three months we all had to go through what was called PTS; this was a probationary period, during which all new nurses worked in the pantry. There we prepared special diets based on the request forms sent by the ward sisters according to what each patient was supposed to eat. At lunch times we were each allocated different wards in which to serve the meals and to feed those patients who could not help themselves. After that we had to take round bedpans and generally clean up the wards as we went along. In the afternoons we were trained in how to give bedbaths, to take temperatures, and in the art of bedmaking. All these things had to be done within an allocated time; it was stressed

that conscientiousness, speed, and thoroughness were essential requirements for each pupil nurse.

Then, after the three months, the Matron called each probationary nurse for a friendly chat, during which she wanted to know if we were all prepared to continue with our course after what we had seen and done. She said that it might so happen that some of us might have discovered that nursing was not the right course for us. She would give us three days to think it over, after which each one of us could tell her, individually, of our decision.

From that time, after the end of our probationary period, each one of us accepted the challenge of nursing as a career. The theoretical level, as well as the responsibilities of the practical work, increased with each passing year. What I appreciated most was the attachment to the patients and the internal joy which followed when patients improved and got well. I also found that the Latin I had studied at Junior Certificate was very helpful in nursing as so many medical words originated from it.

Although there was hard work and studying to do at Holy Cross, I really enjoyed my stay there. The environment was superb: not only was there no pollution and noise like in East London, but what was even more gratifying was that members of the staff, from the Rev. Dr. Drewe—the Superintendent, who had been trained at St. Thomas's in London, the Matron Miss Tracey and the Sisters, who were all from Britain, were sympathetic to all the nurses, and devoted to their work of teaching us and seeing to our welfare and that of the patients. Once a week Dr. Drewe had organized visits, by medical teams from the hospital, to the remote areas around us to attend to those people who could not reach the hospital. I really appreciated his work and always thought that if successive white governments in South Africa had created such a machinery in all parts of the rural areas, many African lives could have been saved. In Matatiele the people had to

depend on traditional medicine; although there were two white doctors in private practice, nobody could possibly afford them because they were too poor.

Although our stipend was only thirteen shillings a month for the first year, and £1 in the second, I always saved, and so was able to find the fare for the return journey for my holidays. I felt that my parents had done enough for me and my elder sister not to ask them for the fare; besides, they were still faced with the education of my younger brothers and sisters. Going home to see my family was wonderful, but at the same time it was an agonizing and depressing time for me when I looked at the state of health of the people. I would find that whole families had been wiped out by TB, by child mortality from pneumonia, from whooping cough, measles and generally from malnutrition, which had reached alarming proportions. The more I learnt and knew about these diseases and how easily these could have been prevented, the more I realized the suffering of my people.

It was at Holy Cross that I began to understand more about the Second World War. There was an Englishman, Mr. Houghton, who had fought during the First World War who used to come to the Nurses Home with maps twice or thrice a week to explain the war. As everybody was aware that thousands, perhaps hundreds of thousands,, of Africans were being recruited, we believed that things might change for the better for our people after the war. But others amongst us recalled the sinking of the Mendi, during the First World War, in which hundreds of African soldiers on their way to Europe had perished. Yet there had been no change after that. Anyway, we lived in hopes.

In 1944, a friend of the family who worked in Kokstad had subscribed to weekly copies of *The Bantu World* for me as a Christmas present. It was in this paper that I first read about the African National Congress, whose president, at that time, was Dr. Xuma.

Many nurses read the paper because it reported mainly on African affairs; it was the first newspaper I ever read. It was the pictures in this paper that reminded me of the men that I had first seen in East London at the Peacock Hall. Some nurses from Natal said that they knew of a man called Champion who was also a leader of the ANC. However, the talk would end there as nobody really understood much about the subject.

We left for Durban early in 1946 to sit our final examination at the King Edward VII hospital. It was my first visit to that city. We were lodged at the McCord Zulu Hospital, which was also a missionary hospital, where the Superintendent, Dr. Taylor, was also a friend of Dr Drewe. What struck us in Durban was the huge Indian population.

The results of the examination came towards the middle of the year. I was in charge of the male medical ward when Rev. Norton, who was in charge of the church, walked in and embraced me, after which he broke the news that I had passed: I just stood there motionless; it was only after he had gone that the joy for my parents flashed through my mind. I was to stay on at Holy Cross for a further three months to complete my contract. In the meantime, having abandoned the idea of taking midwifery immediately, I made an application to work at the Pretoria General Hospital. My brother was doing his final year at the primary school, and I thought that it was time for me to help my parents after their hard struggle. I made up my mind to work for at least five years before I could think of getting married.

At eight o'clock on the eve of my departure, like all other nurses who were leaving, I went to see the Matron for the presentation of my Hospital Certificate and to bid farewell to her. After I had taken my seat facing her, she handed me my Certificate, which was written in red letters. (I received my State Registration later, when I was working in Pretoria.) She then explained that after all my reports

since my probationary period had been scrutinized, they had decided that I merited a First Class pass. I heaved with astonishment. She went on to say that the doctors, sisters and herself (she was an anesthetist) had all thought that I was one of the best theatre nurses they had ever had. Amazing! I just could not believe my ears. Then, finally, she unwrapped a paper and took out a brand new navy blue and red nurses' cape and gave it to me. She went on to say that she usually presented either a pair of scissors, or a torch, but she was giving me the cape as a mark of distinction so that I could wear it during my work; she then wished me all the success in my career.

As I left the office I still could not believe it. During my training I had tried hard to do what I was capable of doing, but I had never expected so many words of praise from the Matron. Miss Tracey was well-known for her strictness all round; we used to shiver when she came to take rounds—she was such a perfectionist that she was nicknamed 'Colani' (Pick Up!) because, as she went round the hospital, she would ask staff to pick up even the smallest piece of paper or rubbish she saw. Actually, she got to know her nickname later on, because she learnt to speak Xhosa; she would say, 'I know Colani is my name, but I want the hospital so clean that I can eat in it'.

I spent a month at home before going to Pretoria, where there were already a few nurses from Holy Cross. I was going to the Transvaal for the first time but I was somewhat apprehensive because of the stories, which were commonplace, that we heard about the Boers.

Chapter 21

King Kong, Brave As A Lion

by

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Sylvester Stein

*King Kong—mountain gorilla,,
King Kong—lord of the ring,
King Kong—heavyweight killer,
That's me, I'm him. King Kong.
The greatest guy! The greatest guy!
King Kong! King Kong!
No other guy so wide and high,
King Kong! King Kong!*

Now events in Todd's life were to take a different and better twist ... so it looked. As Nemesis riffled through his little diary of things to come he'd tipped Todd a cheery wink, pointing to where he was ordering up a happier future for him than razor-blading. Ah, the old deceiver!

There was, in particular, one wonderful event in the air that seemed bound to guide Todd, and with him all our party, up a far jollier road. It would surely influence the future in our favour and numb our personal pain at the loss of our colleagues as well as soothe our hurt at the searing public tragedy of Sharpeville in 1960.

It would take us forward in a very gay and positive way, this event, for it would make its entry to the accompaniment of African gusto and irrepressibility—and it was, in fact, immediately foreshadowed by the arrival in Britain of Todd himself, that most jovial, glittering and irrepressible of Africans, released at last from his grubby career in doorstep sales. He had decided to take the refugee route, encouraged by old Nemesis, and was bringing with him a mighty band of his comrades to put song and fun into the chilly hearts of us strays and exiles.

This happening was something real and something splendid. It was the *King Kong* show arriving in London in 1961, and with it the whole team, its 99 strong cast and orchestra straight from Soweto. This was not “King Kong” the story of the gorilla and Fay Wray; this was the township jazz musical that Todd had composed, with Harry Bloom and Pat Williams as librettists. In Johannesburg its enormous success had finally knocked into all South Africa’s heads the fact that inside their own country, on both sides of the colour bar, wondrous theatrical and musical genius existed. Now after a houses-full tour of all Southern Africa it was transferring to the West End, looking to go on to Broadway later. A triumphal way out of the apartheid prison for Todd.

King Kong, story of a heavyweight township boxer, was nothing less than *Drum* set up on stage. Music, dance, sport, politics, crime, *shebeens*, sex, township life ... the complete *Drum* cocktail. What’s more not only Todd but many other ex-*Drum* men were in the company, even Gwigwi Mwerbi, the circulation manager finding a slot as saxophonist in the orchestra. All were taking the chance of freedom and cherishing hopes of fortune and lifelong fame.

So now, with the ANC also having set up a presence in London, almost the whole of our former wonderful circle was there. It was the high point of the diaspora. Invitations to meet the rich and famous rained down on our heads, and the rich and famous in their turn fished for invitations from us.

There was an open part one night at my house, a ‘function’ you’d call it, that turned out too popular for its own good. Organised by the anti-apartheid people, under the grand patronage of Lord Lugard, Gwen Frangcon-Davies, the actress, Lady Caroline Wedgwood-Benn and a pair or so of Cabinet ministers, it drew an unexpectedly huge mob of curious English socialites, as well as unrestrained numbers of our exiles who’d worked themselves up into a democratic fervour at

the chance to shake the hands of the aristocracy they usually found so beneath contempt. Early on our three great living rooms were stuffed beyond capacity, with not a square inch of space for the drawing of breath let alone for dancing – and a queue of clamorous ticket-holders still arriving, to be turned back down the garden path again in another queue that bulged out through the iron gates and along the pavement towards the Underground at Camden Town. An enterprise smothered by its own success.

Aside from that flop, however, *King Kong's* fame and promise were bringing cheer, bathing us all in the spotlight and brightening our lives. Now that the show had opened in Shaftesbury Avenue, thought the optimists in the company, money and fame for each performer was surely guaranteed for ever. Let us celebrate immediately – and forever!

Todd himself threw a party of the township kind, high-voltage and non-stop.

The Matshikiza family was by now living in a basement flat up the road from me beside the green slopes of Primrose Hill, where two or three other old friends had already come to roost, each new family snuggling in beside the one who'd turned up just ahead of them so you soon had a nice little community squashed up together and continuing to grow around the nucleus of the first who'd been sent out to take shelter, as in the game of Sardines.

It chanced in that period that not one but two different sets of people had settled in the road. There were these South Africans of ours, and there was a second clique made up of Britain's bright new satire generation of entertainers and writers. They too had piled up very close on top of each other, another clump of sociable barnacles.

The two sets mixed happily together, soon making cross-colony connections. Eleanor Bron moved into a flat in my house; next door to us on the one side was Jonathan Miller, and semi-detached to us on the other was Sylvia Plath with Ted Hughes on the middle floors of a tall, elegant Georgian residence with a rather superior rocking horse in the front window (more that 30 years later it's still there, rocking away with that same supercilious look on its face, though of course Ted and Sylvia aren't); around the corner lived Bill Oddie; regular visitors were John Fortune, John Bird, Marty Feldman, the pop-eyed comic, Desmond Morris the *Naked Ape* man, cartoonist Mel Calman, the Dankworths, themselves *ex officio* members of that same jazzy scene, and Dudley Moore, then known only as Dankworth's pianist and not yet sanctified by Hollywood. This crowd of neighbours was invited to our festivities, that was the South African way.

There was a quiet start to the Matshikiza party, a good omen surely, for how many quiet beginnings didn't we all remember that ended in wild and wonderful dancing and singing? On arrival I was offered a first drink by Todd, whom I found in ruminating mood, working up his impressions of that great city. Being sensitive to race matters, he had already smoked out aspects of apartheid that had followed us here. Laughing expansively, to show it didn't *matter*, he told me how he'd gone to a barber had said to him coldly, refusing to in his clean, white sheet around this black man's neck, 'we don't handle your sort of hair.'

Todd sniggered bitingly: "He's *afraid!* Still I'm sir to him, anyway mind you, my dear sir, yes man, yes sir, I'm known as sir, one of the untouchables or not!' He guided a pint of beer past his moustache. 'And, hey, Sylvester, what do you think of this, it's ghettos again here too, we're back living in a ghetto of our own again, all us blacks fenced in together.'

'It's only sardines,' I grunted. I had to admit to myself, though, that it truly was a ghetto, building up apace in the wake of the Sharpeville massacre as more and more of our colleagues tumbled into London. But I played it down, now the patriotic Londoner. 'Just only the sardines game,' I said again.

'Huh?' came from Todd, eyebrows rising up slowly, though his eyes twinkled beneath. He shortly got my point, however, while maintaining his own, even extending the metaphor further. He saw the effect as part of the bigger waves of blacks and other immigrants from over the world moving into north London, each ethnic group segregated into its own territory. 'First impressions from a traveler making notes of local customs,' Todd said to me, laughing in his hearty way, head flung back, with another drink preparing to find its way through the moustache, that bristly moustache that seemed so much a part of his laugh as well as his drinking. 'Look at the map of London here, Sylvestapol my boy, these English natives have got it all worked out very nice and apt to keep the interlopers off; there's all these separate little boxes, with tell-tale names pinned on each of them; they've packed the Caribbeans away together over in British West Hampstead as you might say, then there's the Jews up in Golders Greenstein, yes very nice and pat, specially designed for them, it could be Golders Greenberg either and finally behold ... there's Belsize Parkistan and there's Muslim Hill!'

Now there arrived the soignée Pat Williams, who'd written the lyrics for *King Kong*, introducing her friend Desmond Morris to Todd. Morris, a large solid man, stood next to Todd, towering above him, while they looked out of the window across the enclosed yard at the 'view', an unlovely wall of faded russet-coloured old brick, only a few feet away and bulging inwards a bit, trying to come still closer. 'It makes me uneasy,' Todd observed of this rather claustrophobic London phenomenon, 'so near, it stops the air coming in.'

‘Certainly a *bijou* little place you have here,’ agreed Desmond giving it the kindest construction.

‘Bijou!’ Todd liked that. ‘And, hey, there’s a *bijou* little at strolling on it above us.’ The cat now stopped and crouched there, camouflaged against the rusty background of the wall, a marmalade cat with just two legs dangling down, each foot and the tail showing white at the tips. ‘At a distance you read it as a patch of small white roses dotted across a reddish creeper,’ Todd commented.

Desmond was charmed by the lyrical statement. ‘Absolutely,’ he said, pulling a lock of lank black hair up across his brow and screwing up his eyes to see if he could call up that vision for himself.

‘To be perfectly frank with you though,’ —in some moods Todd was certainly frank, even confrontational— ‘what we really need here, man, is not a cat but a dog. It would remind us of home, as we weren’t allowed to keep one out there. A nice *bijou* little doggie.’

‘You’d be much better advised,’ Desmond laid down in a booming lecture-room tone, ‘to have a very large, easygoing dog, such as a Labrador; if you’re going to keep your family pet in a very limited space, don’t get a small, snappy dog like a corgi.’

‘Done!’ .. Todd relied, ‘and we’ll have just one very large *bijou* tree in the middle of the yard for its convenience.’

‘Convenience!’ smiled Desmond, seeing here a joke Todd hadn’t intended. Todd moved away now to greet others, the place was filling fast. What Todd didn’t know was that Desmond Morris at that time was curator of mammals at London Zoo just down the road, and that he had just learnt from Desmond one of life’s great truths,—that a big dog is more restful than a small one.

One of Todd's kids came up, to tug at his father's coat, eyes shining, 'I just seen Paul Robeson,' he whispered admiringly. 'Everybody's here.'

Everybody only not the Pope,' said Todd. He turned to me with a wink, 'it was *Robertson*, the TV man.'

'And only not the Queen either,' added the kid, one of his expectations dashed.

'Just keep a watch out for her,' Todd said, packing him off. Then turning to me he said, 'This drinking gives me a thirst, what about another?' Before we could look round his wife Esme was there, pouring us each a beefy one; a good-looking and very self-possessed person she had been circulating through the party with a vast jorum of wine, donated by the Matshikiza's landlord, another of our South African 'sardine' neighbours, Ivan Stoller, an idle young millionaire and as it happened owner of the dog Scottie. The wine, cheap and cheerful, had a speedy affect in turning up the volume of the general chatter.

Suddenly, a shrill cry. From the corner where my wife Jenny was, arose something of a strident scene. Sylvia Plath, with whom she'd lately struck up a close friendship and who'd been talking to her and Bloke, had jumped up with a small scream in the middle of their conversation and dashed across the room and straight out between the crowd through the front door, to set off other little frightened shrieks from a woman she'd brushed past at speed.

'Sylvia—my God!' yelled Bloke too, his eyes popping out, 'what's she got the huff for, what have I said, what have I done? I never pinched her bottom or nothing nice like that.'

Jenny ticked him off. 'Don't always think it's on your account.'

'What's it then?'

'She's pregnant.'

'Pregnant! How can you tell?' Bloke was even more pop-eyed. 'And did she just suddenly find out Who's it by, anyway, so quick? Not me!'

'Bloke, there you go again, don't always think it's you.' She pinched his ear in a teasing way: 'Get it? Get it Bloke?'

It appeared to have been another of Jenny's great inspired guesses. 'I simply said to her two of our kids couldn't come to the party tonight because they were kept home with German measles. She looked as if she'd been shot, jumped up suddenly and rushed off without a word.'

'Well, whyfore? What's she got against Germans' measles?' asked Bloke, astonished. And how could that make her pregnant?'

'Because when you're pregnant—so you see she *knew* she was – it can harm your unborn baby to catch it.' Jenny spoke severely to him, as if he should have known better: So there you are, two plus two, it's simple. She's being silly though, how could she catch it from me when the kids're at home? H'm, so she's pregnant is she!'

Bloke rather muddled about all this, apologized for his stupid questions and played for a laugh, 'Hey, I better clear off as well, otherwise I'll get you girls pregnant too.'

We gratified him with a good round of laughter. By this time a crowd had come over to hear from Bloke and Jenny what it all was about. The Matshikiza kid, circulating through the party at his own lower

level, had also quickly darted over between the knees of the adults to where the action was. To distract him, so that he wouldn't over-excite himself, Ivan Stoller, who'd appointed himself uncle to the family, put a friendly arm around him and said: 'Nice pink pyjamas you got there, sunshine!'

This had the effect of recalling Todd to his duties. 'Hey, you ... you should be in bed!'

'I can't sleep.' He was quite right, it had got very noisy. The flat was packed and everyone had something to say, or rather to ell. Things were still in a reasonably genteel state though, but now a second small sensation came up—a good thing really, a successful party is very much elevated in mood by such fruity and emotional real-life episodes, items worthy of gossip hatching out before one's eyes being of especial benefit.

This next business that raised the tempo was a noisy falling out between two of us, normally warm friends. Thus ...

On a battered green and red-striped sofa near the window there was sitting a party within a party, all squashed together across each others' laps, giving the sofa the look of an overcrowded life-raft in stormy seas. They were discussing contentious though highly intellectual matters. There was Arthur Maimane, Gwigwi, Dam-Dam, Robert Resha, the ANC man, Barney Desai, the Africanist, and Rose his wife, James Phillips, the vocalist who always led the singing of *Nkosi Sikelel'I Afrika*, Malcolm and Jean, Monty Berman, our latest refugee friend—and now Bloke joining them, squeezing down beside Jean and manoeuvring her up and over so that she sat on his knee. So then, he was still on the long chase to get closer and closer to her, was he—one day, his attitude seemed to show, who knows, who knows ...?

Arthur, one of those whom alcohol might befuddle but never destroy, consistent drinker though he was, was knocking it back busily and had put to these castaway mariners the proposition that Sol Plaatje, who in 1912 had been one of the founders of the ANC as well as the author of a number of books of high literary value, both fiction and polemic, could confidently be described as South Africa's greatest African writer. Arthur was maybe out to start an argument, though for a moment it didn't catch fire. 'Yes, well, who else?' concurred most of the voices on the sofa. 'Plaatje!' Resha hailed him, lifting a glass.

'Yes,' said I, supporting the motion, 'agreed, agreed ... but you know what' — as a daring thought came to me — 'maybe you should group equally with him our own great Zeke.' Zeke, author of a series of fine and true stories of African life, his autobiography recently published and more books in the pipeline, wasn't to be embarrassed by this, he was abroad. It did the trick, though: my intervention brought trouble. It caused Bloke, poking his head out from behind Jean to frown severely. 'No, no, no, you can't say that. Ridiculous — Zeke!'

'Oh, yes, it's certainly a bit ridiculous of you, Sylvervest,' Todd backed him. 'Our nice old Zeke, surely not, come, come, come.'

'No-no, *wag* — 'n *bietjie* (wait a little), don't object too quick. Look here, 'I argued,' just judge the literary quality of the man. And though Zeke is still only at the start of his career, he already matches Plaatje: he has depth, humour, humanity, a wonderful line, a style of his own, and, most important of all, he has a theme. And he's no lightweight.'

That caused Bloke to wrench himself right out from under his pretty burden, brush her off him virtually — 'excuse me honey, excuse me' — to stand up and expostulate very loudly. He actually exploded. This normally smiling, accommodating man let a wave of sheer, sneering

laughter rip out of him—it was laughter not meant to be funny but derisive ... cutting. It was a great fortissimo outburst; I half expected the children to pop back out from the bedroom again. On Jean's face there appeared a sardonic and quizzical look.

What could have turned him so emotional and harsh, I asked, as Bloke went on making a fuss about it? I realized what it was: the great green god of envy hovering in the background. Behind the sour laughter, you could imagine Bloke asking the world, 'Am I not weighty too? Haven't I too a big theme?' It made him bristle, this praise for Zeke. The worst of it, I surmised, is that he must have felt that it was part true—that's what would have rankled the most. It's not to say that Bloke was not also a writer of quality, but he never achieved the poetry and philosophy and depth of feeling of those other two, *Plaatje* and *Mphahlele*. And Todd too, backing him up here as another overlooked writer, had wit and charm, but could not achieve the depth, the gravitas.

Bloke was sorely betrayed by this bitterness that showed under his usually engaging and congenial surface expression. And while he revealed personal bitterness, interestingly enough *Plaatje* had displayed none—was there ever more gentle and forgiving a man, although he'd had to labour under even greater obloquy in his life than had the Africans of post-Second World War?

I said nothing more, though, just packing away in my head the thought that what one had seen here was plain jealousy. 'How could you class Zeke so high and not me' was what must have been passing through Bloke's mind. It brings particular heartache to feel one is being overshadowed by a peer and contemporary. Not to say that I didn't suffer a little soreness myself, I felt rather sadly that I would have liked to be classed as an African too, and thus eligible for the competition, with three or four novels to my credit, not to mention a textbook on running!

I switched to another subject, sitting down next to Dam-Dam—Nathan Dambuza Mdledle the singer who played *King Kong* in the show, that human gorilla—to talk to him about the big gumboot dance he did on stage and its origins at the Durban docks, where the whaling station workers would meet in the vast flensing shed and despite the turgid smell of whale blood and blubber, dance in wonderful unison on the greasy floor, doing their gumboot adaptation of the traditional barefoot Zulu war-dance. It produced a still greater slapping, stamping noise than did the original, it was very stirring and strangely flamenco in feeling, from Spain rather than Africa. Or perhaps where Spain first got it from was Africa?

In the years since that contentious conversation, I've often returned to the proposition, who's the greater and in fact the greatest African writer from South Africa, Plaatje or Mphahlele? Amazingly enough, to make it a fairer contest, it is not only Mphahlele whose publishing output has had a chance to grow and burgeon since that night, but Plaatje's too, in spite of his death having taken place long before, in 1931. For his early novel *Mhudi*, which had been issued in a private edition only originally, was given general publication in later years; his *Native Life in South Africa* became ever more widely known; and miraculously, his beautiful diaries of the 1899 Siege of Mafeking, where he had served as an interpreter, were brought to light for the first time, unearthed from an old family hut as long as 80 years after they were written and 50 years after his death, to be published finally amid great acclaim. What intrigued me was the style and tone of the text of that amazing diary, which, save for the fact that it was hidden from view all this time, might well have been the model for the characteristic sound and style of the *Drum* writers. Presumably there is something particular and intrinsic in the way that African writers express themselves in English.

Esme, now anxious about the drink running out, came over to ask Todd what she should do. 'We need more, where's the nearest shebeen?'

'Shebeen, shebeen!' Todd cried, facing this drought crisis, 'where do they keep their shebeens, these natives?'

'Simply send to the off-license,' suggested one of the natives, the well-informed and imperturbable Desmond Morris.

'So late at night!'

'They stay open precisely as long as the pubs.'

Amazed at the liberality of the law, Esme, shaking her head in disapproval of such lax public morality, went out with a large basket, and myself as company. Our return did the life of the party a great deal of good. The walls of the small flat no longer pressed in on us, but seemed to expand as Esme's reserves of liquor carried out their happy work bolstering our confidence, our spirits and our wit. Mind, there was still some disappointment in certain corners because of obstacles in getting at the drink. The crush meant that glasses had to be passed along overhead, and did not always arrive, being appropriated on the way — which had the curious effect of diminishing the level of intoxication and noise in proportion to the distance from the kitchen. This led to a polite pushing and jockeying for positions nearer the kitchen and to some vociferous repeat orders from the outfield.

From the rocky sofa near the window a low chorus of song now drifted across, turning before long into a general sing-song. How could we have spent so long neglecting our customary party joys! The hearty singing drove up the voice level needed for normal

speech. *Inyani!* (in truth)-it could have been Sophiatown. Home sweet home reborn!

Todd was now playing his piano, hammering out numbers from *King Kong*. But there were whispers behind his back when he started on the tune of *It's a Wedding*. 'A bit tummy,' groused an English musician with a pasty face, a noisy and obstreperous fellow. We did have to admit though that this was partially true. There had certainly been lukewarm comments about the production from several London critics and we had to agree that the show hadn't quite come off the way it had in Africa. Though a major event for us, it wasn't yet sure of being a long-run hit among the British. It was a precarious moment for it.

'It lost some of its raw vitality on the way in,' granted Ivan Stoller, 'it got cleaned up a bit for the West End, what a mistake, what a mistake.'

'Eheh, raw vitality,' Dambuza acknowledged the shortcoming a bit glumly..

'No, it lost Miriam Makeba, she was the star of the show,' corrected Jenny sharply, not sparing sensibilities. She spoke the truth, the management hadn't been able to keep Miriam in the star part she played in Johannesburg, they couldn't settle terms with her. Miriam! You can still hear that golden voice of Miriam's on the old LP, it stands witness to the difference between the South African cast and the one that had been brought over, for Miriam was much more than merely an actress singing.

'Miriam! Give me a cherry every time!' a raucous admirer of hers now sang out, a quote from the show.

A momentary dampener was put on things. To beat it off, Esme kept circulating faster than ever with her life-preserving liquids. Todd in particular was drinking more and more and now did one of his popular turns, very exuberantly, standing up before us, a small proud man, and rattling through in his best elocutionary manner the speaking of the Xhosa phrase ...

*I-qaqa liqikaqikeka e quaqwni,
Laqhau'k uqhohogo lahothaq-hothek' umnqunho'*

In translation this had something to do with a skunk tumbling over on its side and down green slopes and snapping its spine. No matter, there was a great deal of phonetic richness about it, a virtuoso display of Xhosa clicks, clacks, splashes and pops, which went down famously with the company.

There were more cheers and laughs and downings of drink and frolicsome attempts by the locals at these click sounds until the house supplies again looked in threat. 'Now it's really after pubtime, we really need a shebeen,' Esme appealed.

'Don't panic,' said a knowing fellow, one of the early arrivals from abroad, 'now we simply go to the back door of the pub instead of the front. I know the guv'nor.'

'So they *have* got shebeens!' exclaimed Esme. 'And not a madame but a guv'nor.' Off we trotted again.

Bloke and Malcolm and Gwigwi, with Todd joining in over his shoulder from the piano, were continuing with a very high decibel conversation, nostalgic stuff about how brilliantly the musical had gone down on tour in Rhodesia, which then recalled to the musicians their experiences in bands in earlier days humping their instruments around on their way to a gig in the townships, only to be stopped

and searched by police believing they'd surely find stolen property tucked into those double-bass and cello cases. 'And the buggers expected a *gun* inside mine, instead of my tenor sax. For sure!' called out Gwigwi, laughing loudly. 'And when they saw only my nice silvery sax inside, "Where did you pinch that thing, kaffir, come quick, hand over, hand over", they'd shout.' A practiced raconteur with a rubbery visage, he believed that the louder one laughed and the wider one pulled one's face the more likely it was others would see the point. At this stage in the party nobody was going to be too critical and all laughed as noisily as Gwigwi himself, while the piano, trying its hardest to get a word in above the row, kept banging away at the top of its *fortissimos* and a reckless clanking came from the kitchen from the washing up of more and yet more mugs and glasses.

Generally one had here one of the finer pandemoniums. Then suddenly KO! KO! KO! A really frightening rap at the door. Rap-a-rap-rap! Our minds asked immediately: Is this the knocking of an unearthly Nemesis? Instantly the party hushed, all one could hear was the clink of Esme softly bustling about, guiltily concealing any evidence that there had been drink taken.

KO! KO! KO! KO! again.

Still for another moment or two nobody moved. Finally, Hello, Hello, Hello was shouted impatiently through from the other side of the doorway, anyone there?

At this the brave host called himself to attention, marched over to the door, having to squeeze through the crowd of his guests to get there—*eksuus mense, eksuus, eksuus!*—flung it back and retreated a step ...

Chapter 22

This Is America

by

Hugh Masekela

I quickly cleared immigration at Idlewilde (now JFK) International Airport and, after a nervous walk through the terminal, approached a set of clear glass doors with the American morning waiting for me on the other side. Before I could ponder my next momentous step into a new world, the doors silently slid open on their own and the music of New York chaos breezed in on cool autumn air, an amazement. Miriam had called me before I left London to say that she would be away on tour with Harry Belafonte when I arrived, but that someone would meet me at the East Side Terminal in Manhattan. I was sitting on the bus riding through Jamaica, Queens, a twenty-one-year-old from Witbank on my way to mythic Manhattan, when it finally hit me: I smiled to myself and whispered *die dlladla my ma hoor my*—this is America, I swear by my mother's living soul.

When the bus pulled into the East Side Terminal, I calmly remained in my seat while everyone else disembarked. The bus driver, noticing that my suitcase was the only one left in the hold of the bus, came back into the vehicle and said to me, "Where are you going, buddy?" "I'm going to New York City, sir," I said. This is New York City, my good friend," the driver said. "You won't find another one."

I stood up in disbelief and slowly stepped off the bus. Nothing around me looked like the sparkling New York City I had seen in the picture books or the movies. Everything was drab, dingy, and dark inside the terminal building. A smiling, light-skinned African man in a navy blue suit with a maroon silk tie over a white shirt walked up to me. He was already holding my suitcase. "Com on, Hughie," he said. "Let's go home."

The man was Mburumba Kerina, a fellow exile and friend of Miriam, who had come to pick me up. I followed him to a cab. He told me he was SWAPO's chief representative at the United Nations—SWAPO, the South West Africa People's Party, was petitioning the United Nations for the liberation of South West Africa (now Namibia). He was married to Jane Miller, an African-American woman from California who was also very active in the Namibian liberation campaign, and together they had two kids, Kakuna, their four-year-old daughter, and Mandume, a boy of two. Jane was expecting the couple's third child. The Kerinas had become friends with Miriam after they attended one of her performances at the Village Vanguard. We rode up Third Avenue to 336 East 82nd Street, between First and Second Avenues, where Miriam was renting a basement apartment.

Driving up Third Avenue, I responded to all of Mburumba's stories about Namibia and the UN and his family with one question: "Is this really Manhattan?" I couldn't believe this was the same New York City I had heard about and seen in movies. From the taxi it was a blur of people in the millions scampering to work, dirty streets, buses,

taxis, and shabby tenement buildings, open manholes, and newly dug ditches with hundreds of men in hard hats working on construction sites and street paving gangs. Signs all over read, DIG WE MUST FOR A BETTER NEW YORK. Police cars and fire engines with screaming sirens hurried to one crisis or another, battling to get through the congested traffic. Window washers hung suspended on scaffolding high up against buildings whose windows were sixty stories up in the air. Blaring car horns, stuttering air hammers, screeching tires, screaming voices; street sweepers; garbage collectors running to and from grubby, noisy garbage trucks, toting gigantic plastic bags and cans of trash; cyclists, joggers, and dog shit on the sidewalk—I could not believe the pandemonium. I quietly wondered if I had made the right decision by coming to America. Was this madness worth all the trouble I had gone through?

Since they lived five blocks away, at 77th and Second Avenue, Miriam spent a lot of time with the Kerinas. Bonggi, Miriam's daughter, had become like their other child. When Mburumba and I finally arrived in Miriam's pad, Bonggi was there—more than excited to see me. She jumped into my arms—“*Malme, Hugh!*”—and launched into a fusillade of Zulu, already broken even though she had only been in America nine months. I had last seen Bonggi with her grandmother at Dorkay House, where they had come to make final preparations for her travel plans to New York, so she could join her mother. Bonggi was eager to hear about her relatives back home, but mostly how her cousins Nhlanhla, Nongobozi, and Thupazile were doing. Unfortunately, I had last seen these kids in 1956 when Miriam and I started our torrid love affair. I could only say to Bonggi that I was certain they were all very well, although I couldn't explain why I had not seen them lately. Bonggi was crestfallen I had not come bearing any tidings for her from Nhlanhla and her grandmother.

When Miriam was away, Leslie Reed, an aspiring Puerto Rican actress, singer, and dancer, looked after Bonggi with the help of Jean

Johnson, another aspiring singer from Harlem. The two women were always auditioning, but never seemed to get hired, so Miriam was helping them earn a few dollars by having them look after the apartment and Bongi while she was on the road. Jean was tall, dark, and quite attractive. Originally from the South, she was crazy about B.B. King and Ray Charles. Leslie had light skin, straight hair, and a dancer's body, and spoke with the rat-a-tat relentlessness of a typewriter. Leslie came from a close-knit family, and spoke to her mother on the phone several times a day in breakneck Nuyorican Spanish.

I had been in the house a few hours when Miriam called from Las Vegas. She was excited that I had arrived safely, but would be away for another three weeks. She insisted that I make myself at home, and asked me to help Bongi with her homework because she was just beginning to learn English. With the new, inferior Bantu education for African children back home, Bongi had only been instructed in the ethnic languages before coming to America. My task was to decipher this new world Bongi was entering into Zulu first, and then teach her the English equivalent so that she could cope at her new school, the Downtown Community School in the East Village.

That evening Leslie took me to the Jazz Gallery on East Eighth Street, where Dizzy Gillespie was sharing a bill with Thelonious Monk. When we walked in, the set was already on. Cheeks full extended, Dizzy was playing with Lalo Schifrin on piano, Rudy Stevens on drums, Mike White on bass, and Leo Wright on saxophone. He had just returned from South America, and you could hear the Brazilian influences in the music his bank played: "Desifinado," "One Note Samba," the theme from *Black Orpheus*, and other hot Brazilian compositions. Between songs he spotted me in the audience and smiled at me from the stage, nodding as if he'd been expecting me. Right after his set, he walked to our table and greeted me like a long-

lost brother. “Ooowee,” he said, “wait till Lorraine hears about this.” This jazz legend of bebop and I hugged—he told me how glad he was that I had finally gotten out of the apartheid hellhole and was relieved we didn’t have to write each other veiled and coded letters anymore. “Now we can talk about those bastards in South Africa without fear,” he said, bursting into his patented laugh and high-pitched “Oooweee.”

Thelonious Monk walked and was heading toward the stage when Dizzy stood up and stopped him. “Hey, Thel, I want you to meet Hughie Masekela. He’s the South African trumpet player I told you about. He just got in this morning from London.” Monk was wearing his black sunglasses and customary black suit, black shirt, and mini-porkpie hat. He gave me a limp handshake and uttered an unintelligible, high-pitched whine, “Nyiii,” then walked away. I never saw his eyes behind those dark sunglasses, just my own confused state looking back at myself. Dizzy hollered at him, “You was born dead, Thel. You hear me? Born *daaeiid*.” He turned to Leslie and me, Don’t mind him. He’s a born actor. He’s got the biggest mouth in the world, oooweee.” I was in music heaven, meeting people I had idolized for years. I was dazzled but tongue-tied, especially after Monk’s weird introduction.

“Let’s pop over to the Five Spot, across Third Avenue. Mingus and Max Roach are playing there. Max really wants to meet you, oooweee,” Dizzy said, breaking the awkwardness at our table. “Okay,” I managed. Dizzy was in high spirits, bubbling over. He reminded me of my uncle Kenneth back home, who even resembled Dizzy physically, down to the expensive tweed sport jacket, cashmere sweater, brown camel-hair slacks, and English brogues. When we got to the Five Spot, the joint was packed to the rafters. The smoke-filled room was jumping with Charlie Mingus looming wildly on stage, exhorting, cheering, and scolding his big band all at the same time while playing the hell out of his upright bass. His

drummer was shouting back at him while beating the hell out of the skins. The integrated big band was playing their hearts out, intense and on edge, sending up a complex, wailing blues—one section's tight melodies competing with another's seeming chaos—that threatened to tear the roof off. Word was that Mingus was notorious for beating up members of his band when they made mistakes while playing his complicated arrangements, but the finished product was like nothing else, an exhilarating and eclectic mix of bebop, Dixieland, and swing. The band also played many Duke Ellington compositions. Mingus—who had played with the Ellington band for years—worshiped the Duke even more than Abdullah Ibrahim did.

Dizzy led me to a table where I met Max Roach, who seemed overjoyed to see me. He had heard from Dizzy that I was crazy about Clifford Brown, his late partner in the legendary quintet they had led together. Max Roach was an antiapartheid activist, and often organized pickets in front of the South African Mission to the United Nations. He was also a fervent civil rights advocate.

I know Vusi Make from your country, and Maya Angelou, his wife," Max told me. "They're always at my house. When Miriam returns, my wife Abbey and I are gonna have a party for them. I'll phone and ask her to bring you along. Vusi will be so happy to see you. He talks a lot about you. Welcome New York. We're gonna win in South Africa, and soon!"

Mingus was still playing when Dizzy checked his watch. He said we needed to get back to the Jazz Gallery for his next set. When we returned, we caught Monk's last four songs, "Ruby, My Dear," "Epistrophy," "Crepuscle with Nellie," and "Round Midnight," all compositions that Abdullah Ibrahim had insisted we play with the Jazz Epistles. It was a mind-blowing experience to hear Monk's band with Charlie Rouse on tenor sax, Wilbur Ware on bass, and Ben Riley on drums. My favorite albums were coming alive right in front of my

eyes. I could have been dreaming. When Dizzy was preparing to go back onstage, he called over his and Monk's musicians and introduced them. They were all fascinated that I had just come from South Africa, and gave me a hearty welcome—Dizzy had been telling them about me.

Before he took the stage for his next set, Dizzy asked us where we were headed. "Back uptown," Leslie replied.

"No, don't do that," Dizzy said. "Go down to the Half Note on Hudson and Spring Street. Go and catch John Coltrane. Hughie will enjoy that. Don't go home now, oh no, ooowee." We couldn't say no.

We grabbed a cab and headed down to SoHo. While Leslie was paying the taxi driver, I slouched next to her, exhausted, but while the taxi's engine idled I could hear faint rumblings coming from inside the club—Coltrane on his soprano sax, Reggie Workman on bass, McCoy Tyner on piano, and Elvin Jones on drums, pumping away on "My Favorite Things." I leaped out of the cab, itching to get inside. Dizzy was right. The joint was jam-packed. Coltrane had recently formed a new group with whom he was stretching his music into ever greater complexity. But aside from that, his technique on the saxophone was devastating. He could play faster than anyone I'd heard before, and yet when he played slow ballads, his sound was the sweetest cry a saxophone could ever make. Every saxophone player of the time was overwhelmed by the man's genius. After every one of his solos, you could almost hear the clanking sound of players around the world laying down their horns. Trane was really something else, literally, another thing altogether than anything I'd ever seen or heard up close.

During their break, Reggie Workman, who knew Leslie, brought Trane, McCoy, and Elvin over to our table to say hello. They were excited to meet a musician from South Africa. After sitting through

their next set, Reggie wrote his phone number down on a drink coaster and insisted that I call him once I got settled. During the cab ride back to Miriam's place, I was intoxicated by the evening's experiences. Leslie was talking, but all I could do was stare at the skyscrapers on Sixth Avenue and occasionally glance in her direction. "My Favorite Things" kept ringing in my ears. I'll never forget that moment. It was one o'clock in the morning, September 27. I had not had a good sleep since my last night in London, but that night I dreamed I was playing in Art Blakey's band as a member of the Jazz Messengers. In all my years in South Africa, dreaming about what it would be like in America, none of those dreams came close to what I had actually experienced. In only four months since leaving South Africa, I had met Sammy Davis Jr., Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonious Monk, and Max Roach. I'd seen John Coltrane, Miles Davis, and Charles Mingus perform. I knew I had to work hard to get to the level of the great talents I had just been with, but I was determined to get there.

For all of its wonder, getting acclimated to life in New York was still challenging. Back in South Africa, election campaigns were reserved for the white world. Africans did not participate. When I arrived in New York, I had no idea how that world functioned. I had never had the opportunity to partake in this kind of freedom of expression. It was a bit overwhelming, arriving in America and finding the presidential campaigns between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon at fever pitch, Republicans and Democrats at each other's throats, endless televised debates, round-the-clock flesh-pumping and baby-kissing, and a lot of character assassination and mudslinging, which all seemed to be in a day's work in the business of politics. My ignorance was obvious to Jean, Jane, and Leslie, who tried to explain what all the madness was about.

As if this were not confusing enough, the annual United Nations General Assembly sessions were winding down. At center stage were Cuba's Fidel Castro, who had just moved his large delegation to Harlem's hotel Theresa after the Waldorf-Astoria management allegedly accused his group of plucking live chickens and cooking them in their rooms.

Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev banging his shoe on the UN lectern and declaring "We will bury you" managed to upstage Castro's exodus to Harlem. The Congo's Patrice Lumumba had come in for one day and returned home to the Congo's murderous turmoil empty-handed. A young Yasser Arafat was also in town, to scream about Israel. I was fascinated by the proceedings. The world's ideological one-upmanship was at its most intense at the United Nations, but basically everyone went back to their country without having achieved any significant victory. The world remained the same.

Meanwhile, the civil rights uprisings were reaching a boiling point in the American South. White people in the South resorted to all sorts of official and mob violence—against black men, women, and children, and their white allies—and it quickly became clear that the freedom we in South Africa assumed existed for people of African origin in America was a mirage. There wasn't too much difference in how most white people felt about black people throughout the West. I quickly realized that while I was in America, I needed to watch my black back and not think this place was that different from South Africa. The methods of racial terrorism might be applied differently here, but the disposition was the same. This was apartheid wearing a different hat.

Imam Elijah Muhammad's Black Muslim movement was also making itself heard in the streets of New York and throughout black America. Malcolm X's fiery speeches at highly disciplined rallies and

interviews denounced King's approach and promoted an eye-for-an-eye position. It was obvious that the white media was attempting to create a major division among American blacks by making it appear that Malcolm and Martin were archenemies. McCarthyism was still in the air, and the Communist scare was on the lips of every American, although very few if any could articulate what they were so terrified of. Anyone who stood for liberation from oppression was automatically regarded as a Communist. This was the America I found. This was also the America where Ray Charles's "Wha'd I Say" was the number-one song, followed by Chubby Checker's "Let's Do the Twist," the Impressions' "It's All Right," and Sam Cooke's "It's Been a Long Time Comin'."

I was getting behind on my schooling—Miriam was to help me figure out enrollment and fees when she returned from her tour—but I was thoroughly enjoying my time in the city. During the day, I took care of Bongi and tutored her in English. At night I prowled the jazz clubs with Jean or Leslie, or went to the movies or the Apollo Theater. Back then, the Apollo was still a mecca for black performers, and really opened me up to that world in a new way. I remember going there to see "The Gospel Train," featuring Reverend James Cleveland, Reverend Cecil Franklin, Shirley Caesar, and the Five Blind Boys of Alabama. We also checked out the James Brown Revue. I had never seen such an intense exhibition of high-level energy. The man made Sammy Davis Jr. appear lazy. On another day, we grooved to a wonderful rhythm and blues revue featuring Jackie Wilson, Ruth Brown, Etta James, Solomon Burke, Billy Wright, and many others. We reveled to the Ray Charles Revue and the Stax Memphis Revue, featuring Rufus Thomas, Sam and Dave, Otis Redding, and Booker T and the MGs. I also had my first intense brush with salsa music when we caught the Latino Variety Revue with Machito's Orchestra featuring his sister Xaviera; Celia Cruz with Pacheco's band; La Lupe; Tito Puente; Tito Rodriguez; Willie Colon; Mongo Santamaria; and

the Palmieri Brothers. The Apollo also had a jazz revue with the Horace Silver Quintet, Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, the Slide Hampton Orchestra, Les McCann's trio, Gloria Lynne, Stanley Turrentine, and the Cannonball Quintet, featuring Nancy Wilson.

These great musicians were a major influence on the jazz and mbhaqanga groups I'd played with back home, not to mention my own personal approach to music. I would sit in the Apollo with the animated throngs who screamed and testified at the players they loved, and all I could think about was how much I wished some of my friends in South Africa could be right here with me. Although rhythm and blues, gospel, and salsa were basically new horizons for me, it all felt like I'd been with all these people in another life. The thing I wanted to learn most from these genres was an understanding of their language and slang. This was an English I had yet to decipher. The wonderful thing about music is that, in the end, language don't mean a thing because when the Latinos hit that stage, I felt I understood everything they were singing about. My biggest wish was to be able to master their dances. . . shiiit, those folks can move!

Sometimes when we had overdosed on music, we would catch the comedy revues and see Slappy White, Lawanda Paige, Redd Foxx, Moms Mabley, and Nipsey Russell. More than the humor, I took great joy from the fact that people could make fun of just about anything they wanted to ridicule, whether it was the police, the president, music, dance, white folks, black folks, old folks, sex, gender, joy, pain, life, death—you name it. Where I came from, people were so thin-skinned that if you tried to make fun of people and their circumstances, whether you did it on or off stage, you'd be taking your life in your hands. Back then, admission to the Apollo was only one dollar, and you could sit in the theater and watch the same show five times from noon until midnight. I was quickly

forgetting about the main purpose of my coming to America, which was school.

After about three weeks, Miriam returned to New York. I had not seen her since earlier that summer, when she came to London to do her BBC television show. As usual, Miriam walked into the apartment with her arms full of gifts for everybody. One evening she threw a welcoming party for me. She invited several of her friends, her band members, Dizzy and Lorraine Gillespie, and the Kerinas. This was the first time I met Dizzy's elegant and warm wife. Lorraine told me I reminded her of Miles Davis when he had first come to New York from East St. Louis, twenty years earlier.

While I was enjoying myself, Dizzy asked me to walk with him to the store to get some lighter fluid for his pipe. As we walked around the block, he pulled out his Sherlock Holmes-looking pipe, stuffed it with an aromatic tobacco, lit it, and passed it to me after he'd taken a few draws. I had never smoked a pipe before, but at Dizzy's insistence, I got the hang of it.

"Hughie, is that jacket the only coat you've got? If so, you're gonna freeze your little behind off in that little Italian frock coat, man. It gets colder'n a motherfucker here. You're gonna need a real winter coat if you wanna live until the spring of '61 boy. Tell you what, meet me on the corner of 57th Street and Broadway on Monday around three, at a store called Webber and Heilbroner. You meet me there and let's get you a proper winter coat. Otherwise you gone die in that little thing you wearin' when it starts to snow here. Then we gonna have to dig you out the snow and thaw you out. Oooweee, ha, ha, he, he."

Once back in the apartment, I realized that Diz had packed some mean smoke in that pipe of his, because all I could pay attention to was Ray Charles on the phonograph singing "Just for a Thrill" with mellow strings and voices in the background. I couldn't stop smiling,

and I answered everybody with a “yeah” and a grin. Soon I was lost in Ray’s “Georgia” and everybody stopped paying any attention to me; they just carried on with their conversations. It seemed like hours later when the visitors said good night. I stood up to shake hands with everybody. When I got to Dizzy and Lorraine, she gave me a big hug and a kiss on the cheek and said, “Welcome to New York, and don’t you forget to meet Dizzy on Monday, boy.” Dizzy winked at me as he followed his wife up the stairs. “Oooweee, good, ain’t it?” Dizzy whispered, referring to the pipe. All the visitors left, and by the time Miriam returned to the apartment after seeing everyone out, I was out cold in my bed in the guest room.

The next day we all went to visit Central Park and some of the city’s museums. Miriam told me that Belafonte was in the process of setting up a non-profit foundation that would help me through school, but in the meantime she would take care of my tuition. The next morning we hailed a cab and went to the Manhattan School of Music. I expected the school to be a sprawling, tree-lined campus like the ones I had seen in American movies. I kept looking for signs of students sporting jackets and sweaters with the school’s name printed on them. When the cab pulled up to 206 East 105th Street, it turned out to be a pieced-together series of three-story brick buildings that used to be an elementary school.

I was to study Music Theory 101, Music Literature 101, French Grammar, English Literature, American History, Brass Ensemble, Chorus, and Psychology. I would have private trumpet lessons with Mr. Vacchiano, the first trumpeter of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra. I felt truly blessed and in immeasurable debt to Miriam, who had paid my fare to America and was housing me and paying for my tuition, clothing, and living expenses. When I tried to thank her, all she said was, “Hughie, we are family. Let’s look out for each other. Work hard and let’s keep trying our best to find ways to improve the plight of our people who are suffering back home in

South Africa." Although I found the enslavement of my people by Verwoerd and his minions sickening, I had never thought I could ever be in a position to effect any changes against apartheid through music. When Miriam spoke of improving the plight of our people, it was the first time in my life that I had been inspired to consider the possibility of ever being able to rattle the complacency of Afrikaner racism through my life's work.

Soon after we returned to the apartment, a limousine arrived and Miriam was off to La Guardia Airport, embarking on a three-week tour with the Chad Mitchell Trio. Later that afternoon, I went down to 57th and Broadway as specified by Dizzy, and waited outside the Webber and Heilbroner store. After about twenty minutes, a tall white man tapped me on the shoulder and said, "Excuse me, are you Hughie, by any chance?" "Yes," I replied. The man ushered me into the store. "Mr. Gillespie has asked me to supply you with a warm coat for the upcoming winter," he said. "Let me show you what we have in stock."

I was still reeling from Miriam's generosity, and now this. I picked out a modestly priced brown cashmere overcoat, thanked the salesman, and left. As soon as I got back to Miriam's, I called Dizzy to thank him, but Lorraine answered the phone. She told me Diz had left that morning for Europe. "Dizzy's gonna be really happy," Lorraine said. "He's been so worried about you freezing to death. I'll be sure and tell him that you called. Good luck in our studies, and take care of yourself. God bless you, darling."

The next morning I formally began my life in America. It was a routine that would last a little more than a year. At six-thirty, I'd get Bonggi up and get her set for school—fix her breakfast, comb and braid her hair—and we'd be out the door by seven-thirty.

I made friends with some of my classmates: Jimmy Lee, a trombonist from Mount Vernon, who wore thick-rimmed, bebop-style glasses and talked a lot about jazz and came from an allegedly wealthy Jewish family; Tammy Brown, a beautiful black girl from Long Island, who was a voice major studying opera; Fielder Floyd, a black trumpet player from Alabama, whose heavy Southern accent had me calling him “Feelflow” for two weeks until I saw his name on one of his books; jet-black Larry Willis from Harlem, who was already an outstanding opera tenor and basketball player; and John Cartwright, a bass player from Mount Vernon, who was a member of the school symphony orchestra and an accomplished jazz musician. Also in the orchestra was High Robinson, a white trombonist from Jackson, Mississippi, who really wanted to play jazz but only knew classical music. There were a few Asian students from Korea, Taiwan, Japan, and Hong Kong—all outstanding classical musicians.

My fellow students included leading members of the symphony orchestra, opera soloists, top composers, and leading jazz musicians like bassists Ron Carter and Richard Davis, pianists Herbie Hancock, Mike Abene, Dave Grusin, and Larry Willis, drummer Phil Rosen, trumpeters Donald Byrd and Booker Little, and many other young musicians who would later become icons of American music. It was in school that I first met Astley Fennel, a trombonist from the Bronx, whose family originally came from Jamaica; Susan Belink, a mezzo soprano from Long Island, whose father was one of New York’s top synagogue cantors; Yoshiko Ito, a great Japanese opera singer; Howie Folta, an outstanding percussionist from Brooklyn; and Sharon Johnson, a beautiful half-Cherokee French horn player from Cincinnati. The place was like a young United Nations music conference, overflowing with amazing talents and scores of wannabes from almost all over the world. Many of these people would become major influences in my life. Some remain my dearest friends to this day.

On my second morning I was introduced to my trumpet teacher, Mr. Vacchiano, who quickly decided he would be the wrong tutor for me. Vacchiano only taught classical music. I was transferred to Cecil Collins, ex-lead trumpeter for the New York Metropolitan Opera. Collins had lost his front teeth in a hit-and-run car accident at the pinnacle of his career. Most of the non-symphonic trumpet players were assigned to Collins.

For four years I had been playing a German-made F.S. Huller trumpet, the one Louis Armstrong had sent to the Huddleston Band. I had never washed the inside of the horn. On the day of my first trumpet lesson, Collins asked me to play a tune of my choice. After hearing a few notes, he abruptly stopped me. "Your trumpet has leaks," he said. "The only reason you don't know it is because dirt inside is blocking all the holes in it. Come with me and I'll show you what I mean." My stomach sank at his matter-of-fact dismissal of my cherished instrument; I followed him to the bathroom like a sheep to slaughter. He walked over to the porcelain sink, holding my prized Louis Armstrong trumpet like it was a piece of junk. Collins handed me my mouthpiece and then ran a twig through the stem of my trumpet. When he removed the twig, out came loads of green and gray slimy mold. That shit had been stuck up there for years. He then ran water through the horn and foul-smelling, caked gunk came splattering out of the bell in large, green, nauseating blobs. I was embarrassed beyond comprehension.

Back in the practice room, Collins handed me my horn and said, "Now try to blow that thing." I tried, but the horn was leaking like a sieve from around the valves, producing a flat, airy sound more like a leaking exhaust muffler system than a trumpet. I wanted to crawl my humiliated ass out of there and hide.

"You have to go to Manny's Music Store on 48th Street between Sixth and Seventh Avenues and ask for a Vincent Bach trumpet with a 7C

mouthpiece of the same name. These will cost you around one hundred and fifty dollars. You also must buy an Arban Cornet Method exercise book, for about twelve dollars. When you have those things, come back to me and I'll teach you how to play the trumpet. With all due respect to Louis Armstrong, that thing is now an old scrap that even he would be unwilling to blow on." Cecil Collins left the room with me standing there holding Satchmo's trumpet in my right hand. I was totally shattered and speechless.

I didn't have one hundred sixty-two dollars, and I had no idea where to get it. Two weeks had rolled by, and I could not take a lesson on the instrument that was my major. Collins kept calling me to his tutorial room to ask when was I getting a proper trumpet. "You are falling behind. This is your major. You are scheduled for brass ensemble, too. By the time you join us, if you ever do, it will be too late because we will be way ahead. Remember, with a new mouthpiece and trumpet, you're going to have to start from scratch. Can't you let me talk to Miss Makeba or Harry Belafonte about the urgency of this matter?"

"No sir," I replied. "I'll figure out something."

My new world was caving in on me. I could never go to Miriam and ask her for money after all she had already done. I had not yet met Belafonte, and the only money I had to keep me going was what Miriam had left for food and transportation for me and Bongi.

Miriam called one day from Canada to check on things, and Leslie told her about my predicament. Miriam was furious that I hadn't let her know. She instructed Leslie to go and see Alfred Braunstein, her accountant. He gave Leslie the money. The next day I walked into Manny's Music Store and purchased my first new trumpet. On the bus ride to school, I thanked my ancestors for their intercession. I also gave thanks to Trevor Huddleston and Bob Hill and Old Man Sauda

and Louis Armstrong. I whispered a *very* special thank-you for Miriam Makeba. I got off the bus and marched up 105th Street with a brand-new trumpet in a leather case, complete with the new 7C mouthpiece and the *Arban Cornet Method* book. Collins smiled as I showed him my new prized possessions. I was now a full-fledged student at the Manhattan School of Music.

My American History teacher also taught at Columbia University, and hosted an educational television program on the subject on the Public Broadcasting System, which was shown throughout the U.S. He opened my mind and placed into context many of the distortions I had harbored about the United States. I particularly gravitated to discussion of racism, civil rights, and the other human-rights debates. Discussions of communism, Castro, Russia, Malcolm X, SNCC, and Dr. Martin Luther King fascinated me, as did people and organizations like Strom Thurmond, Jesse Helms, Orville Faubus, George Wallace, the Ku Klux Klan, the John Birch Society, and the white Southern Baptist leadership. As part of the large group of Africans immigrating to the United States to study, I was getting a first-class education in and outside the classroom. A few years later, through Belafonte, I performed a fund-raiser for SNCC.

I will never forget an episode in Mr. Miller's English class. We were discussing George Orwell's *Animal Farm*. Miller began comparing the pigs in the book to Kwame Nkrumah, Jomo Kenyatta, and Patrice Lumumba, among others. My blood began boiling. I raised my hand and objected to Miller vilifying African liberation leaders. I was joined by Astley Fennel and Fielder Floyd, the only other black male students in the class. In the ensuing war of words, I was branded a Communist and Astley and Fielder were accused of being disciples of Malcolm X by some of the white conservative students, while we branded them children of the Klan. We had nearly come to blows when Mr. Miller, who looked like a U.S. Marines captain, screamed at the top of his voice, "Stop, stop, stop!" He stormed out of the room

and returned with Dean Whitford, who calmly dismissed the class and asked us to follow her to her office. They accused me of attempting to create a political forum out of a classroom discussion, which surprised me—I was just responding to what I thought were unfair characterizations of the heroes of African liberation. I stood my ground and told them that I hadn't come all the way to America to listen to the denigration of people who were dedicated to the liberation of African peoples. Neither was I in the country to be converted into an American right-wing patriot. I had come to America to get an education, and I demanded that Mr. Miller be the one to be spoken to, because he was provoking conflict and confrontation in his English class. The matter was never brought up again, and Miller backed off from making derogatory statements. The white students with whom we had the confrontation never spoke to us again.

Psychology was a class that I could not understand. Freud, Jung, libido—what the hell was this shit all about? It wasn't until I went to England thirty-seven years later for substance addiction recovery that I finally understood what psychology was all about. It took that long to break down the walls that had been constructed in my psyche by township life, discrimination, ethnic cleansing, booze, drugs, and sex. For decades I was certain that psychology was some white conspiracy to brainwash people of African origin into being complacent, obedient niggers. I was not stupid; I was just suspicious and not that keen on the subject.

But all in all, I was doing well at the conservatory. Word had gotten around about my jazz improvisational prowess, and when I would do my classical exercises in the basement practice rooms, I'd occasionally break off into some jazz licks or standard ballads. The room would become crowded with other students, amazed at this African taking off on their music. Sometimes Mr. Sokoloff, the treasurer, would burst into the room to remind me that I was in a

school of classical music and those rooms were meant for the furtherance of expertise in that medium and certainly not for “jazz riffing.” I was accused of reflecting badly on my fellow students and even my home continent! It was always mentioned that the Ghanaian music professor Dr. Nketia, who had been at the school during Modern Jazz Quartet leader and pianist John Lewis’s time, had never done that sort of thing. This was odd because so many of the jazz players of that time had attended the school; in fact, some of its most accomplished alumni, jazz heads like John Lewis and Max Roach, were always mentioned proudly in speeches and conversations by the school’s administration. It blew my mind that I had to apologize for playing jazz—but it was just another eye-opener to me of the double standards I’d be facing in American life.

In my class, I got very close to Astley Fennel, Larry Willis, and Fielder Floyd. It turned out that Larry played a little jazz piano. We hung out a lot at Astley’s place in the Bronx, where he lived with his widowed Jamaican dad. They had an old piano, and Larry would accompany Astley and me on piano on popular bebop and blues compositions, plus some American standards. Astley had a tin ear, but we hung with him mostly because of the piano at his house. Larry, on the other hand, had great potential.

Fielder and I were sworn disciples of Clifford Brown. We spent a lot of time trading the great trumpeter’s phrases and gushing over his incredible prowess on the horn. Fielder was rooming with Marcus Belgrave, who played lead trumpet in the Ray Charles band and had been a personal friend of Clifford’s. He was also close to Brown’s family in Wilmington, Delaware, a stone’s throw away from his home in Chester, Pennsylvania. Marcus and Fielder shared an apartment around 158th Street and Amsterdam Avenue in Washington Heights, where we went after school to pick up pointers from Marcus and ask millions of questions about Clifford Brown. The two trumpeters usually lit up a joint and offered me a drag, but I

always cordially declined. From time to time I would notice them going into a nod and rubbing their noses furiously, but at first it didn't occur to me that they were on heroin—their behavior wasn't nearly as severe as that of the addicts I saw nodding on the sidewalks of Harlem around the Apollo Theater. When I first saw those cats, I asked Leslie what kind of booze they were drinking and she said, "That ain't no booze, honey. Those motherfuckers are falling over from shooting heroin." I had never heard of heroin before that. When it finally dawned on me that Marcs and Fieldler were knocking themselves out with H, I was quietly shocked, but I never said anything to either of them. About seven years later, Fielder Floyd died from a heroin overdose.

Jane and Mburumba often brought their children, Kakuna and Mandume, to Miriam's apartment for me to babysit while they went out to one reception or another. Sometimes when Leslie and Jean stayed over with Bonggi, I would go to the Kerina flat and babysit there. The Kerinas became like family to me—they were generous and funny and a total joy to be with. Of course, their home cooking and wonderful leftovers gave Bonggi and me a very good reason to stop over regularly for a quick hello and good-bye, with the full knowledge that Jane would insist that we sit down and have a quick bite to eat. But their house had more than good eating; I also met many prominent political scientists and activists through the Kerinas, among them the great African-American writer John Henrik Clarke, who was also a radical scholar of international African politics and one of America's foremost civil rights authors and teachers. Then there was the prolific author John Killens; artist/sculptor John Peoples; author Louis Lomax; and Namibian freedom fighters like Kozonguizi, Sam Nujoma, and Ben Guriab, who were presenting petitions at the United Nations on behalf of their people. Discussions at the Kerina household could go on into the early mornings, with heated confrontations between parties holding different opinions on

protest, racism, history, genetics, philosophy, psychology, and liberation.

One night when we popped over, Lomax was holding court. He had just published a book in which he argued that even though he had African blood in his veins, the fact was that he was light-skinned and his closest forebears were of German origin, which made him more a white man than a Negro.

John Henrik Clarke, John Killens, Miriam Makeba, Maya Angelou, Vusi Make, Leslie Reed, Jean Johnson, and a few Africans were at the Kerinas for this discussion. Even though everybody tore into Louis Lomax with scathing and sometimes venomous criticism, he would not stand down. "You are a disgrace to the black race," someone would hiss at him. But Louis Lomax, in his Brooks Brothers suite, Ivy League cordovans, and horn-rimmed glasses, his charcoal-gray, semi-straight hair carefully groomed, would sit back in his chair, flash a very confident smile, and reply, "How can I be a disgrace to a group of people I don't belong to in any manner of speaking?" — a question to which the gathering found it very difficult to come up with a rebuttal except for the stock phrases like "Look in the mirror," or "One drop of black blood makes you a black man," or "Go to the South, hug a white man or kiss a white woman, and let's see how many hours you'll live after that."

Lomax would fire back, "Many white civil rights activists have been murdered in the South. I wouldn't be the first. Stop being racist and emotional. Give me some logical answers." It was a useless case, but Lomax was a grand provocateur—I was still trying to figure out where I fit into all of this, so I just sat back and watched the show. He went on to conduct live debates on television with Malcolm X, other black activists and a number of white conservatives, and with Southern racists who thought he was just a crazy ole nigra.

Even outside of the Kerina's house, I found myself surrounded by people who were revolutionaries—whether they were African or American, artists or activists, it all seemed to come together magically at that moment. Miriam took me to a party at the home of Abbey Lincoln and Max Roach in honor of Vusi Make and his wife, Maya Angelou. Maya was starring in an off-Broadway production of Jean Genet's play *The Blacks*. Bra Vusi, as we called him back home, had worked at *Drum* magazine and then become a fiery anti-apartheid orator in the Vereeniging township of Evaton and its environs. When Robert Sobukwe was detained for treason and sent to Robben Island for life after his death sentence was commuted, Vusi was one of the people from the Pan-African Congress's leadership who went abroad for military leadership training. Vusi ended up in Ghana, where he met Maya. They returned to the United States together—she to pursue her acting career, he to make representations at the United Nations and establish solidarity with American civil rights movements and other activists who were passionate about the liberation of people of the African Diaspora.

Mburumba took me to Harlem one day when he had an appointment with Malcolm X at the Muslim-run restaurant on 116th Street. Harlem always gripped my soul in a kindred kind of way. It reminded me of the communal vibes I experienced in Sophiatown and Alexandra. Just as the townships were cultural kaleidoscopes and key political meeting places for the ANC in South Africa, Harlem, a black metropolis, was the magnet for intellectuals, artists, musicians, black nationalists, and Pan-Africanists. A few years later Langston Hughes invited me to his home in Harlem. Hughes told me that in 1923 he had traveled by freighter to Senegal, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Belgian Congo, Angola, and Guinea. His first published poem was also his most famous. "The Negro Speaks of Rivers" was written when he was only nineteen:

I've known rivers ancient as the world and older than the flow

Of human blood in human veins.
My soul has grown deep like the rivers.
I've bathed in the Euphrates when dawns were young.
I built my hut near the Congo and it lulled me to sleep.
I looked upon the Nile and raised the pyramids above it.
I heard the singing of the Mississippi. . .

He gave me a book of his poems that moved me so much I wrote a song to one of them, "Night Owl."

Contrary to the angry, hostile image the white conservative press had painted of Malcolm X, in person he was handsome, hospitable, and witty—and gifted with an ability to gain your intimacy immediately; Malcolm spoke to me as if he had known me all his life. Following a lengthy conversation, he stood and gave me a firm, brotherly handshake. "One day soon, all your leaders will come out of jail to rule your country and bring peace, love, and joy to your people." His words were not unfamiliar—lots of American activists shared similar sentiments with me all the time—but for some reason, coming from him, they struck me as more prophetic than kind and reassuring. In that era, Malcolm was in the rare company of Miles Davis, Harry Belafonte, Martin Luther King, and Sidney Poitier, an African-American man who seemed to be completely unintimidated by any kind of white people, racist or liberal. His first definition of himself was as a man, one who was only black by biological happenstance and equal in all ways to any man on earth. It was only when people came on as though they were better than he was that he didn't waste time putting them in their place. Malcolm X commanded awesome respect even from people who usually felt superior around blacks. He became, from that moment forward, a model for me of how a man of African origin should project.

When Thanksgiving came around, Miriam took Bongi with her to California, where she was on the road with Belafonte. I was left alone

in New York. I really had a rough time understanding the logic of Thanksgiving, watching people become suddenly feverish about buying turkeys. Marcus Belgrave persuaded me to come to Chester, Pennsylvania, with him and Fielder for the long holiday weekend. We boarded a Greyhound bus in New York, and three hours later we were in tiny Chester. We walked from the terminal to Marcus's home, a few hundred yards away, where his extended family was waiting. As soon as we got to the house, they were all over us, happy to see old Marcus and "mighty glad" that he had brought Fielder and me for Thanksgiving.

Marcus's family was from the South, so Fielder was no surprise to them. They were more than fascinated, however, with a real live African. They bombarded me with an unrelenting stream of questions. I was shocked at how little Americans knew about the continent I came from. They believed the outrageous, stereotypical bullshit about Africans still living in the Stone Age gathered from Tarzan films, Nyoka the Jungle Girl, Jungle Jim cinema serials, comic books, and other ignorant portrayals. Black Americans seemed to have been programmed to avoid and deny any historical or genealogical connection with Africa. The majority of them were always quick to say, "No, I ain't got nothin' to do with Africa, man! I'm pure, full-blooded American. You better believe it. Yeah, boy!"

However, most of those from the South were totally different. They easily saw how much we had in common; some recalled their grandparents' folktales, which preserved a connection to Africa. Marcus's parents and aunts and uncles told me about how their own parents had been members of Marcus Garvey's Black Star Movement, which was cruelly sabotaged by the government's intelligence community during the height of the "Back to Africa" campaign. Many had contributed substantial amounts of their earnings over many years so that they could be part of Garvey's revivalist crusade, only to be disappointed when he was systematically railroaded by

the American government and totally destroyed. When he was finally jailed on some trumped-up charges, many who had hoped that the “Back to Africa” dream would become a reality were deeply disappointed. Nevertheless, it was encouraging to discover that many African-Americans did not buy the “Africans are savages” propaganda. I found out that a considerable percentage of this community were informed about what was happening in Africa, especially older people with a Southern background and those who had taken it upon themselves to do intensive research on the history of the continent and its people.

It was understandable that there would be such ignorance about Africa in the Western world. There was clearly a concerted effort by the conservative establishment to ensure that people who had African or Native American ancestry knew as little as possible about their history—the past was a portal into anger. On the other hand, we Africans were peddled a vision of blacks in the Americas that suggested they were living the high life—all we ever saw were artists surrounded by glitter and glamour. It came as a shock to my generation, who came to the West in the 1950s and the 1960s, to find that wherever black people lived—Europe, the Caribbean, America—they were surrounded mostly by poverty, bigotry, squalor, crime, discrimination, and institutionalized murder. This left many of us wildly disillusioned, but it was also the beginning, for many of us, of a commitment to forge solidarity with these communities.

Marcus Belgrave came from a tightly knit, working-class family. Marcus, Fielder and I shared a bedroom with three beds on the third floor of their old but sturdy Colonial-style house, which had large downstairs lounges, a wrap-around porch, huge landscaped gardens, and a large kitchen that bustled with oversized women cooking beans, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, stuffing, rice, hominy grits, cornbread, black-eye peas, turkeys, hams, gumbo, ribs, sauces, pumpkins, cobblers, cakes, cranberry sauce, and everything else that

came with the holiday. The kitchen rang with laughter and gossip, while the men settled on the porch to down one beer after another, drink whiskey, gin, brandy, rum, wine, watch television around the clock, and argue wildly about the state of the world with the little knowledge they had at their command. I was grilled endlessly by preschoolers and octogenarians and everyone in between about Africa.

“What’d y’all eat over there?”

“Y’all got television?”

“When’d you learn to speak English so good?”

“You always wore dese clothes an’ shoes?”

“Y’all have cars and roads over dere?”

“When y’all gone throw all dem white folks outta dere?”

“D’ y’all have fruits and d’ y’all live in houses?”

“What yo’ daddy do for a livin’?”

“How you like it in America?”

“Y’all go to church?”

“Where’d you learn to play music?”

“Show me some a y’all’s dances.”

Later that evening, Fielder listened to me as I continued talking about my home. With a cynical smile on his face, he said to me, "Tell me somethin', man, how come you talking like a white man all de time?"

"What do you mean?" I asked, rather surprised.

"Man, you always talking dat-tap-de-rap-de-tap kinda shit, man. Why can't you talk like no black man? How come you ain't talking like me and Marcus, man?"

It took some fifteen minutes to try to explain my background, how English wasn't even my language and that I had only been speaking it daily for less than a year.

"Shit, man, that's wild! What you been talking all dis time?"

"Oh," I answered, "Zulu, Xhosa, Sotho, Tswana, Ndebele, Afrikaans, Pedi, Shangaan."

"Wait a minute," Marcus jumped in. "You mean to tell me that you speak all them languages?" Before I could answer, Fielder said, "Say somethin' in dat shit that sounds like you hittin' two woodblocks together, man."

I said some words in Xhosa, and they were mesmerized. Some were laughing, some wanted to look inside my mouth. All of them were trying to imitate me. The laughter started all over again as they hopelessly tried to click their tongues like me.

"Shit, man, that's some wild shit. How'd you do dat? Tell you what, you teach me how to talk like a black man, okay?"

"Okay," I answered Fielder, as he and the others couldn't stop breaking up from trying the Xhosa clicks. "Sheet, maan, do dat again."

Hey momma, come hear what Hugh's language sounds like. Hey, Hughie, talk dat stuff again."

Marcus's folks were all stunned when I rattled off a sentence that was full of all kinds of clicks. "Well, I'll be damned," said one of his uncles. "Child, y'all talk like dat back home? Well, Lawd help me out. Hey Lawanda, come down here and listen how dis chile talking dat talk from down where he come from." The fascination about my strange tongues went on past midnight.

The next morning Marcus Fielder, and I took a twenty-minute train trip to Wilmington, Delaware, to visit Clifford Brown's home, where I got to meet my hero's widow and son. They were fascinated by the fact that I had idolized Clifford from so far away and had taken the trouble to come and see his home. I was treated like a long-lost relation. I was also introduced to Clifford's trumpet teacher, who tried to explain his tutoring methods, but I was too sad thinking about Clifford to even understand what he was trying to say.

We continued on to Philadelphia, where Marcus knew lots of musicians, and we spent most of that afternoon and early evening jamming with them. We worked over Miles Davis compositions like "So What" and "Milestones," standards like "How High the Moon," "All the Things You Are," "Cherokee," and "Body and Soul," Charlie Parker's "Straight No Chaser," Duke Ellington's "A Train" and "Perdido"; the list is endless. The sixties were the golden age of jam sessions—they were very competitive, all about separating the boys from the men when it came to fast tempos and intricate chord structures. They also helped us all get with the latest songs and innovations. This was how word got around quickly if there was a talented new musician on the scene. The sessions were a kind of information service about new talent as well as informal jazz workshops. It was a wonderful day for me, and word got around on

the East Coast bebop grapevine that there was a bad lil' trumpet player from Africa who sounded a lil' bit like Clifford Brown.

Thanksgiving 1960 was my introduction to African-American family life. "Y'all be sure to come back an' visit again, y'hear? Don' forgit to write yo' mama," said Marcus's mother, hugging me tightly with a wet kiss on my cheek. "Be sho' to tell her you was wid us over Thanksgivin'. It'll make her feel good to know ya had a decent home-cooked meal." Most of Marcus's siblings and cousins walked with us to the bus terminal and bade us farewell with all kinds of screams and hollers. When the bus pulled off, some of them were screaming unintelligible Zulu and Xhosa words, popping their fingers inside their mouths to make a clicking sound and laughing hysterically. By the time we pulled into New York's Port Authority Terminal at 42nd Street, I was talking like a black man and Fielder was "'sho proud" that he could understand "what de fuck" I was sayin'.

Back in New York, I had Miriam's apartment to myself. I was spending most of my time at the Kerinas' in between going to school, babysitting, club-hopping with Fielder and Marcus, jamming uptown with Larry Willis and bassist Eddie Gomez, trumpeter Larry Hall, drummers Al Foster and Henry Jenkins, and other ex-members of the Music and Arts High School youth band, who were now attending Eastman, Julliard, or the Manhattan School of Music. Larry and I were regulars at John Mehegan's jazz workshops on the Julliard campus, and John was now giving him private lessons. Larry was beginning to play the hell out of the piano.

One evening Dizzy invited me to come down to Birdland, a jazz club named after Charlie Parker. He was playing there for two weeks. The place was jam-packed, and a gang of musicians were standing at the bar. During Dizzy's break, the Slide Hampton band, featuring Freddie Hubbard, took the stage. Dizzy introduced me to Horace

Silver, James Moody, Errol Garner, Melba Liston, Quincy Jones, Sarah Vaughan, Sonny Rollins, Max Roach, Charlie Mingus, Booker Little, Kenny Dorham, Lee Morgan, Donald Byrd, and many other legends and stars who were in the joint. I was semi-hypnotized from being introduced to all these giants. Then we got to Miles, still my idol. He was surrounded by scores of beautiful women and the musicians from his band—Wynton Kelly, Paul Chambers, and Jimmy Cobb. Miles shook my hand with a scowl and barked at me in his raspy sandpaper voice.

“You from South Africa? You know Jeff?” he asked.

I was tongue-tied. “Jeff. Who’s Jeff?”

“Sheeet. You don’t know Jeff? Diz,” Miles turned to Dizzy, “This mother-fucka don’t know Jeff. He ain’t from no South African, man.” He growled and then, turning back to me again, he said, “You from South Africa, man.” He growled and then, turning back to me again, he said, “You from South Africa an’ don’t know Jeff. You full o’ shit, man. You don’t know Jeff?” His face was almost in mine.

“Miles, who de fuck is Jeff, man? Where he at an’ what de fuck do he do?” said Dizzy to Miles in an irritated tone.

“Dis ma’fucker don’t know Jeff. He ain’t from no South Africa, man. Jeff’s in Sweden, baddest bass player from down there, man,” Miles replied.

I jumped in quickly, “Oooh, you mean Hoojah. Hoojah got me my first job, man. Hoojah is my uncle, too. I’m sue Hoojah told you off when you first met, didn’t he?”

Miles looked at me quizzically. “Hoojah. Who the fuck is Hoojah?”

“Hoojah is Jeff,” I said. “Jeff is Hoojah. You don’t know Hoojah?” I shot back. “Hoojah can be really tough, can’t he?”

Miles smiled. “Hey, you know Jeff? Dat mafucker called me a small boy; tol me I don’t know shit, dat Dizzy an’ Bird taught me everything. He blew me away. I ain’t never met nobody wid da kinda confidence like Jeff. Jeff’s one bad ma’fucker. Sheeet. You know Jeff?”

Miles hugged me and called Paul Chambers over. “Hey, Paul, Hugh here know Jeff in Sweden, say he got him his first gig. Sheeet man, you know Jeff? Jeff a bad ma’fucker.” Miles couldn’t stop smiling. Paul Chambers gave me a limp handshake, said, “Hey,” and then went back to talking with Jimmy Cobb. Dizzy left me standing with Miles and his entourage. He was working the room, greeting friends and laughing his famous “Oooweee” laugh. Miles kept looking at me and shaking his head. “Sheet, you know Jeff? Jeff’s a bad ma’fucker.”

On the afternoon of December 12, 1960, I was having a rum and coke with Peter and Bonnie in her apartment. It was cloudy, with a light drizzle. I was looking onto 82nd Street from Bonnie’s first-floor window at the drizzle when I noticed that it was not frizzling anymore. These were snowflakes—small ones at first, and then they grew thicker and thicker, slowly blanketing the block slightly dusting the tarred surfaces with a white carpet of snow—my very first snow.

“Let’s go outside and I’ll take a picture of you to send home,” Peter said. “Get your coat and a scarf so you don’t catch a cold.” By the time I came back from downstairs, where I could see the snowfall increasing onto our back porch, kids were already making snowballs, hurling them at each other excitedly as the white stuff came down in bigger and bigger flakes.

We soon got tired of throwing snowballs and returned to Bonnie's for a few more hot rum and cinnamon drinks and watched as the snow came down harder and harder, eventually making the street invisible as it got darker outside. Even the streetlights were getting shrouded in the heavy storm. I went back downstairs around nine-thirty and shortly after that passed out while watching the news on television. I woke up around seven that morning and it was still snowing. Mayor Wagner was on the television screen, announcing that all schools would be closed until further notice. Snow removers were being brought out to clear the impenetrable streets. The city had come to a standstill. I was lost in the whiteness.

I was freezing my ass off in New York City. I spent Christmas day with the Kerinas, wondering just how many people had been killed in South Africa in car accidents, fights, and by the police. I missed my family, but I wasn't missing my country yet. The weather warmed up a few days after Christmas. I decided to go and catch John Coltrane's group at the Half Note. The snow was melting so fast that torrents of draining water were cascading down the gutters. By the time I entered the club it had begun to rain. I was wearing my Italian raincoat and trademark eight-piece black cap, certain that the warm weather would hold for a few days. By the time Coltrane's group went on for their second set, the rain was turning to snow again. I stayed for two more sets while another snowstorm was developing. As it turned colder, the melting water turned to ice. By closing time at four the following morning, the snow had stopped, but the temperature had gone arctic. People were battling for taxis, shoving and cussing each other. When some of us tried to go for the subway train, we found out that public transportation had been suspended once more. There were more and more desperate people the farther uptown I walked. I tried to go across town, thinking that the East Side would be better. It was worse. By the time I got to Grand Central, I could not feel my feet in my shoes. I walked the next forty blocks home alongside hundreds of people who were freezing just

like me. When I finally got home, my hands were so iced I could hardly hold my keys. I rang Peter's bell with tears running down my cheeks. Shocked at the state that I was in, Peter ran a tub of lukewarm water and made me put my hands in it while he made a hot Irish whisky for me. My feet were stiff and my socks were all iced up. By the time I was able to open my apartment door, I had finished my sixth Irish whisky and was still shivering, seven hours after I had left the club. Peter kept reminding me that what I went through was only spring for Eskimos. I didn't think that was too funny. For the next three days I stayed indoors, terrified to venture out in that cold again.

On New Year's Eve, Jane and Mburumba came and yanked me out of the house and took me to their apartment, where we watched on TV hundreds of thousands of people bring in the New Year in Times Square. We stayed up till dawn talking about Kennedy, Nixon, Martin Luther King Jr., the John Birch Society, the Ku Klux Klan, Mayor Rizzo of Philadelphia, Governors Faubus and Wallace, Barry Goldwater, Che Guevera, Castro, Lumumba, Ed Sullivan, Ray Charles, Chubby Checker, Namibia, SWAPO, the ANC, the Congo crisis, Kenyatta, Nkrumah, Miles, Dizzy, Miriam, Belafonte, Mandela, Khrushchev, Hitler, Native Americans, Langston Hughes, Alexandra Township, John Henrik Clarke, Tito, Lenin, Jesse Owens, Joe Louis, Wilma Rudolph, Sugar Ray Robinson, hair-straightening, silly old Louis Lomax, girls, boys, and our parents.

After some initial struggles in school, I developed a determined routine, which helped me pick up the slack. Every day after fetching Bonggi, I would first assist her with homework, then I would practice the trumpet lessons Cecil Collins had given me for the next five hours, with breaks to fix supper for us and walk to the store on the corner for some need or the other. After putting Bonggi to bed, I would do my academic and music homework, prepare the next day's clothes for us, and on certain nights do laundry and ironing. Bonggi

and I always washed the dishes together, with her doing most of the talking about her new school, her friends, her grandmother, and her cousin Nhlanhla, or singing one of the many songs she had composed in her little head.

When Miriam was home, the three of us would sing together the songs of Christina Makeba, her mother, a traditional healer. Miriam and Bonggi taught me many beautiful songs from this genre, “Bajabula Bonke” (the Healing Song), “Ngi ya Khuyeka” (I Am Suffering), “Bay a Jabula” (The Ancestors and the Healers are Rejoicing), “Dzinorabiro” (I have Treasured My Traditional Heritage from My Forefathers), “Nyankwabe,” “Icala,” and others—singing them was itself a healing. I attended John Mehegan’s jazz improvisation classes regularly, jammed every weekend with Larry Willis and his friends up in Harlem, did as much club-hopping as I could when Leslie or Jean would stay with Bonggi, took in a lot of movies and concerts at the Apollo, Carnegie Hall, City Center, the Palladium, Birdland, the Half Note, the Village Vanguard, the Village Gate, the Five Spot, the Jazz Gallery, and Basin Street East, among others.

At midterm, my trumpet, Brass Ensemble, and French grades improved. I continued to draw a blank in psychology despite the efforts of the teachers, schoolmates, and friends like the Kerinas, who all tried their best to explain the concept to me. I just could not get it.

In the spring of 1961 we moved to Park West Village, a new apartment complex on the West Side. Some of the tenants were Ray Charles, Joe Zawinul, Horace Silver, Lee Morgan, Ray Bryant, and a host of authors, poets, designers, and visual artists. A few weeks later I finally met Harry Belafonte at his offices on 57th Street. He introduced me to his production manager, Bob Bollard, who immediately assumed developmental custody over my life. In the back of the offices was a large library with stacks of tapes, tape

recorders, and a large working desk. This would become my workplace for the next three years. It was the library of Harbel and Clara Music, the music-publishing wing of Belafonte Productions. Over the years they had acquired hundreds of calypso tapes and recordings of chain-gang music. Researchers who had visited prison work gangs in the South in the early part of the twentieth century and recorded the music had sold the latter to them. Belafonte already had a sample of this genre on a record titled *Swing Dat Hammer*, which his company produced. This album captured the poignant beauty of chain-gang prisoner musicianship, the power of its militant cry for fair prisoner treatment, and the painful cries of men whose lives were filled with hopelessness. My job was to transcribe this taped music onto paper so that it could be copyrighted. I would be paid five dollars an hour, working after school. In addition to my salary, Belafonte's foundation awarded me a stipend of \$190 a month to supplement my living expenses.

Belafonte was far better looking in person than the pictures of him on his countless album covers, or the movies I had seen him in, like *Carmen Jones*. Tall, athletic, and with golden porcelain skin and pearly white teeth, he also exuded the compassion and humility of the activist and philanthropist he was, with no pretensions of glamour or stardom. When he spoke, he looked you straight in the eye and spoke with simple eloquence. He was very unaffected—and this was at the time when he was among the most famous entertainers in the world. Most of his staff addressed him “Harry” or “Mr. B.” Even though he joked around with everyone in the office, there was no doubt he was a very focused and serious person. His impeccable taste was evident in the paintings by Charles White and other great African-American painters that hung on the office walls, and his elegant furnishings. Harry came and left in a taxi, rushing to pick up his daughters from school after affectionately speaking with his wife, Julie, on the phone. His simple lifestyle was a pleasant surprise because I had expected a lot of flash, glitter, and fanfare around him. Instead, the people who

worked for him were like family. That he was able to keep such a low profile, in spite of his box-office successes, millions of record sales, and sold-out performances all over the world, was amazing. Over the years Harry came to be more than just a benefactor to me. He has been a father to me, the strongest influence on my stage presentation, my community activism, and my commitment to the fight for human rights. Even though it took me a long time to finally come around to it, Harry always tried very hard to teach me self-respect, compassion for others, and, more than anything else, never to forget the people I came from.

Over the weekends Leslie or Jean looked after Bonggi. Although everything was going swimmingly for me, I would get terribly homesick at times, and there was still a dark cloud over my memories of home. I had lost touch with all of my Alexandra and St. Peter's friends. Monty and Myrtle Berman could not write because they were still under detention and now allowed any correspondence. The only person who was writing to me was my mother. She kept me abreast with as much news as it was permissible to send me.

I would often go to Central Park across the street from our new flat, find a solitary area, and talk to myself in all the different home languages I could muster. On one such Sunday afternoon I was talking township slang to myself in the park, with all the choreography that comes with the territory, hands waving, torso angling to get the point just right, totally unaware that a group of people who were watching me from a distance though I had lost my mind. Concerned for my sanity, they had called a black policeman, who startled me out of my township dialogue by tapping me on the shoulder. "Hey, buddy, are you okay?" I was so taken by surprise that my heart was pounding violently against my chest. I was also scared to see a policeman. For a moment I had a flashback of South

African police brutality. “Sir, officer, I am quite all right. I’m from South Africa. I’ve been here for six months and have not spoken my language too much. I was talking to myself, pretending to be conversing with some of my buddies back home.”

The policeman laughed. “Oh, you’re from South Africa. It’s pretty back there. You’re very fortunate to be up here in New York City, my friend. Welcome.” With those words he stuck out his hand to shake mine, told me why he had approached me, and pointed to the group of people who had alerted him to my solo performance. The cop and I walked around the park, talking about New York and South Africa, and two hours later he shook my hand in front of our building and wished me the best of luck. I never saw him again, but his friendliness did remind me how fortunate I really was to be away from South Africa, where my people were being imprisoned every day for activism—and some just for being black and in the wrong place at the wrong time. Members of the liberation movements were leaving the country for Botswana, Swaziland, and Lesotho. From there they went on to Zambia, Tanzania, West and North Africa, Russia, and Eastern Europe, seeking an education and military training. Others were recruited by Cuba and China. Nelson Mandela and man of his comrades were on trial for treason. Word was that the CIA had assisted in nabbing Mandela after he had reentered South Africa from his trips all over the world, including Central Africa, where he and Oliver Tambo had established the military wing of the ANC, Umkhonto we Sizwe. Among those fleeing the country or being imprisoned or murdered by agents of the evil administration were many of my friends, relatives, schoolmates, friends of my family, and people I had looked up to all my life.

I was in Mrs. McLaughlin’s dictation class one morning when a bespectacled, distinguished man in his early thirties walked into the room and asked to speak to her outside. Mrs. McLaughlin came back

inside and said, “Masekela, your services are needed. Please take your trumpet and follow the man, he’s waiting for you outside.”

Hello! I’m Al Brown,” the man said shaking my hand and smiling. “Harry sent me to come and get you. He is recording Miriam at RCA’s Webster Hall studios, and wants you to come and play some horn on a few tracks.”

That afternoon, I played muted trumpet on “Strawberries,” “Umqokozo” (My Little Red Xhosa Dress), and “Ntyilo-Ntyilo” (the Love Bird) for Miriam Makeba’s album *the Many Voices of Miriam Makeba*. Harry produced it, and was bursting with creative energy, enthusiasm, and jokes—clearly enjoying what he was doing. He was driving Bill Salter (bass), Archie Lee (percussionist), and Sam Brown (guitarist) to the limit. The album was a huge success and garnered major radio play, especially by Symphony Sid on his WEVD-FM nightly program, *Jumping With Symphony Sid*. He targeted the three songs I played on, which transformed my rep around the city. Suddenly I was starting to command a little bit of respect, especially around the school. The young ladies were now extra-friendly, and in the cafeteria, people were asking me how it was working with Miriam Makeba and Harry Belafonte. “Do you really know Dizzy?” “Have you been with Miles?” “Do you know Coltrane?” “What is Louis Armstrong like?” The questions never stopped. The people proudest of me were Miriam and Harry. They were more than convinced that they had made the right move by helping me to come to America.

Ron Carter, Donald Byrd, Richard Davis, David Izenzon, Richard Williams, Herbie Hancock, Mike Abene, and all the other successful musicians who were going to the Manhattan School of Music became friendly. Ron Carter especially took a liking to me.

Jean Johnson had basically taken over from Leslie Reed, and had more or less moved in with us by now because Miriam was getting busier, going out more on her own tours, and beginning to perform a lot abroad in Europe, the Caribbean, South America, and Asia. With my part-time job at Clara Music, I was finding it harder to spend as much time as I had with Bongi. She was really growing now. Her English was better than ever and she was doing well in school and was crazy about music. She was blessed with the sweetest singing voice, had natural talent for composition, and always sang new songs for me when I was at the piano. One song, "Nhlanhla," which Bongi had named after her favorite cousin, I later recorded as an instrumental arrangement with my first band. I knew Bongi was destined to become a great musician.

Astley had an aunt who lived on Manhattan Avenue in Harlem, between 112th and 113th streets. Some days I would go with him to visit Mrs. Miller. She would lay some serious Jamaican dishes on us: rice and beans, sweet plantains, jerk chicken, fish stews, and homemade ginger beer, with the meanest meat patties this side of Montego Bay. Astley suggested to me one day that I should move out of the Central Park West arrangement and get my own place. "How can you live there with all these women, man? Why don't you take a room over at my aunt's place? These women are stifling your shit, man. You oughta move our ass outta there and get some space, ma'fucker."

Later that spring it occurred to me that with my working after school at Clara Music and the \$190-a-month stipend from Harry's foundation, I could afford a small place. I took Astley's advice and rented a room from Mrs. Miller for forty dollars a month. I can't say Miriam was happy with my decision, but it was time for me to find my own space. What I really liked about my new place was that I could practice my scales and then play some of Clifford's, Miles's,

and Dizzy's licks. A drunken tenant from across the alley would be my audience. "Blow dat horn, ma'fucker, blow dat ma'fucking horn. You one soulful nigger. Blow dat horn, ma'fucker!" he'd yell out to my dicey new neighborhood, which was teeming with heroin junkies, pimps and prostitutes, numbers runners and drug dealers.

Around this time a new influx of South African exiles began migrating to the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic United States. Miriam and I were overjoyed about this addition to our growing South African community. She really enjoyed for all of us to come over for dinner, have drinks and bury ourselves in nostalgia, and end the night singing songs from home, followed by a grand finale with Bongi, Miriam, and me singing the traditional ethnic chants. Miriam was the toast of New York's African community, and America in general was fascinated by her charm and seeming simplicity, as well as her exotic looks, magical voice, and overwhelming personality.

Miriam, Mburumba, and Jane introduced me to people from all over the world. Miriam had performed at John Kennedy's inauguration, at the opening of the Organization of African Unity in Addis Ababa, at Carnegie Hall, at the Hollywood Bowl, and in almost every prestigious arena, forum, night club, amphitheater, auditorium, and stadium in the world. Even more amazing was the fact that all this had occurred over less than two years.

Although Mrs. Miller was warm and motherly and treated me like a son, she did not allow me to have female company in my room. I was beginning to feel caged in. After a few months I went looking for places to rent below Harlem, but was always rejected for any number of reasons. I was a foreigner. I didn't have full-time employment. I was a student. I soon figured out that the problem was the color of my skin.

One afternoon I walked up 57th Street with Belafonte to the Russian Tea Room, where we had lunch with his guitarist Ernie Calabria, Diahann Carroll, Anthony Quinn, and Sidney Poitier. Harry had wanted to host an evening of poetry reading at his home—nothing elegant, just an artistic, creative, fun-filled evening with his close friends and musical accompaniment by Ernie, John Cartwright, and me. Walking back to his office, I told Belafonte about my problem finding an apartment. He turned me on to Millard Thomas, his other guitarist, who lived at 310 West 87th Street, between West End Avenue and riverside Drive, where there was indeed a one-bedroom flat for rent on the ground floor. The proprietor, who lived on the floor above, was Mrs. Edith Marzani, a radical socialist who had been blacklisted during the McCarthy witchhunts. She liked me right on the spot and told me to move in as soon as I wanted. She was in a wheelchair, having been paralyzed from the waist down, but her spirit was dynamic. Mrs. Miller was sad that I was leaving. She liked my midnight horn serenades. I would miss her wonderful cooking and motherly care. “Be sure to come and visit me, you hear?” she said, misty-eyed.

I took off from school the next day and bought a bed and other household goods from the Salvation Army. I painted the apartment walls flat white and the window frames glossy black. Miriam gave me some sheets, pillowcases, a bedspread, and a few kitchen items. That Friday night I slept in the first bed I had ever owned in my life.

I got a telephone and regularly spoke with Sonny and Pat in London. Pat told me she’d be coming to New York to spend a few weeks with me before continuing on to Barbados. Sonny had secretly warned me that Pat had been living part-time with Ben “Satch” Masinga, who was in the cast of *King Kong*, which was now a bit hit in the West End. Although we had been apart for almost a year and I also had had my fair share of dalliances, still I felt betrayed, mainly because Satch was an old friend from African Jazz and Variety days.

However, Pat had a very logical explanation—she described their relationship as purely biological. The tables were turned.

Still, we had a very enjoyable two weeks together. I took her to see Miles, Belafonte, Dizzy, Miriam, and a Duke Ellington and Ella Fitzgerald concert at Carnegie Hall. We also had a few dinners at Miriam's, and when we left her place, Pat brought up an old subject again.

"Hughie, she still loves you," Pat said. "Remember what I told you before? I'm a woman. I can tell."

"It can't be anymore, Pat, come on," I replied. "Since I've been in the States, Miriam's been having affairs with Pernell Roberts, Horace Silver, Max Zollner, a West African diplomat, and Kenneth Dadzie, a United Nations officer, all of whom she has introduced to me as her lovers. That is ample proof that she's gotten over me a long time ago."

"On the contrary, Hughie," Pat continued. "She's doing all of this to make you jealous. Can't you see?"

My head was swimming in confusion as our cab meandered back to my apartment. I was over Miriam and she was over me. She had her lovers and I had mine. I had just lived with her for more than six months and we never spent a night together. What was Pat tripping about? If there was anyone I had strong feelings for, it was Pat. Regardless of Satch, I was still madly in love with her. Belafonte saw that I was crazy about her, and thought at was the ideal person for me. "Why don't you marry her, Hughie?" Harry's question had gone over my head at the time, but checking out Pat staring out the taxi window, I began wondering if I should seize the moment.

One night Pat and I had just returned from a movie when the phone rang. It was Millard, asking me to come upstairs for a minute. As soon as I walked in, Millard put five fat marijuana joints in my shirt pocket, lit the one he was holding, and said, "I know you are accustomed to only the best where you come from. All along I didn't want to waste your time with the bullshit smoke I been holding. Last night a friend of mine scored me a couple of ounces of Panama Red, the connoisseur's smoke. I know you'll love this, Hughie," he said. Without waiting for an answer from me, he passed me the joint and I proceeded to savage it, passing it back to him from time to time. When the joint was finished, Millard said, "Hurry back to your lady, man. I know you're gonna enjoy yourselves tonight." He wasn't lying.

Pat and I made torrid love until morning. I asked her to marry me a few times during the course of the night, but she just giggled and kissed me all over my face. I passed out until midmorning, when Pat asked if I was ready to get up and eat some breakfast. She was weeping. "What's the matter?" I asked. "Nothing," she replied. "I'm just sad because I'm leaving in a few days and we are having such a wonderful time together. Shit, man, go and wash so we can eat." It was a beautiful summer Sunday morning. I suggested that we take a stroll through Central Park. Again, Pat started crying. "What's the matter, baby?" I asked.

"Hughie, I want to marry you so badly," Pat began, "but my parents will not hear of it. I have already asked the, but they say I can't marry some musician who has no future to talk about. My father is the head of Barbado's hospital system and the medical association, and all my siblings and cousins are doctors, lawyers, bankers, judges, and ministers of state. I am expected to marry into such a family, and they refuse to listen to why I want to be with you. I just don't have the strength to go against the grain, Hughie."

A few days later we took a taxi to the airport. We said very little during the ride. This time there were no tears when we said our good-byes. We both knew that we most probably would never see each other again. Back at the office a few days later, Belafonte asked me about Pat. I told him she had left for Barbados. "You should go fetch her back, man. You'll never find another one like her," he said. "Not for a long time." He was right.

During the summer of 1961, Miriam and Bongi left for an extended tour of Europe, Asia, Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean. With school out, I worked full time at Clara Music and kept up my private horn lessons with Cecil Collins at his home in Tenafly, New Jersey. Bob Bollard thought I was doing so well that he recommended me to Hugo Montenegro, Belafonte's new music director. At the time, Hugo was arranging orchestral music for Harry's upcoming summer tour, which would include a large dance troupe selected by the great choreographer Walter Nicks. Among the dancers and choreographers, Pearl Reynolds. Hugo hired me to notate Nick's dance sequences as a guide for him to translate them into an orchestral score for the concert tour. For me, this was the biggest challenge I'd faced since *King Kong*. I managed to pull the task off over three days and became good friends with the dance company, especially Pear. Hugo Montenegro was so impressed with my work that he proposed I work with him as his orchestrator.

Around this time I met Valentine Pringle at the Belafonte office. He was Harry's new protégé. A tall, ebony-complexioned, bass-baritone singer with a voice very much like Paul Robeson's, his spirituals and folk songs made him popular on the club and concert circuits. Val's guitar player was Bruce Langhorne, a curly haired, light-skinned musician with a delightful sense of humor. The three of us hit it off hard and started hanging out at my apartment, where we would

listen to music, drink a lot of cognac, and laugh our asses off. Sometimes we hung out at Bruce's apartment on 48th Street, where he lived with Georgia, his dancer wife, who was a product of the Katherine Durham dance ensemble and a close friend of Pearl Reynolds. Although Bruce worked with Val from time to time, his regular gig was as an accompanist for Odetta. He played on recordings for folk-music giants like Phil Ochs, Judy Collins, Bob Dylan, and Pete Seeger.

One evening Pearl, who had just returned from a Belafonte tour, invited the Langhorns and me over for dinner along with Ernie Calabria, Belafonte's guitarist, who came with his wife. Pearl was very heavy into African tradition, culture, and dance. She was also crazy about Cuban music, which she played throughout dinner, especially the Juajuanco music of Tito Rodriguez. We drank a lot of sangria wine, and then Pearl pulled out some of that Panama Red smoke, which we had with dessert. Before I knew it, I was helping Pearl wash the dishes and saying good-bye to the guests as if I had been the host. With the doors firmly locked, we sat in the candlelight, deep in discussion about African liberation, art, and dance while we graduated to some fine cognac and more Panama Red with Tito Rodriguez. This night was the beginning of a long and beautiful friendship and love affair.

One day Jimmy Lee, the hip trombone player from Mount Vernon, who was also in my class, invited me to a penthouse loft party where Prophet, the great artist and designer, was having a farewell party for Quincy Jones's band, which was leaving the following day on a European tour with Dizzy Gillespie. He asked me to bring my horn because there was going to be a jam session, but there were so many gate-crashers and musicians trying to sit in that I lost the desire to play. Instead, I enjoyed the 360-degree view of the Manhattan skyline, Brooklyn Bridge, the Battery, the East River, and faraway New Jersey, across the Hudson River from Prophet's wraparound

penthouse porch. Jimmy Lee introduced me to a tall, blond, mischievous-looking young musician by the name of Stewart Levine. Right away Stewart and I were rapping about Africa, Asia, and the rest of the world. His girlfriend, Susan Carp, was a leader of the Young Socialist Party, which is how he came to know so much about Cuba, China, South Africa, Vietnam, North Korea, Nkrumah, Sekou Toure, Lumumba, and so many other elements that had become troublesome to America's political and business establishments.

During our discussions, Stewart corrected me on many issues with facts that let me know he was very well read—a quality that distinguished him from most Americans, who knew nothing about matters outside their little neighborhoods except the anticommunist propaganda they got from the national media. Stewart was different.

On the first day of my second year of school, Stewart walked into Music Literature class and sat next to me. Right away, we sensed that we were on the way to becoming friends for life.

My reputation as a musician was beginning to grow. I was getting work as a session man on recordings and club dates with the help of Al Brown. The extra money helped toward my tuition. Mrs. Marzani offered me a larger apartment on the same floor for only fifteen dollars more a month. I took it.

Jimmy Lee and Stewart came over to help me paint my new place. Stewart asked me if I smoked grass—a question he first hit me with at Quincy's party. He found it very odd that a musician from South Africa didn't smoke dagga, when that country was one of the world's biggest exporters of the herb. But I was suspicious; Millard had once been set up and busted for marijuana, and warned me to keep my habit a secret because the penalty for possession was stiff.

We drank vodka and orange juice while my friends helped me with the painting. Sloshed and exhausted, we finished on Sunday morning, passed out, and woke up that afternoon with painful headaches. Later, Frank St. Peter, a saxophonist friend of Jimmy and Stewart, came over and, without asking, lit up a joint and began to pass it around. It was strong Colombian smoke. I had totally forgotten my denial.

“You bullshit motherfucker,” Stewart admonished. “I knew you were full of shit when you told me you didn’t smoke. I said to myself that you definitely must have been putting us on, you jiveass motherfucker. Light up another joint, Frank.”

Toward the end of 1961, Belafonte thought I was ready to record my first album, especially after the success of Miriam’s last album. That night I walked to my apartment oblivious of the twelve blocks in the subfreezing temperatures; my thermal underwear and the cashmere coat Dizzy had brought me kept me warm. Inside, my soul was fired by the prospect of recording. I was very excited.

Around Thanksgiving, the first wave of South African students from the PAC and ANC refugee camps in Tanzania arrived in America to attend school at Lincoln University in Pennsylvania. I had been very close friends with some of them back home. At the beginning of the Christmas holiday season, Joe Louw, Willie Kgositsile, and Peter Davidson came to visit. George Molotlegi, who had been studying at Howard University in Washington, D.C., since 1959, also arrived. They all laid down their bags and made themselves at home. They had come to celebrate the festive season with me. George was a family member of the Royal Bafokeng Nation, recognized globally as one of Africa’s richest tribes. His family ruled a kingdom of more than 300,000 people spread over 750 square miles in South Africa’s Northwest Province, home to some of the richest platinum deposits in the world.

Schools had closed, and they had nowhere else to go for the holidays. I was the only person they knew would welcome them. At first I was worried about how my landlady would react to my boisterous guests. On the contrary, Mrs. Marzani stopped by my apartment as was her custom, greeted my friends heartily, and welcomed them to America. But the arrival of my holiday visitors didn't go unnoticed by federal authorities. To my surprise, an unmarked car suddenly appeared and stayed parked outside my apartment building. In South Africa, I had grown used to being shadowed by the police and informers. One day I asked one of the trenchcoated men in the car why they were always parked in front of my place. I was abruptly told, "None of your business." I reported the matter to the police and was told they were the FBI, and that their surveillance superseded local police jurisdiction. Although this brought back memories of South Africa's Special Branch Gestapo, we decided to ignore them. And throughout the holidays we partied openly, showing that we were not intimidated by their arrogance. My friends returned to their respective schools following the Christmas holidays, but the FBI, the Internal Revenue Service, and U.S. drug enforcement officials would keep an eye on me. My telephone was bugged for the next three decades that I spent in America.

SECTION II:

ESSAYS

Chapter 23

The Linguistic Revolution

By

Peter N. Raboroko

“In every form of society” writes Mr. M. Lewis, “because language is so closely related to the thoughts. Feelings and actions of men, we cannot change the extent, nature, functions of language without setting in motion, further, perhaps unintended, changes.”

As a result of a number of advances of great significance to social growth there have been changes in the extent, nature and functions of language. The advances, which constitute historical landmarks are: r the development of language itself, the advent of writing, the invention of printing and the instantaneous transmission of speech and writing. The cumulative effects of these changes have been so great that they have initiated a new era: the era of Linguistic Revolution. Humanity in general, and Africa in particular, is on the threshold of this Revolution.

The spread of literacy, stimulated by, and in turn stimulating, newspapers, cheap books and libraries, the telegraph and the cheap postage rate: all these things have meant that people read and write

more. Today the written word, a commonplace commodity, spans the world with the speed of thought.

The invention of the telephone, the radio and other communication machines has led to a renaissance of the spoken word, with tremendous implications for human development.

The significance of these developments lies in the fact that they transform human conduct, which process must affect thought, feelings and impulses, as well as overt behaviour since language is fundamental and pervasive to man as an individual and in his social life.

It is against a background such as the one we have delineated that we shall examine the linguistic problems facing us.

In the previous issue *Liberation* ["The Problem of Many Tongues," no. 4, August 1953], Dr. J. M. Nhlapo deals with the language question. Dr. Nhlapo's approach to the question, his formulation and treatment of it show a failure on his part to grasp the essentials of the situation. This failure emanates from his inability to appreciate the fundamental fact that the language problem is, on both the national and international level, a part of the social question which is the central problem of our day, and as such cannot be dealt with in isolation.

In his approach to the problem Dr. Nhlapo quotes Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch as saying: "The want of some common 'world language' is, I assume, being felt by educated Europeans ever since Latin faded out as the common language."

We know that "educated European", in their racial arrogance regard a common European language, like Latin, as a "common world language". As a spokesman of the imperialist nations of Europe Sir Arthur obviously conceives of the 'world' as the part inhabited by the imperialist nations of Europe. Thus in his basic conception of a 'world' language Dr. Nhlapo is clearly in the bonds of Herrenfolk

philosophy, according to whom 'international' refers to relations between Europe or 'civilised' nations a euphemism for 'exploiting and oppressing nations.'

In his approach Dr. Nhlapo further states that "Linguistic barriers do not only constitute an international but an intertribal problem." Here again the learned doctor fails to distinguish the significant from the trivial, the important from the unimportant, the main current of the stream from its eddies and backwashes. To state the approach to the problem in tribal terms is to fail to grasp the import of the working of social forces in our midst. Tribalism as such is a decaying and disintegrating force, and even among the indigenous peoples of Africa it has in many parts ceased to be a force at all. The tribes and tribalism are still with us but they have ceased to be of social force. Thus whilst inter-tribal problems do exist they are not significant. To speak of linguistic barriers as constituting an "intertribal problem" is to mistake the apparent problem for the real one, to mistake the eddies and backwashes for the main current of the stream.

Thus, in these circumstances, we cannot but reject Dr. Nhlapo's approach to the problem, as well as his formulation of it. Since his treatment was based upon his formulation of the problem we need not here concern ourselves with it. Having dug out the foundation of his case, which was in any case embedded in the bed-rock of shifting sand, we need hardly bother about the walls, which were bound to crumble and tumble to Mother Earth. Our task is to seek a bedrock of concrete in which to embed the foundations of our problem.

The idea of a common language for all humanity is an ideal which cannot receive practical application for many years to come. An international language, to be functionally effective, must aim at making the various nations of the world, and not only their leaders, effective members of one world. However, within the foreseeable future, national languages will be used for satisfying the immediate needs of the members of various nations.

The urgent problem which we shall soon have to face practically is that of a common language for Africa.

We have already indicated that tribalism is a dying social force in Africa. African nationalism, an emergent and growing factor, is once again set in motion forces that radically affected the internal economy as well as the social life of the African people. It is worth while noting that this new industrial capital was largely built the new, significant social force in Africa. The existence of a nationalism presupposes the existence of a nation. A nation is an historically evolved stable community of people arising on the basis of a community language of a territory of economic life, of social institutions and of behaviour patterns.

Before the advent of colonialism Africa, like India and Indonesia, was, despite the fact of its physical compactness, a mere geographical expression. From the seventeenth century the rising commercial capital of Europe set in motion forces that affected the internal economy and the social life of the indigenous people of Africa. During the last quarter of the nineteenth century the new industrial capital of Europe through the African people, who, during the rise of European commercial capital in the earlier period, had been forcibly removed from Africa and exploited in the slave trade and as a labour force.

Contrary to popular notions on the subject, it is not essential that a nation should evolve out of a community of tribal or even racial affiliations. Both the British and the American nations which have evolved out of the combination and amalgamation of different tribes and different races, are a living negation of this popular fallacy. The African nation is thus founded on the broad basis of people deriving their origin from different tribes and different races. Thus the conception, "birth and growth of a nation" presupposes the disintegration of tribes and races and their neutralization as a social force. The theory of "the blood" as the basis of such a nation is incompatible with the facts. Such a theory falsely implies that this

nation is inherently capable of accommodating people of other national or racial origins.

Through factors of imperialism, which have stunted the national growth of this nation, the creation of common social institutions consonant with the being and social development of this nation has been prevented. Already, however, there is in existence a movement historically destined to create the appropriate social institutions. Thus at a higher stage of development the existence of such institutions is bound to become a reality.

The question of a national language, the outward and visible sign of mature nationhood, is being resolved by forces mightier than ourselves. In this regard, we already see in the social forces at work the "first faint stirring of future promise."

The community of behaviour patterns which we have alluded to as one of the ingredients of nationhood is in part the product of historical evolution and in part that of a conscious social philosophy. Through the medium of a common language the process of integrating the feelings, attitudes, thoughts, impulses and actions of a people will be functionally extended and accelerated.

It is in the light of this approach that Africa's linguistic problem must be viewed and examined.

Before examining in detail the question of a national language for Africa let us examine the experience of some other nations.

In Great Britain, the Midland dialect of England, mainly on account of its geographical situation, became the accepted standard English and consequently the national language of Great Britain. Here we must not forget that both Ireland and Wales, on account of their previous repression by the English, ultimately rejected English as their mother tongue.

In 1944 the British Government decided to promote the use of Basic English as an international auxiliary language within the Commonwealth as well as beyond.

In India, where English had acquired a special function of inter-communication during the British occupation, Hindi has by statute been adopted as the national language and is expected within fifteen years to become the first language of India.

In the United States, English was the language of the pioneers. Within the U. S. A. there are large communities speaking, reading and writing the languages of their original homes in Europe. As a result of this there is a great deal of functional illiteracy in English. In the words of Mr. Lewis "it is only in the presence of a common language functionally effective in thought, feeling and action that it is possible for the U. S. A. to be an integrated society in the face of military, economic, political and social needs."

At the Revolution, when the inception of the Soviet Union took place, an attempt was made to establish Russian as the one language for the constituent republics. When the various people showed the usual resistance, this policy was changed. Although Russian was rejected as a first language it was readily accepted as a second language and serves the purpose of a common means of intercommunication. All the Republics in which Russian was not already the vernacular decided in 1920 to make it a compulsory second language in their secondary schools.

The serious linguistic problem facing the Soviet Union is how to achieve adult functional literacy in this one common language. When, in another generation or two, the vast majority of Soviet citizens begin to use Russian for their immediate needs it will automatically become their mother tongue.

There has for centuries been a common written language throughout China but no common spoken language. On this question S. S. Karlgren remarks "an edict issued in Peking can be read and

understood everywhere in this vast country, but the Cantonese read it aloud in a way that sounds utter nonsense to the Pekingese." In an attempt to correct this defect the Chinese government officially adopted a common script in 1918 and embodied this in a common national dictionary. As the traditional written language of China was too scholarly, a kind of Basic Chinese has been evolved to encourage the growth of literacy.

In all the national politics we studied, the problem has been one of a single common language which every member of the society can speak, read and write.

The immediate approach to the solution of this problem has been the adoption of bilingualism which allows the adult the use of his own mother tongue for the satisfaction of his immediate needs and desires and of a second language for his effective membership of the larger society.

The problem of encouraging literacy has also led to the simplification of both the spoken and the written language. The movement in each case is towards the achievement of functional efficacy in speech and writing in the common language and the consequent facilitation of the integration of feelings, thoughts and actions.

Having seen how the problem of a common language presents itself to various national polities we may now ask in what form the problem presents itself to Africa. For Africa, the problem is the adoption of a common language that will make the people of Africa functionally effective members of the African Nation and that will at a later stage satisfy their immediate needs and desires.

With the problem thus stated, it becomes clear that such a language must first be regarded as an auxiliary language to serve the inter-communication needs of the people's of Africa who at present speak languages that are unintelligible to one another. It means also that at a later stage when such a language is used by various people for the satisfaction of their immediate needs and desires, it will have become

their Mother tongue. When such a language acquires functional efficacy in speech and literacy for the adult members of the African community it will then be firmly entrenched as a national language.

Which language should be chosen as an auxiliary? It might be tempting to advance the claims of one's own sectional or regional dialect. Or it might sound plausibly "objective" to advance the claims of French or English, Portuguese or even Afrikaans, as being widely understood in different parts. Such approaches, however, are basically invalid, because they ignore the real social forces at work in Africa. It would repay us better to study and analyse the social forces at work in our continent.

Unlike India, which enjoyed the doubtful honour of being under one oppressor power, Africa enjoys the unenviable honour of having five or six oppressor powers. Although the essential nature of the oppression is strikingly the same, the methods and approaches to the achievement of the task of oppression sometimes differ radically and even fundamentally.

Under the Portuguese policy of "assimilation" the educational curricula have no reference to the child's own mother tongue. In this way, a happy few Africans are "assimilated" into the oppressor class and are, through neglect of their mother tongue, successfully estranged from the mass of their people.

Under the South African policy of segregation the educational curriculum gives the African a smattering of his mother tongue, and then burdens him with the task of learning two of his master's languages on the explicit understanding that he becomes a more efficient tool.

Under the Belgian policy of "integration" the African child is now permitted the luxury of the vernacular for purposes of intercommunication with his "black brethren," and Swahili has been picked for the purpose. Those who became successfully "integrated" into the ruling caste may not only help in exploiting their black

brethren but may also get into white hotels and travel in white trains without their less fortunate black mothers, black fathers or black sweethearts.

Under the British policy of “partnership” the problem of intertribal communication has imposed the necessity of using Swahili for mother tongue instruction in Zanzibar, Tanganyika, Kenya and Uganda.

The logic of circumstances has already forced different oppressor powers to foster the teaching of the same vernacular in different zones. The same factor has forced one oppressor, Great Britain, to foster the spread and teaching of this same vernacular.

The spread of Swahili is extending northwards and southwards beyond the confines of the areas mentioned. A number of leading Universities of the world, like the University of Leningrad, have provided a professorial chair for the teaching of Swahili. It has been classed by language scholars as the ninth important language of the world.

In Europe there are no Europeans. There are only Frenchmen and Germans and Swedes. In Africa there are no Nigerians, Ugandans and South Africans---there are only Africans. This emerging fact is a pointer to the significant difference between the nationalism of Europe and the nationalism of Africa. It is this fact that will facilitate the spread of a “lingua franca” in Africa. On account of its geographical situation Swahili is the most significant language in Africa today.

Swahili belongs to the Bantu language family which includes more than two hundred languages and dialects spoken from the Cape to the Cameroons. Although it has unlike our local Fanakalo, retained its essentially African grammatical structure, its vocabulary has borrowed much from Arabic, Galla, Somali, Portuguese and other languages. It was set down in writing before the coming of the white

missionary and of the white trader. It has many dialects conditioned by local differences.

Writing on constructed or semi-constructed languages, F. Bodmer observes: "It is beyond human ingenuity to construct a live skylark but the aeroplane has advantages which no flying animal possesses. Apple trees and gooseberry bushes are also products of growth but geneticists have produced new varieties of fruits by combining inherited merits of different strains or allied species. The work accomplished by pioneers of the science of language shows that it is possible to produce new language varieties by combining the inherent merits of different forms of natural speech."

The foregoing analysis does not imply any obligation to accept Swahili *holus-bolus*, without regard to its structural defects or to the inadequacy of its present vocabulary to the task of expressing the scientific or philosophical concepts of our age. It may be that the solution to the problem lies in the synthesis between its present form and substance and new elements derived from an intelligent approach to our society. Understood in this context, Swahili offers the necessary question of language planning on basis for "Basic Africanic," an urgent necessity to enable the people of Africa to become effective members of one society.

The proposal for the use of "Basic Africanic" as the auxiliary language of every child in Africa, irrespective of his colour or creed, assumes that regional languages will be retained. The use of any language as an auxiliary presupposes the use of the child's own mother tongue for the satisfaction of his own immediate needs.

It would be an illusion to discuss the language question in Africa in isolation from our major social and political problems. An all-African medium of communication is, from our viewpoint, reasonable, convenient and progressive. From the viewpoint of our various rulers, however, it may seem subversive and dangerous. They would prefer to perpetuate tribal linguistic and other divisions, and instruct us in European languages only to the extent that would enable us to

receive our orders and report on their execution. Therefore the language question in Africa can only be seen properly as one aspect of our struggle for emancipation from white imperialism.

At the same time, that national struggle itself will be the poorer if it overlooks the importance and the dynamic character of the language question. It is a primary requirement for us to grasp the leading principles of the language question. We must free our minds from the assumption that the imperialist powers, and the sheltered position of their languages, have some to stay permanently in Africa. We must study and discuss linguistic problems; popularize the idea of a common language; examine different points of view [regarding] the language problems of different countries; and the idea of an international language.

The language question must be taken up as part of the national liberation movement.

Chapter 24

European and Asian Diary

by

Ruth First

26th MAY [1954]

Here and there in [East] Berlin, one can see what the bombed city must have looked like. All rubble is cleared away or stacked in tidy heaps, but gaping shells of some buildings remain. Some impressive building has been going on. The Stalin Allee is the city's pride and rightly so. It stretches for some miles, a wide open boulevard and lining both its sides are enormous apartment houses. The thousands of flats here have been allocated to the best shock workers. Names were put in a lottery for allocation to some of the people who, by giving three per cent, of their earnings per year, helped to find the money to build the flats.

The World Peace Council Meeting---a really great meeting. There were about 500 participants among them, names known throughout the world. Pritt opened the session. Then there was Kuo Mo Jo, Sartre, Anna Sehgers, Shostakovitch, Lafitte and thousands of other celebrities, as thick as bees. There were plenary sessions in the morning and commissions in the afternoon. The two main items on the agenda were the H-bomb and national independence. The whole meeting is a masterpiece of organisation. There is an army of interpreters and translators and a smoothly working system of simultaneous translations through head microphones.

The Indian delegation is big and very representative. Mulk Raj Anand is among them. He is a small man with a sharp sense of humour. He was using his every free moment in organizing an exhibition of contemporary Indian art to tour Europe. Sitting next to me are Desmond Buckle and Gordon Schaeffer. A little man with only half of his left arm---chirpy and full of go. The Indian delegate who spoke yesterday got a tremendous reception, especially when the Chinese and Soviet delegates went up to shake his hand after the speech. Kuo Mu Jo seems to be everybody's favourite. He has just to giggle (and he does!) and the whole Conference roars with him.

The Conference went mad when it was announced that the 1953 Peace Prize had been awarded to Charlie Chaplin and he had accepted. The other recipient was Shostakovich, a shy, retiring man obviously embarrassed at being fussed over.

On Thursday night we saw the Soviet ballet---the company that was sent home from Paris in transit here for three nights. We saw Ulanova dance in *Romeo and Juliet*---indescribably beautiful. Then a potpourri of all kinds of dances---some waltzes, the Swan Lake extract. Continuous clapping went on till our hands were almost blistered. That's one thing we've been doing a great deal of---clap. But of course in the last week there's been a lot to clap.

1st JUNE

This week end the Conference of the Free German Youth will take place. It promises to be very impressive. Already contingents of young people have been marching up and down the streets outside the hotel.

I did a short broadcast this morning on South Africa over the German Radio.

Berlin is a real Conference city. Last week the Peace Council, this week the Youth Whitsun Festival; next week something else. And all entails tremendous organization. A fleet of cars, whole hotels placed at the disposal of delegates; each one receiving not only a guide, and a special Conference briefcase, but even 50 marks of pocket money!

I went over into West Berlin the other night. It was like two countries, two cities. The outside appearances are completely different. One cannot drive from the West into the East without a visa and all the paraphernalia, but all one has to do is go into the underground railway and over you go. The lights go out for a few seconds as you cross the border from East to West and the other way, but that is all that happens.

West Berlin is like a corner of London or Vienna. Luxurious flats, well-dressed people---but 300,000 unemployed in a population of 2 million. And the relatively high standard of living of the rest only because of the enormous amount of American aid.

In the East, not this superficial atmosphere of luxury but signs of the steady improvement of living conditions, magnificent workers' apartment houses are a sign of the future.

3rd June

This is not a Conference of the Free German Youth but a week-long Festival of sport, culture and parades. Berlin has changed hands. The youth have taken over. This morning trainloads of young people have been pouring in. Two and a half thousand foreign guests are coming. Altogether 700,000 youth will take part. The Free German Youth has a membership of 3 million in the German Democratic Republic. Imagine a march past with almost the entire population of Johannesburg taking part.

There are several international football matches, athletics, ballet, opera and a Soviet Folk Dance group, puppet shows and lots more.

Tomorrow we visit Stalingrad---a completely new city not on the old maps which has gigantic iron foundries. On Monday we plan a visit to Potsdam, in between we'll take part in the youth festival.

This afternoon a few of us visited the Pioneer Republic for children of six to fourteen; adults of over 25 are not admitted unless accompanied by a child! It takes two and a half hours to walk round the Republic which is beautifully wooded and has an artificial sea with sand brought to its banks by train; tents and camping facilities which ordinarily house 3,000 pioneers at a time but which this week are housing 30,000 participants in the Festival; an open-air theatre which will be officially opened tomorrow by the G. D. R. [German Democratic Republic] Premier---Pieck; sports fields and athletic tracks, sleighing rinks and a toboggan slope, puppet theatres, a morse

station for the children---we got tired of walking around so gave up at this stage. I think this is the most exciting thing I have seen in Germany up to now. Every ten pioneers have a leader or Free German Youth instructor with them and this enormous park teems with files of children, singing, dancing and walking from one part to another. Their singing would delight you---especially some of the German international brigade songs.

Yesterday we went to Dresden and Leipzig. Eleven Nigerian students are studying at these universities on scholarships given by the Free German Youth and supervised by the German Trade unions.

Two young students are acting as guides and interpreters. Both are very interested in what goes on in the world, South Africa included. One asked intelligent questions about South Africa and seemed to grasp the situation and remarked how complex it was. But in the next breath he revealed that he thought Malan [white Prime Minister] was a black man! I can now understand how complex South Africa *did* seem to him.

Everywhere there are many newly published books in German being sold. Their publishing is not only prolific but of a fine standard. If only one could get in English some of the works I have seen in German. I am thinking mainly of the proletarian poetry, novels of such people as [Jorge] Amardo, Zimmering, Neruda and scores of others.

7th June

The German Youth's festival has now been going on since Friday but yesterday, Sunday was the official opening.

Chapter 25

The Meaning of Bantu Education

by

Duma Nokwe

Bantu education is the 'education' designed for the 'Bantu' by the Nationalist Government; it is a development of 'Native Education,' the education which was designed for the 'Native; of South Africa.

Like 'Native Education,' 'Bantu education' is a qualified education which is a product of the political and economic structure of the country. Like its predecessors too, 'Bantu education' was not introduced as a means of raising the cultural level of the Africans, nor of developing the abilities of the African child to the full, but as one of the devices which aim at solving the cheap labour problems of the country. The development of education amongst the Africans and the policy of Governments have been closely connected with the labour problems of the country.

Dr. Verwoerd's statement that "(Native) education in each of the four provinces, therefore, took into account neither the community interests of the Bantu, nor the general policy of the country," is incorrect in so far as it refers to the general policy of the country. It is, of course, correct that 'Native Education' did not take into account the interests of the Africans, it was never intended to fulfill that task. The Director of Education of the Transvaal made it very clear that *"teach the Native to work"* was the *"true principle by which the education of the Native is to be regulated and controlled"* and that a plan for *"native education"* must *"contemplate the ultimate social place of the native as an efficient worker."* The report continues to prescribe a scheme through which the aims of Native education could be realized, and the scheme which had to be for the continuation of MANUAL TRAINING with ELEMENTARY INSTRUCTION, and in the second place for the shaping of the elementary instruction to equip the Native for more intelligent comprehension of any industrial work before him." The scheme was implemented; and it determined the salient features of Native education, which were:

- 1) The complete application of segregation in the purpose, administration and organization of education.
- 2) The vesting of control of education of the Africans in hands which were not responsible to the Africans, despite the fact that Africans were made to pay for their education.
- 3) The careful regulation of the number of children who had access to education to keep it as low as possible, so as not to upset the reservoir of cheap, unskilled labour. Among of the 'controls' used were the denial of free, compulsory education to Africans and the insistence that parents who wanted their children "educated" should pay for them, and the inadequate and poor schooling provided for Africans.
- 4) The careful regulation of the curriculum of African schools so that African education remained basically elementary with an emphasis on MANUAL labour. This is illustrated by the following extract from

the report of the Native Education Commission of 1930-1932 (p. 75), "The students were taught gardening, other manual work, every student at Lovedale had to work two hours in the garden or on the road, this excellent practice continues to this day."

5) The denial of technical education to Africans, and the restriction of their training to teaching, nursing and interpreters and priests.

The government attempted to check the flow to towns by imposing restrictions on the movements of Africans, in the form of permits under the Native Urban Areas Act of 1935. But as industry developed, the contradiction sharpened proportionately.

Successive governments of the country have tried various devices to resolve the contradiction between country and town. The Amendment to the Urban Areas Act was calculated to tighten restrictions on the entry of Africans into towns; elaborate influx control departments were established, the police force was increased, and pass raids were intensified; and arrested Africans found themselves working on the farms. Farmers were allowed to build farm goals and secure their cheap labour behind bars. The Nationalist Government, which represents the interests of the capitalist farmers and the mine magnates, has intensified the efforts to drive Africans from the towns to the country in a more ruthless manner. *'BANTU EDUCATION'* is one of these numerous efforts of the Nationalists, aimed at resolving the conflict between the farms and mines on the one hand, and industry and commerce on the other, by compelling the African to accept the miserable oppressive conditions of work on the farms and mines.

'Native education' was the 'education' imposed upon the African during the period of the development of capitalism in the towns; the period when there was a shortage of cheap labour in towns and consequently a great demand for it. 'Bantu education' is imposed on the Africans in the period of the development of capitalism in the

country, a period of intensified exploitation by farmers and the shortage of cheap labour on farms and mines.

Through it, the Nationalists are attempting to harness the African to the most ruthless exploitation and oppression.

BENEFICIAL — TO WHOM?

Dr. Verwoerd's exposition of Bantu education contains the outwork fallacy that it is intended to benefit the African. In his pamphlet on Bantu Education, he says:

"The Bantu pupil must obtain knowledge, skills and attitudes in the school which will be useful and advantageous to him, at the same time *beneficial* to his community. The subject matter must be presented to him in such a way that he can understand and master it, easily making it his own, to the benefit and services of his community."

In the very next paragraph, however, Dr. Verwoerd proceeds to expose this fallacy by stating that:

"A school must equip him to meet the demands which the economic life of South Africa impose upon him." He admits that the country maintained the difference in standards between European and African to perpetuate the illusion of white supremacy and black inferiority, the fallacy upon which the exploiters rely to justify their ruthless exploitation of the people. Native education fulfilled the function of supplying the growing commercial enterprises and mines with 'efficient' workers without disturbing the cheap labour reservoir.

Native education was the 'educational' scheme for Africans during the period of the shortage of labour in the mines and the growing

commercial enterprises of the country; together with other measures like the Land Act of 1913 and the Taxation laws, it maintained a steady flow of cheap labour from the country to the towns.

Before World War I, when South Africa had mainly an agricultural-mineral economy, most of the energies of the government were spent in squeezing Africans out of the Reserves and driving them to the towns. With the development of industry in the towns after the First World War, the process which the Governments had begun assumed inconvenient proportions as the flow from country to town increased.

This created two 'problems' for the economy of the country:

a. The participation of the African in industry and his low wage constituted a 'threat' to the privileged position of the European worker, according to the Report of the Economic Commission (p. 76):

"Industry in the Union in areas where the Native predominates used to be based almost entirely on "European supervision and skilled work, and Native manual labour. This was the natural division of labour in the earlier period of the contact between races....when however, the land began to fill up and the struggle for a share in the material goods became keener, this division of labour began to change. On the one hand, there arose a small but increasing number of natives who aspired to the more lucrative occupations of the Europeans.

To remedy this position, and to restore the 'natural division of labour' which protected the European, Colour Bar laws were passed which denied Africans access to skilled labour, the 'natural' preserve of the European.

b. Africans were naturally attracted by the more favourable conditions of work offered by the growing industries, as opposed to

the feudal conditions on the farms and the exploitation of the mines. This created a condition of surplus cheap labour in the towns and a 'shortage' of labour in the country and on the mines, thus sharpening the contradiction between the town and the country.

"The economic structure of our country of course results in large numbers of natives having to earn their living in the service of Europeans."

These last two quotations represent a more honest declaration of the purpose of Native education. Dr. Verwoerd's exposition of 'Bantu Education' is full of glaring contradictions, but in characteristic Nationalist style he staggers blindly over the contradictions and imposes upon the majority of the people of South Africa a complete racist and fascist system of 'education.' It is a negation of every single principle of education, which has been accepted by democratic people of the world.

The content of 'Bantu education' is a gross lowering of the already low education facilities of the Africans. Dr. Verwoerd shamelessly sets Standard II as 'fundamental' education, after which pupils will be carefully selected for what is called high primary education. Dr. Verwoerd keeps a judicious silence about the fate of those who are not selected for the higher primary course. The curriculum is distorted. Fundamental education consists of reading, writing and arithmetic, Afrikaans and English, religious education and singing. History and geography have been excluded. The intention is obvious, the African child who is being prepared as an instrument of cheap labour in a society which relies on fallacies must not know either the conditions of his country nor the truth about the world which are apparent even in the distorted. Some African history books are likely to expose the fallacies.

Dr. Verwoerd blames the African child for the low percentage of African children who have access to education, and not completely inadequate schooling facilities. To increase the percentage, he proposes, first, to reduce school hours of the substandard to three a day. . . . "it is wrong to utilize expensive teaching to supervise large classes of bored pupils while thousands of children who are entitled to the same measure of primary education kept out of school."

Secondly, to remove children who keep in sub-standards for years, "keeping other children out of the *available* school accommodation and wasting public funds without themselves deriving any benefit worth mentioning."

Thirdly, to dismiss children who fail to attend school regularly.

Fourthly, to refuse admission to children who cannot afford school requisites, such as pens and exercise books.

These proposals are made under the heading of "Extension of School Facilities for Bantu Children." He does not mention a word about building new schools. On this point, however, he proposes later on:

- a. "Bantu mothers can, in accordance with local methods, erect walls where farmers allow it, and the Department will provide the windows, doors and roofs."
- b. "The present arrangement in Native Areas by which the Department provides the necessary labour is sound and can continue. The urban Bantu community will have to meet its obligations just as the rural community has to do."

The net result of these proposals is a reduction in the educational facilities for Africans.

The intensification of oppression and exploitation is extended to the teachers. Women teachers who are less expensive than men will be preferred. Instead of an increase in wages which teachers have been clamouring and hoping for, Dr. Verwoerd proposes a reduction in the present scales, despite the fact that European teachers have had increases and cost of living continues to rise. Dr. Verwoerd argues that the European teacher has a higher salary because "he is in the service of the European community and his salary must be fixed accordingly." He ingeniously explains that the European teacher in the service of Africans gets a European wage because he can be regarded as on loan to the African. Dr. Verwoerd does not explain why he does not apply his principles to the messengers and the "large numbers of natives who earn their living in the service of the Europeans."

Dr. Verwoerd says of African teachers that they are entrusted with "a role in which they will be in the service of and *responsible* to the "Bantu community." At the beginning of his pamphlet, however, he says "the control of the educational system has been taken out of the hands of the Provinces and placed in the hands of the Department of Native Affairs," and later he says "no new school may, however, be established without the prior approval of the Department." The only responsibility the African community has in Bantu education is that of providing the children and the schools.

The introduction of 'mother-tongue' education as a medium for teaching is justifiable on two ground: first as an expression of respect for a people and its national culture; secondly as a step towards the democratization of education amongst a people.

The facts about Bantu education and numerous oppressive laws of the Nationalists indicate clearly that Dr. Verwoerd has no respect for the Africans and in fact despises them, nor has he any intention of democratizing education so that it is available to all Africans to

develop their abilities to the full, and so that they can contribute freely and fully to raising of the material and cultural standards of all people of this country. The reasons why Dr. Verwoerd introduces mother-tongue instruction is to enable the African child to master his distorted schemes easily, and to fan the spirit of tribalism to divide the African people.

“Bantu education” is a reactionary scheme which very nearly destroys education for the African in South Africa. It is reactionary because it is designed to satisfy the needs of a reactionary and heartless class of exploiters. Whilst the Nationalists disregard the needs and interests of the masses of the people, and subject the people to a more ruthless oppression and exploitation in the interests of solving the contradictions of their society they do not take into account the sharpening conflict they are creating between themselves and the people, which will ultimately break their artificial political and economic structure.

II

Bantu Education in Action

When Bantu Education was introduced, Dr. Verwoerd wrapped it up in apparently ‘progressive principles.’ These were firstly the separation of education to the state. Secondly,, there was the much boosted extension of the control of education directly to the African people through School Committees. Thirdly, the introduction of mother tongue instruction. It was not difficult to strip Dr. Verwoerd’s schemes of the appearance of progressiveness and to expose Bantu education for what it is—a treacherous attempt to destroy the critical and creative abilities of the African people, and to restrict their ambitions within the narrow confines which the Nationalists design and desire should be the functions of the members of the Bantu

Society. The publication of syllabuses for the Lower Primary Course and the Higher Primary Course have confirmed the predictions of the people as to the true purpose of Bantu education.

The New Syllabus

In both cases, Dr. H.F. Verwoerd has invited criticism of the syllabuses and he contends that they are unassailable from the point of view of modern progressive educational principles. But Dr. Verwoerd has no regard for the criticism, if he had, he would long have abandoned his post and his Party. These invitations for criticism are intended to shield the ruthless autocracy with which the Nationalists implement their schemes. The Nationalists hate criticism and are determined to punish severely the volume of protest and criticism against the very introduction of Bantu Education met with the most scathing retorts and contemptuous dismissal in government circles. Teachers who will in the main be responsible for the implementation of Bantu education have been forbidden from criticizing the policy of the Native Affairs Department, and whoever criticizes the syllabus adversely will be a marked man. No amount of criticism, therefore, will persuade the Nationalists to modify or abandon their plans.

There was a mixed reaction to the Syllabuses, as there was to the introduction of Bantu Education. Some people (fortunately only a small and relatively uninfluential section of the people) adopted the attitude that there was no fundamental change which had been introduced by Bantu Education. Native education, they argued, was as much an education created by the ruling class for the oppressed people as Bantu Education was. It was further argued that whatever dangerous innovations there might be in Bantu Education, these could be remedied by raising the political consciousness of the teachers so that they teach that which would liberate the children rather than what would enslave them mentally. Another group

(consisting mainly of teachers), which whilst admitting the destructive nature of Bantu Education, regarded it as an insult to suggest that teachers could willingly inject poison into their own children. Before assessing the role of the African teacher in Bantu Education, it is necessary to examine some aspects of the syllabus for the Higher Primary Course (Std. III to Std. VI).

The medium of instruction throughout the whole course is vernacular, except in the case of English and Afrikaans. The following are the subjects and the time allocated to each is indicated in brackets in minutes per week: Religious instruction (100), Afrikaans (205), English (205), Arithmetic (180), Social Studies (180), Health Education (150), Nature Study (60), Singing and games (60, Needlework (for girls), Tree planting and soil conservation, Handwork and Homecraft, and Gardening for Boys and Girls (each 120). It should be noted that out of a total of 1,650 min. per week, 360 minutes or nearly a quarter of the time be spent in handwork, gardening or tree planting and soil conservation. In addition, the Nature Study course provides for practical work for all classes which includes the 'collection of weeds' and this resembles Dickens' 'So-the-Boys School.' In the words of the syllabus, the primary aim is to inculcate the attitude that "work ennobles."

The moral and mental training of the child is provided by a subject called Social Studies. This is really a training in Nationalist policy under the guise of Geography, History, Citizenship and Good Conduct. There is no clearer statement of the purpose of this course than that contained in the syllabus itself. These subjects have been "orientated economically and socially with an aim to develop in the Bantu child Social consciousness and responsibility." The course is intended to make the child realize that he is bound by various ties to particular groups of people as they are represented in his home and in his tribe. Groups of people beyond his tribe are omitted,

apparently it is undesirable that he should realize the bonds with people beyond his tribe. A further aim is:

“The acceptance by the Bantu Child in an intelligent manner of the fact that the welfare of his community depends on the contribution made towards it by each of its members. He should therefore know how his own people work and others earn a living. . . . and he should be convinced that he must work if he wishes to lead a useful and contented life. . . . He must realize that by his behaviour other people will determine whether society will accept him as a dependable and useful person. . . . He should be convinced that he cannot live and act as a detached individual in society. Furthermore, he must realize that the laws are necessary for the people of any community for harmonious living together. Consequently, teaching should lead the child to do naturally, and therefore willingly, what society has prescribed as correct, good and commendable.”

It would be difficult to find a clearer exposition of fascist principles of education. The passage from which these extracts have been taken represents the process of education as a task in which every effort should be made to twist and hammer an otherwise rebellious child into accepting and submitting to conditions which have been created for him. That is, of course, the basic aim of Bantu Education.

The Social Studies course is therefore designed to inculcate a strong tribal consciousness, acknowledgement and acceptance of what has been prescribed for his tribe, obedience to the laws, and the function of education is to make him accept all these naturally and willingly. The orientation has been achieved by ruthlessly omitting everything which is inconsistent with the above purpose and including everything fashioned in Nationalist style.

In the section dealing with History, to indicate what a fortunate heritage awaits him, the child is taught in detail all the benevolent contributions which the State and Church have made towards the development of the Bantu. Not a word is mentioned of the contribution made by the Africans towards these institutions and towards the development of the country generally. Under Mining, Commerce and Industry, the History course includes:

“the effects of Mining, Commerce and Industry on the life of the Bantu – the creation of opportunities for work; new professions and trades; movement of the people to cities; need for influx control.”

No mention is made of the fact that these industries really exist by exploiting African labour. Throughout the whole course the Africans are presented as lifeless clods or earth upon whom mysterious forces are acting to shape their destiny.

The action dealing with Citizenship and Good Conduct is an abomination. The whole course is designed to impress indelibly upon the child that he is a citizen not of South African but of the tribe and that he has “duties, privileges, and responsibilities in the village and the town” and ‘privilege’ instead of ‘right,’ is insistent throughout the syllabus, and sandwiched between duties and responsibilities. There is not a single occasion when the word ‘right’ is used. Quite clearly, the African child will be taught that he has no rights. Apart from an intensive training in the mechanism and virtues of tribal organization, supplemented by the modernized version provided for by Dr. Verwoerd’s Bantu Authorities Act, the precepts of “Good Conduct” include a knowledge of how to assist, amongst others, the CHIEF, the STOCK INSPECTOR, the LOCATION’S SUPERINTENDENT and the POLICEMAN. Assistance to the latter will probably follow the Gestapo method of charging children with

the task of spying on their parents, and reporting any anti-Nationalist activities. By the time the child is in Standard Five, and on the verge of leaving school, he is given final trimming in the form of:

“instruction and guidance in the Personal Reference Book— why and how used, the Labor Bureau, control measures in Urban Areas, Curfew.”

These are the things which he must naturally and willingly do because the society of Dr. Verwoerd and Swart have prescribed them as good, correct and commendable. It is only if and when the pupil gets to Std. VI that he is given a glimpse of the sanctuary which is above the Chief and his tribe. Even here the emphasis is on Bantu people. After a constant grinding for thirty minutes each day for eight years, the child will it is no doubt hoped, submit naturally and willingly to the dictates of the paramount Chief Verwoerd and his clique, and also regard it as his duty to persuade other Africans to do the same.

Culture and Politics

It is only the most blind dogmatism which makes it possible for people not to realize that if there have been no fundamental changes brought by Bantu Education, at least the changes are radical enough and create conditions for new methods of struggle, and a new emphasis on the struggle in the cultural and educational spheres. Through Bantu Education, the Nationalists have realized the inseparable unity between the cultural life of the people and their political aspirations, and they now hope to use the former to smother the latter. Surely it is the task of progressives to organize the cultural life of the people so that it serves the true interests and aspirations of the people.

The Key Figure

The hope that African teachers will be able to teach anything other than Bantu Education in Dr. Verwoerd's schools is based on an unrealistic assessment of the situation. Dr. Verwoerd is clearly aware that the key figure in his schemes is the teacher. He said, "So much depends upon the teacher carrying out his duties conscientiously. . . For the teacher who is not faithful in this regard there is no place in Bantu Education." The conditions of employment of teachers make it quite clear that Dr. Verwoerd will tolerate no unfaithfulness or even criticism. It is also clearly stated that any teacher who encourages disobedience or resistance to the laws of the country or participates in political activity would be instantly dismissed. Even if, therefore, it was possible to increase the number of militant teachers who would be prepared to risk 'their bread' in order to serve the interests of the people, these conditions of employment, combined with the spying activities of some Principals (which will no doubt be intensified, because of the enhanced prospects of becoming a sub-inspector) make it unlikely that such militant teachers would remain teachers for long. It should also be borne in mind that the prospects of raising the political consciousness of teachers are no better now than they were a year ago. In fact, because of their conditions of employment and the distrust which is bound to grow amongst them, the teachers can be expected to be more reticent and less responsive to the voice of the people, and a little more 'bread conscious.'

The prospects of using teachers in schools is further diminished by the fact that Dr. Verwoerd is going to train his own Bantu Education teachers. And he is going to train them not merely to be dumb tools for his policies and schemes, but also to be active agents against the liberator movement. Apart from the fact that it is a condition of a teacher's employment that his whole time should be at the disposal of the Native Affairs Department, Dr. Verwoerd has stated that he considers it the duty of teachers to agitate against the African

National Congress and to discredit its campaigns. Recently, after he had dismissed 116 teachers on the Rand, he said that he did not think that they had done sufficient work to sabotage the boycott of schools.

It is important to realize that Bantu Education is not merely designed to destroy the political consciousness and understanding of the African child, so that he may be a dumb and contented serf, but it is positively designed to produce Nationalist cadres, who will sow seeds of hostility against the Liberatory movements, sabotage its campaigns and attempt to terrorize and intimidate progressive people. Bantu Education thus constitutes a positive political front against the movements. Since it is so fraught with danger for the Liberatory movements which are the bulwark of the people's interests and aspirations, it deserves the utmost vigilance and most careful study and the most effective assault.

Chapter 26

**“A New World Unfolds. . . .’: Congress of the People
Adopts the Freedom Charter”**

by

Alfred Hutchinson

They came in their thousands—from the cities, towns, villages, farms and faraway kraals. They came in buses, lorries, motor cars and trains. They came in all colours; they came in all ages. Ministers, factory workers, farms labourers, drivers, business men, students, doctors, teachers, clerks, workers in the kitchens. . . the call that had been made many months ago was being answered, the call that ran through the length and breadth of our vast land. The call of the people of South African to meet together to speak together, and together decide how they wanted to live, was being answered.

For the first time in the history of our country, the people have met—not as Black and White—but as “equals, countrymen and brothers.” They have met under the wheel of the Congress of the People, the

wheel which spanned racial considerations and proclaimed the unity of the people and their common desires.

The national anthem swept upwards, carried by strong resolute voices. The voice of the absent Chief Luthuli filled the gathering, pointing the way forward—the way to the future South Africa. It told of the wrong foundations of the Union of South Africa; the foundations of inequality and injustice and the harrowing inheritance of the people of South Africa.

The Congress of the People met under the sheltering wing of the people of the world. Messages of friendship and support spanned seas and crossed high mountains; brotherly hands outstretched in support for the people in their struggle for liberation. For who does not know the urge for freedom—the passion that has haunted mankind; the passion that has always opened new worlds?

The presentation of the *Isitwalandwe* were moving. The people of South Africa meeting as one were conferring the highest distinction on the people who have served them well. *Isitwalandwe*—the wearer of the feather of the rare bird almost unknown—legendary almost; the feather worn by the heroes of the people. South Africa knows her heroes.

But of the three people to receive the award only Father Huddleston could be present. Dr. Dadoo and Chief Luthuli, the banned leaders of the people, were absent. Chief Luthuli was in distant Groutville but his spirit was with the people and the people had him in their hearts. You cannot banish a leader from the people. He sent his daughter, Albertina, to receive the award on his behalf.

Father Huddleston stood before the people as he had done many times. For years he had fought with them. For years they had

tramped the difficult road together. The people loved him as he loved them.

In many minds there will always remain the picture of the frail, white-haired woman in a sari, standing under the ox-wagon wheel of the Congress of the People. She was Dr. Dadoo's mother and she was receiving the *Isitwalanwde* on behalf of her son. The mother of a hero, standing before the people, brought tears in many eyes.

Three thousand men and women met together at Kliptown, Johannesburg, on the 25th and 26th June, 1955. They had been sent by their fellow men to speak for them. Now the Freedom Charter was being read, the Charter that had been drawn up by the people. For months, demands had been flowing in. The people had spoken of hunger, poverty and ignorance; of the police that broke into homes at the dead of night; of pass raids and prisons and farm gaols; they had spoken of the slums in which they live. . . the things in their lives have been discussed and now they decide that these things must end.

The call that had swept through the vast land from corner to corner became alive. The people had answered the call and now they were giving it back. It would ring from city to city, from town to town and find its way back to the Kraals. The people have spoken; they have spoken in one strong voice.

At night when the people had left, the wheel hung in the night. A few fires burnt and volunteers tramped the area guarding it. But the spirit of the afternoon was still there persisting like the demands of the people who would again meet in the morning. Songs of freedom continued to be heard deep into the night.

At nine o'clock the representatives of the people were back at their business. The words of the Charter rang clear and unequivocally: "South Africa belongs to the people who live in it, black and white. .

." South Africa had ceased to be the country of one group of the people—it belonged to all. No government could justly claim authority unless it was based on the will of all the people. The people declared that they had been robbed "of their birthright to land, liberty and peace." The people declared that their country would never be prosperous or free until "our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities. And the people rising to sing the national anthem sealed the covenant to strive together," until the democratic changes set out in the Charter were won.

A new world, a brave new world was unfolding itself. In the new South Africa the people shall govern; the national groups shall have equal rights; the people shall share in the country's wealth; the land shall be shared among those who work it; all shall be equal before the law; all shall enjoy equal human rights; there shall be work and security. . .

There was movement in the crowd. The police had arrived. The people stood together, refused to be provoked. The police trooped to the platform. Mounted police sat on champing horses and cordons of armed police was thrown round the gathering. The police were investigating a charge of treason. The people burst into song and silently sat down.

What treason was there to uncover when the people declared their aims to the country and the entire world to know? Was it treason for the people to meet and speak together? Was it treason to demand food and clothes, plenty and security? Was it treason to demand the brotherhood and equality of all men irrespective of race or colour? Was it treason to work for peace among all mankind? There was nothing to conceal and the Conference continued as the police stood watch.

The new South Africa unfolded once more—the South Africa the police seemed to hate and fear: The doors of learning and of culture shall be opened; there shall be houses, security and comfort; there shall be peace and friendship. Dusk was gathering when the adoption of the Charter came to an end. The children who had sung “Away with Bantu Education” were silent. Their demand had been answered.

The people of South African had met; the largest and most representative assembly of the people had taken place. The Freedom Charter had been drawn up and now the delegates would take it back to the people who had sent them.

In the gloom the police looked like some sentinels of lost ramparts; the representatives of an age that had gone. They insulted the people; they spat in women’s faces; they slashed the peace exhibition, completely ruining it; they pointed guns at peaceful people. . . the band struck the songs of the people and the people joined in song. They danced together and were glad together. The people cannot know fear—people who have pledged themselves to fight together in the non-violent struggle of the people cannot know fear.

The Freedom Charter has been drawn up. Another milestone has been reached on the road to freedom. Thanks to the African National Congress, the South African Indian Congress, the South African Coloured Peoples’ Organisation, and the South African Congress of Democrats for having sponsored the greatest assembly of the people of South Africa. The Congress of the People must give momentum to the struggle for liberation and the fruits of it will fall to the organisations which brought it to its happy culmination. The people have spoken.

Chapter 27

Freedom Charter

by

The Congress of the People

Adopted at the Congress of the People at
Kliptown, Johannesburg, on June 25 and 26, 1955.

We, the People of South Africa declare for all our country and the world to know that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, black and white, and that no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people;

that our people have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality;

that our country will never be prosperous or free until all our people live in brotherhood, enjoying equal rights and opportunities;

that only a democratic state, based on the will of all the people, can secure to all their birthright without distinction of colour, race, sex, or belief;

And therefore, we the people of South Africa, black and white together—equals, countrymen and brothers—adopt this Freedom Charter. And we pledge ourselves to strive together, sparing neither

strength nor courage, until the democratic changes here set out have been won.

THE PEOPLE SHALL GOVERN!

Every man and woman shall have the right to vote for and to stand as a candidate for all bodies which make laws;

All people shall be entitled to take part in the administration of the country;

The rights of the people shall be the same, regardless of race, colour or sex;

All bodies of minority rule, advisory boards, councils and authorities shall be replaced by democratic organs of self-government.

ALL NATIONAL GROUPS SHALL HAVE EQUAL RIGHTS!

There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races;

All people shall have equal right to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs;

All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride;

The preaching and practice of national, race or colour discrimination and contempt shall be a punishable crime;

All apartheid laws and practices shall be set aside.

THE PEOPLE SHALL SHARE IN THE COUNTRY'S WEALTH!

The national wealth of our country, the heritage of all South Africans,
shall be restored to the people;

The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the Banks and monopoly
industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a
whole;

All other industry and trade shall be controlled to assist the well-
being of the people;

All people shall have equal rights to trade where they choose, to
manufacture and to enter all trades, crafts and professions.

**THE LAND SHALL BE SHARED AMONG THOSE WHO WORK
IT!**

Restriction of land ownership on a racial basis shall be ended, and all
the land redivided amongst those who work it, to banish famine and
land hunger;

The state shall help the peasants with implements, seed, tractors and
dams to save the soil and assist the tillers;

Freedom of movement shall be guaranteed to all who work on the
land;

All shall have the right to occupy land wherever they choose;

People shall not be robbed of their cattle, and forced labour and farm
prisons shall be abolished.

ALL SHALL BE EQUAL BEFORE THE LAW!

No one shall be imprisoned, deported or restricted without a fair trial;

No one shall be condemned by the order of any Government official;

The courts shall be representative of all the people;

Imprisonment shall be only for serious crimes against the people, and shall aim at re-education, not vengeance;

The police force and army shall be open to all on an equal basis and shall be the helpers and protectors of the people;

All laws which discriminate on grounds of race, colour or belief shall be repealed.

ALL SHALL ENJOY EQUAL HUMAN RIGHTS!

The law shall guarantee to all their right to speak, to organize, to meet together, to publish, to preach, to worship and to educate their children;

The state shall recognize the right and duty of all to work, and to draw full unemployment benefits;

Men and women of all races shall receive equal pay for equal work;

There shall be a forty-hour working week, a national minimum wage, paid annual leave and sick leave for all workers, and maternity leave on full pay for all working mothers;

Miners, domestic workers, farm workers and civil servants shall have the same rights as all others who work;

Child labour, compound labour, the tot system and contract labour shall be abolished.

THE DOORS OF LEARNING AND OF CULTURE SHALL BE OPENED!

The government shall discover, develop and encourage national talent for the enhancement of our cultural life;

All the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands;

The aim of education shall be to teach the youth to love their people and their culture, to honour human brotherhood, liberty and peace;

Education shall be free, compulsory, universal and equal for all children;

Higher education and technical training, shall be opened to all by means of state allowances and scholarships awarded on the basis of merit;

Adult illiteracy shall be ended by a mass state education plan;

Teachers shall have all the rights of other citizens;

The colour bar in cultural life in sport and in education shall be abolished.

THERE SHALL BE HOUSES, SECURITY AND COMFORT!

All people shall have the right to live where they choose, to be decently housed, and to bring up their families in comfort and security;

Unused housing space to be made available to the people;

Rent and prices shall be lowered, food plentiful and no one shall go hungry;

A preventive health scheme shall be run by the state;

Free medical care and hospitalization shall be provided for all, with special care for mothers and young children;

Slums shall be demolished and new suburbs built where all have transport roads, lighting, playing fields, crèches and social centres;

The aged, the orphans, the disabled and the sick shall be cared for by the state;

Rest, leisure and recreation shall be the right of all;

Fenced locations and ghettos shall be abolished, and laws which break up families shall be repealed.

THERE SHALL BE PEACE AND FRIENDSHIP!

South Africa shall be a fully independent state, which respects the rights and sovereignty of all nations;

South Africa shall strive to maintain world peace and the settlement of all international disputes by negotiation—not war;

Peace and friendship amongst all our people shall be secured by upholding the equal rights, opportunities and status of all;

The people of the protectorates—Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland—shall be free to decide for themselves their own future;

The right of all the peoples of Africa to independence and self-government shall be recognized, and shall be the basis of close cooperation.

Let all who love their people and their country now say, as we say here: "THESE FREEDOMS WE WILL FIGHT FOR, SIDE BY SIDE, THROUGHOUT OUR LIVES, UNTIL WE HAVE WON OUR LIBERTY."

Farewell Speech

by

Trevor Huddleston

In his farewell article, written specially for "Fighting Talk," Father Huddleston uses the story of David and Goliath to plead for a "re-dedication to the cause of liberation."

When the young stripling David went down into the valley to meet Goliath, his brothers tried to dissuade him. He was too young, too immature and too reckless. Also, perhaps, he was their brother, and he would steal their thunder. His answer to their appeals was the magnificent and direct one, which stands at the head of this brief article, which is my farewell. "Is there not a cause?"

It is a sad moment at which to leave South Africa: not because things are difficult and shadows dark, but because there is a battle to fight and win: a battle which is ours for the winning, if we have the faith and courage to fight it boldly.

This Goliath of Racialism does a tremendous lot of shouting. It is because he needs to keep his own courage up. He likes to mock at the unarmed David who confronts him. It is because in his own heart there is a lurking fear. He stumbled forward in his armour, flourishing his sword. But he does not see more than a young boy in front of him; a young shepherd-boy with a sling in his hand.

Racialism, besides being stupid, is also blind.

“Is there not a cause?” I have used the story of David and Goliath, not because I think here is a complete parallel, or a perfect moral to be drawn between that battle and ours in South Africa. I have used it because I want to plead with all the conviction I have for a renewal and a rededication to the cause of liberation.

During the twelve years of my stay in South Africa, I have tried to identify myself with the Country. And that has been made easy for me by the trust and affection of so very many. It is because of that identification that I have felt free to speak and to act when so many personal liberties have been attacked by the rulers of the Country, and when, in face of that attack. White South Africa has remained complacent and apathetic.

We have seen, in the past twelve years, all the freedoms for which the second world war was fought and won; not merely attacked but deliberately and persistently destroyed in the Union of South Africa.

The viciousness of the Pass Laws has been carried over into other spheres of legislation. It has become a crime to associate, a crime to speak, a crime to move from one place to another. You can't be deported for daring to criticize authority: or you can be deprived of the right to leave the Country for the same reason. You can no longer shut your door and have privacy in your home, for you *may* be about to commit a crime: the police must have right of entry a any hour of the day or night. You can be punished for being outside a municipal area, and punished for being inside one. You can suffer imprisonment for your ignorance in not carrying correct documents: you can also suffer imprisonment for teaching children the ABC. And if you condemn “apartheid” as a social evil in the same category as slavery; and dare to say that it is also basically un-Christian, you are

a traitor to your country and should be treated as such. "Is there not a cause?" The resistance to all this encroachment upon human rights and freedoms can be effective only in one way, and upon one condition. *It must be based upon a belief in the absolute rightness of our cause.* If we falter in this belief, then we fall into countless errors of judgment and innumerable traps and snares. To change the metaphor—we see Goliath as a mighty giant whose armour is impregnable: we forget the blindness that is his, and we take fright, instead of grasping more firmly the sling in our hands. What I mean is this. The "resistance movement" in South Africa has suffered greatly in times of crises from a sudden retreat from principle: a sudden decision that perhaps compromise is possible: that maybe even Dr. Verwoerd's policies have somewhere their advantages. Thus, in the Western Areas Removal Scheme; the Bantu Education Act; the Bantu Authorities Act—there has been ever present the subtle temptation to try and find some way of opposition which will yet not have the appearance and character of opposition. To the natural confusion of many of our people is added this most dire confusion of all: a flight from principle and a retreat to expediency.

"Is there not a cause?" We know there is. We know for one thing, that the conscience of the civilized world is awake to the evils of racialism as never before. We know that South Africa, out of step with every nation in the world, cannot conceivably persist in her present policies without facing economic and political disaster. But, beyond these things, and far more important, we know that our cause is based on an eternal and immutable truth: the inherent dignity and sacredness of human personality. To me, as a Christian and as a Priest of the Church, this is the essential thing: my rock and—to mix metaphors again—my guiding star.

I have seen so much of the cruelty of racialism in the bodies of hungry children and in the fear-haunted eyes of young men and women, that I will never attempt to come to terms with it. I have also

seen so much of the apathy of White South Africa—Christians and non-Christian—in face of racialism, that I will never allow it to sleep if I can force it into wakefulness.

I hope and pray that Congress may rise to its responsibilities which are so great, in a way worthy of the cause it represents. I cannot do so without sacrifice and suffering, of that I am sure. It needs courage: it also needs inspiration. I believe that it will find both.

And in finding them it will discover that Goliath—Racialism—is blundering, foolish and blind. His threats are empty and his actions vain

David will soon stand astride his headless corpse.

At least that is my great desire.

“Is there not a cause?”

The Appeal of the “Keep Father Huddleston in South Africa Committee”

Without wishing to enter into speculation around the reasons for Father Huddleston’s recall to Great Britain, we would like to express our very deep regret at the decision which compels him to leave this country.

Father Huddleston occupies a unique place in South Africa. He has become for us, and doubtless for many other South Africans, a symbol of outstanding Christian courage and selflessness in defence of right and justice, and in promoting the best interest of both Church and people. There is, in this country today, no European who has so successfully and boldly bridged the yawning gap of hostility and fear between white men and black, and developed on both sides of the colour line, a spirit of tolerance, respect and brotherhood between men.

For these reasons, we believe Father Huddleston is more widely loved, respected, and followed than probably any man in the land today. He has, it is true, made enemies; but not by shirking his duty or abandoning his religious beliefs, but by upholding them stoutly and consistently at great personal cost.

We have no wish to challenge the unquestionable authority of the order to which he owes-and gives—his full allegiance. But a great gap will be left in our community by his departure; and it is unlikely that even the most able, devoted or gifted successor will be able generally, to fill that gap. We feel sure that, if the unique position occupied in our hearts by Father Huddleston were understood and appreciated by his superiors in Britain, they would be moved to retract their decision, and leave him here amongst us, where he would so strongly love to be, and where he is so desperately needed.

In the circumstances, therefore, we make public appeal to the Community of the Resurrection, to leave Father Huddleston to work in South Africa for the future well-being of both Church and people. We feel sure that there are many others in this country who will echo our plea.

Chapter 29

Towards A Cultural Boycott of South Africa

by

A. M. Kathrada

The progress towards maturity of a national movement brings with it new problems, new tasks and new issues, often requiring new policies, or rather, precise policies in ever-increasing spheres of life. Whereas a decade ago the national organizations could have been satisfied with a purely political programme, their development in recent years has had an increasing influence and effect on a wider strata of people.

Although there have been occasions in the past when the people's organizations have been called upon to declare their attitudes on questions not dealt with in their programmes, essentially their main interest was restricted to the political field. So that today they find themselves in the position where they have no clearly defined policies towards several important questions. Such a question for instance is the cultural relationship between South Africa and the outside world a question which of late has evoked much interest and some spontaneous action abroad.

In the years since the end of the Second World War our country has been visited by scores of foreign artists—theatre groups, dance and cultural ensembles—and scores more are scheduled to come. While ninety-nine percent of their performances have been restricted to European audiences, a few shows have been organized for the Non-White people. South African cultural groups also have visited foreign lands. There have also been a few token protests on the part of foreign artists against racialism in South Africa. Notable of these was the refusal of Jazz Band leader Ted Heath to come to South Africa and the resolution of the British Musicians' Union.

On both these actions of definite political significance, the national organizations in South Africa have remained silent. Naturally this gives rise to important questions. Should we continue to remain silent? Do we agree with Ted Heath's action, and if so should similar action not be encouraged? If foreign artists do come to South Africa

should we not arrange for them to appear before Non-White audiences? Isn't a greater cultural, sports and economic exchange in line with the international trend for peaceful co-existence?

On these questions three distinct schools of thought seem to be apparent in this country.

Firstly, there are those who are for maintaining the status quo: i.e., foreign artists should continue to come and it is immaterial whether they perform to Non-Whites or not.

Secondly, there are the people who would like to see more and more foreign artists visit this country provided they could be made to undertake to perform for Non-Whites as well. This group falls into line with the attitude taken by the British Musicians' Union, and also, the writer believes, by the Union of Southern African Artists.

The third school of thought maintains that it should be the policy of the progressive movement to work towards an international cultural boycott of South Africa as a protest against racialism.

We have to consider which one of these courses would most contribute towards the progress or enhance the cause of the oppressed people of South Africa.

The first course we could eliminate without any discussion.

Briefly the protagonists of the second course take the stand that:--

- (a) With the very restricted opportunities open to Non-Whites in the field of culture, regular performances by overseas artists would go a long way towards filling the vacuum. We would rather see Dame Sybil Thorndyke even if she appears at the Bantu Men's Social Centre than not see her at all."

- (b) Politically, the movement could benefit immensely if artists of the stature of Sybil Thorndyke could after first-hand experience return to their countries and espouse the cause of oppressed South Africa.
- (c) If artists such as Paul Robeson were to perform in this country it would help to explode the myth of race superiority, and finally
- (d) Being believers in peaceful co-existence between peoples, cultural exchanges between countries would greatly enhance our cause.

The third school of thought, to which the writer subscribes, naturally dismisses the protagonists of the first course. As for the second school, the writer believes that while the arguments advanced are worthy of consideration, they have to be rejected in the light of the peculiar conditions existing in South Africa.

To obviate possible misunderstandings and unnecessary argument it should be clarified at the outset that he believers of the international boycott base their premise on the point of view that at this stage of development international pressure against South Africa's racial policies coupled with the local struggle, will greatly further the cause of freedom. This stand is not to be confused with local questions such as Non-Whites being forced to accept segregation in various walks of South African life. They base their stand primarily on the view that the perpetrators of racialism in this country derive strength and courage from the closeness that they (the racialists) feel to the outer world; indeed from the almost tacit consent and recognition that they receive from particularly the Western countries in the form of cultural and sports contact, economic and military association. The writer believes that racist South Africans must be made to feel more and more that they stand alone in the whole world in their belief of racial superiority. They must be made to feel the pinch of

isolation from the civilized world in the spheres of culture, sports, etc.

When viewing the reasons advanced by the Second school against this background all the merit in their arguments falls away. No freedom loving South African can disagree that South African racialism must be isolated from the world. And the most effective way open at the present time is for the outside world to make known its antagonism to what is happening here.

Let us weight the arguments of the Second school from the point of view of their political value to the freedom struggle. Foreign artists come to South Africa and perform to a few Non-White audiences. Good. Some of them go back to their countries and speak out against racial discrimination and for the people's struggle. Very valuable. But, what impact does all this have on the day-to-day struggle for our people? The few thousand Non-Whites who manage to attend performances rendered by Dame Sybil Thorndyke or Yehudi Menuhin are very impressed. For them it's been the opportunity of a lifetime—absolutely unforgettable. For them there will remain a lasting memory of great cultural figures of distant lands. But as far as the overwhelming majority of the people are concerned, they remain quite unaffected by the visit of these distinguished guests. All right, one in a hundred of these artists goes back and makes statements or appears on public platforms to condemn racial discrimination. This gives rise to a furore in the White press and accusations are leveled about abuse of hospitality, about incompetence to judge a country by a few weeks' visit, etc., etc. But all this is momentary. While they have a good effect, in a few days it is forgotten: life returns to normal and the plight of South Africa once again fades away from people's minds and press columns. All is quiet until there is a repetition and again the same process.

All this is becoming too monotonous. The time has come when we must move forward. The chain of criticism, the pinch to racialist South Africa must become continuous, unending, until they are made to think; until they are made to realize that each unit in society has its responsibilities to the greater whole; until they are made to appreciate the indispensability of inter-dependence.

We are told that artists such as Paul Robeson, Ram Gopal and other Non-White cultural figures would help to explode the myth of racial superiority. We agree entirely. But in the conditions existing in our country such a possibility must remain a dream. Definitely not in the foreseeable future can one imagine Paul Robeson being allowed to come here, or to perform before audiences of Whites and Non-Whites.

Finally, there is the very important question of peaceful co-existence. Non-White South Africans, like the common peoples all over the world, want to live in peace and harmony with other peoples all over the world, want to live in peace and harmony with other peoples. But it is entirely erroneous to use the argument of peaceful co-existence to offset an international cultural boycott. One can talk of promoting co-existence when talking of the French and Russian people or the Chinese and Indian people or for that matter of any people in the world. But as far as South Africa is concerned, here again we have our peculiar conditions. Peaceful co-existence between whom? Between the Soviet people and a minority of the people of South Africa who rule the country and who solely enjoy all the rights to culture, education, etc.? What would be more beneficial politically? An artiste troupe coming to South Africa from the Soviet Union and leaving behind wonderful impressions among a tiny fraction who partake of the country's cultural life? Or the Soviet troupe refusing to come to this country and thereby winning the admiration and gratitude of the overwhelming majority of the peoples?

One cannot just pick on a popular demand of the time and apply it mechanically to any country and to any situation. Of course, everyone would love to see Madame Ulanova or the Janacek Quartet, Yehudi Menuhin and the other great artists of the world. But the times demand a sacrifice in favour of the greater long-term benefit to the cause of the people's struggle. The continued performances by international cultural figures in South Africa will leave behind fine memories for a comparatively few people. The greater majority of the people will remain indifferent. But, let the artists and actors of the world boycott South Africa and thus help further the cause of progress and freedom.

Chapter 30

The Story of Bethal

by

Henry Nxumalo

In order to discover the truth about the way contracts are signed, Mr. Drum himself decided to become a farm recruit. He was soon picked up outside the Pass Office by one of the touts or 'runners' who look out for unemployed Africans, and are paid for each man they collect for the agencies. He was taken to an employment agency, where he

did not, of course, give his real name, Mr. Drum, but adopted the name of GEORGE MAGWAZA. He said he had no pass, and, with many others, we told that he would be given a pass if he signed a contract to go and work out of Johannesburg: this is the normal way of dealing with people without passes. He chose to work on a farm in Springs, and was sent to –'s compound, where he waited nearly a day before he could sign the contract.

When the contract came to be signed the interpreter read out a small part of the contract to a number of recruits together, while the attesting officer held a pencil over the contract. No one asked the age of any of the recruits (they should have consent of parents if under eighteen), and Mr. Drum was told nothing about whether his pay would be monthly or deferred, what food he was entitled to, or what length of shift he would work.

N A D African Clerk (calling roll of everyone on the contract sheet): You're going to work on a farm in the Middleburg district: you're on a six months' contract. You will be paid £3 a month, plus food and quarters. When you leave here you will be given an advance of 5s. for pocket money, 10s. 5d. for food, and 14s. 5d. for train fare. The total amount is £1 9s. 5 d. and this amount will be deducted from your first month's wages. Have you got that?

The above Contract of Service was read aloud, interpreted and fully explained to the abovementioned Natives, who acknowledged that they understood the same and voluntarily affixed their signatures (or marks) thereto in my presence, and in the presence of.....Labour Agent, acting on behalf of.....

All additions, erasures and alterations have been signed by me.

The provisions of the Native Service Contract Act, 1932, have been complied with.

The consent of parents or guardians of Natives aged between sixteen and eighteen years recruited for agricultural purposes has been produced to me.

The number of Natives attested on this Contract Sheet is.....

PLACE.....

DATE..... ATTESTING OFFICER

Mr. Drum and other recruits: Yes.

Clerk: You will now proceed to touch the pencil.

Mr. Drum: But I was told before that I was going to be sent to a farm in Springs. Why am I now going to Middleburg?

Clerk: I'm telling you where you're going, according to your contract sheet, and nothing else.

So Mr. Drum refused to touch the pencil when he reached the attesting officer, and was told to wait outside for his pass.

The other recruits then ran past the attesting officer, each holding the pencil for a moment, which was not even touching the paper.

Mr. Drum, who can read and write English, had no opportunity either to sign his name or read the contract—but on his way out, he succeeded in obtaining a contract. As a result of holding a pencil for a second (50 recruits were attested in a few minutes), the recruits were considered to be bound to a contract. But in fact the contract had not been signed and had not been fully understood. So it seems that none

of the contracts 'signed' in this way are valid at all (Native Labor Regulation Act of 1911, as amended 1949).

To find out what happened after the contracts had been signed, Mr. Drum went to Bethal to obtain the facts at first hand. With a good deal of difficulty and sometimes at some risk, Mr. Drum succeeded in talking to a large number of people most closely concerned with farm conditions, and carefully compared and checked the different accounts. Sometimes the farmers themselves were friendly, and at one farm Mr. Drum was presented with a sack of potatoes. Mr. Drum was very careful not to cause any trouble or enmity on the farms, and never tried to influence what people said.

Out of over 50 labourers interviewed on eight farms stretching from Witbank to Kinross, not a single labourer admitted that he was satisfied with the conditions. Those who did not express this view refused to comment altogether, for fear that they might be victimized.

Two thirds of those consulted said they were sent to Bethal under false pretences: they were wither promised soft jobs in Johannesburg or on dairies in the Springs district, but they subsequently found themselves being made to alight at Bethal Station and told they were going to work there.

A man from Nyasaland described how the touts employed by a certain labour agency in his country worked. There was a certain boundary which many people crossed in order to get to the Union. The touts lay in wait there to intercept, and when they saw one trying to cross the area they immediately pounced upon him and threatened him with arrest for trespass if he did not accept the offer of a contract to work in South Africa as a waiter. The victim only realized on arriving in the Union that he had been tricked and contracted to work on a farm.

Joseph --, who said he was 14 years old, told me he was recruited by X's agency, in the Northern Transvaal to work in a clothing factory at Springs. He was given an advance of 10s. for food and a train ticket, only to discover at Springs that he was going to work on a farm at Bethal at £2 a month.

Mzuzumi—(30) says he was recruited in Natal by Siz' Abafane Employment Agency, given a 10s. advance and told he would work in Johannesburg. He had no pass then and accepted the six months' contract as a solution to his problem. Siz' Abafane's guide got their party to alight at Bethal Station in the dead of night and told them that is where they were going to work.

The pay on the farms is between £2 and £3 a month, and the food consists mainly of porridge, with meat sometimes once a week, if that.

Months are calculated on the basis of 30 full working shifts, excluding non-working days such as Sundays and public holidays, and the wages for the first month are spent in repaying train fares and money advanced to the labourers as a loan on recruitment.

For example, R—F—(60), employed on the farm of Mr. B., was recruited by Z's Agency, of Johannesburg. He earns £3 a month and has a wife and four children to support at home.

His fare to Johannesburg was £6s. 11d., and his whole wages for the first month repaid this sum. He will have £15 3s. 1 d. to his credit at the end of his six months' contract. But if he decides to return home he will be minus another £2 16s. 11d. when he reaches Louis Trichardt, which means that he will be left with £12 6s. 2 d. in cash, or even less should he ask for tobacco or clothes on credit from his employer before that time, to say nothing of what he will spend on his journey home. And that half a year's work.

Labourers admitted that farmers are always willing to give them credit when their clothes give in, and although few farmers have their own shops, labourers told Mr. Drum that farmers keep large supplies of khaki clothes which they sell to their labourers on credit at the exorbitant price of £12s, a shirt and £2 10s. a pair of trousers. Older men prefer to wear sacks in which holes have been cut for head and arms, and sleep on sacks instead of blankets rather than incur more debt.

Very often the boss boys, themselves Africans, are tough and ruthless with the labourers, for if they are not they lose their jobs. Most boss boys are old employees who have acquired the important status of permanent squatters on the farms, where they live with their families and repay the farmer by working for him free of charge. They enjoy certain facilities, such as the use of a horse when they supervise the labourers.

At Bethal Hospital I found Casbert Tutje, from Cetani, Cape Province, who together with three other friends, was also recruited by Siz' Abafane Agency in Natal.

From there they were sent to the farm of Mr. X at Bethal, to work as labourers at £3 a month each. This happened in November, 1950.

The foursome was invited by a family squatting on the farm to a beer drinking party on Christmas Day, but, as the farmer would not grant them permission to attend, they left the compound without leave that morning. The boss boy had left the compound gate open.

The farmer sent for them and they were severely punished, then handed over to the police. They were brought before the Court on a charge of desertion and sentenced to two months each. The farmer

then arranged that their terms of imprisonment be served on his farm, where they were again thrashed by the boss boys severely.

It was in the course of this that Casbert sustained serious internal injuries which resulted in his being admitted to hospital from time to time. He gradually became weak and sickly, and spent more of his time lying in the hospital than working on the farm. Before his contract expired in 1951 the doctor advised that he was unfit for farm work and should be sent home.

The farmer refused to pay Casbert his wages, however, stating that he had not completed his contract and still owed money for an overall purchased on credit; he would not give him his pass either. Casbert was given the sum of 10s. for food and told to leave the farm. And when he reported the matter to the Native Commissioner he was told that nothing could be done about it. His next alternative was to seek employment on another farm, with a view to obtaining a new pass and getting money to pay for his fare home.

Here, to, he had to sign another contract. He is not home yet. He has been a patient at Bethal Hospital since September, 1951, and is now diagnosed as a pulmonary TB case with little hope of recovery. He still has the new contract to complete.

Another farm in the Bethal area is probably the only one with a compound modeled on the same lines as a Reef mine compound; with the exception that it is dirtier.

A unique feature of it is that it has its own private hospital, a crowded, dirty, small brick building with iron beds and sick labourers lying on mattresses without blankets and vice versa. They sleep in their dirty working clothes, and I was told by the man in charge, P—T--, that the men are sent to Bethal Hospital if they do not improve after receiving treatment from a local doctor. P—has been

working on the farm for 32 years and is better known by the name of 'doctor.' He is probably the best-paid African farm labourer: he earns £8 plus a bag of mealie meal a month, and has his family living with him on the farm. He told me that his treatment for sick farm labourers consisted mainly of regular doses of Epsom salts.

Next to the 'hospital' is the compound and the kitchen. Besides Emmanuel, the cook was the only other person wearing boots on the premises, the others being bare-footed. But the cooks' clothes were as filthy with grease as those of an oil engine fitter who has not changed his overalls for many months. The filth shone at a distance.

The men ate out of improvised zinc containers which they made themselves. One labourer told me that he could not afford to buy himself a proper dish at that stage of his contract; but this was an improvement on what I saw on some farms at lunch-time, where the labourers not only wore sacks but ate on them.

I met the European in charge of the farm on my second visit, but he refused to allow Mr. Drum to take pictures of the compound and stated that I had erred by asking his men about working conditions on the farm on my visit there, without his permission. He said he did not want a repetition of what Michael Scott did.

People living in Bethal tell labourers who died of cold while deserting or simply while living in the compounds, and there are farmers who, probably because of their ruthlessness or otherwise, are known by such names as Mabulala (the Killer) and Fake Futheni (Hit Him in the Marrow), and so on.

Most of the compounds I saw look much like jails. They have high walls, they are dirty and are often so closely attached to a cattle kraal that the labourers breathe the same air as the cattle at night. Some labourers told Mr. Drum that they are locked in at night.

There are a few private schools on farms at Bethal, but the biggest school in the area is the Bethal United High and Senior School at Bethal Location, which has an enrollment of over 1,300 children.

Mr. Wycliffe Khayiana, the principal, who identifies himself with the hardships and sufferings of the local community, told me that the so-called Trek Pass system was dealing a bad blow to the education of the children. When squatters are made to vacate a farm they take their children with them; quite often this happens in the middle of the school term. Over 100 children a year leave school in this way, either during the first term in the year or before the examinations at the end of the year. Not only is the schooling span of the children shortened by this, but other children who would benefit by attending school and are kept out of it because of lack of space are made to suffer unnecessarily.

In an endeavor to have at least one out of three children educated, a Bethal widow recently moved on to a farm for the first time with only two children, leaving the other at a boarding school. But the farmer found out about him when he was home on holiday, and that was the end of his school career—he was made to work on the farm too.

Last December the Bethal branch of the African National Congress invited Dr. H.F. Verwoerd, Minister of Native Affairs, to visit the area in connection with the deteriorating position of the African farm labourers. The Minister replied through his private secretary that he was unable to do that before the present parliamentary session; at any rate, he was kept fully informed on matters in the Bethal area, and the information at his disposal was the same as that given by the chiefs who recently visited the area, namely, that the workers were 'generally well treated by their employers, and had to real grievances.'

But Congress officials deny all knowledge of these chiefs and their visit to Bethal, and hardly anyone at Bethal knew anything about them.

We wish to emphasize that while the Industrial Revolution is causing as much chaos in South Africa as it caused in 19th Century Europe no lessons have been learnt from the industrial past whatever. The same abuse of labour is repeated in the same style.

Farm prisons and contracted labour by-pass the normal need to attract men by improved working conditions and higher wages. They depend upon compulsion, no persuasion.

Most men who touch the pencil for a farm contract are hungry, ignorant and urgently in need of work. Once they have touched the pencil they have handed themselves over to an unknown area under largely unknown conditions.

It is obvious that care has been taken by the authorities to protect these people and equally plain that they have failed. For once men have 'signed' themselves away, itself often a trick, they are taken to an isolated farm where they are at the mercy of the farmer and his boss boys; brought back by the police if they run away; and liable to every abuse with no chance of being able to protect themselves.

We ask, when farm life is so often satisfactory, what are the conditions which have given Bethal so fearful and exceptional a history—and we reply: it is the system, the farm contract system that has had so vile a result.

Chapter 31

The South African Police

by

Harry Bloom

Chapter 32

The Stars of Jazz

by

Todd Matshikiza

The location slept peacefully all night till just after midnight. AT something like twenty past midnight the residents began to shift uneasily in their beds because the sound of the church bell at the Moravian Mission in Scanlan Street was clanging loud. Loud. As loud as any sound is heard at that time of night when everything else is quiet. The sound of the Moravian Church bell might not have been disturbing but for two reasons. First, it was ringing at that time of night, which might have meant, as the custom is still understood today in most churches, that someone had passed away at that hour. A well-known church-attending resident had died. In that case the residents wake up, sit up and think up all those things that the dead one meant or didn't mean during life A wretch, a coon or a regular fool. A king, a kong or "God what a loss."

Second, the sound of that bell was disturbing anytime. It was a large bell with a huge crack in its side. The crack made the bell sound like so much water taking a gurgle. Grong. Grong. Grong. And d'you know who was ringing the bell? GASHE. Gashe, the jazz organist with a crazy shriek across his brain. He'd just returned from a jazz session in the location. Gashe. We called him "Boet Gashe" in 1928 because he was older than we were, but more so because he used to

delight in wearing hideous masks and frightening us from our parents' laps at the concerts if he wasn't ringing his mischievous midnight bells. But if he had an all-night session playing jazz organ at the beer-brewing and pleasure-soaked west end of Queenstown location, then the church concerts fared well.

He was the only jazz organist. No pianos in those days. His organ was carted on a donkey truck from house, and wherever it moved, the people went. Queenstown was happily situated for Gashe because every train bearing miners ("mine boys" in South African English) between the Eastern Cape and Johannesburg stopped there overnight. And the miners' veins were full with jazz, as they were with women, and they got both at Gashe's jazz sessions. We looked upon the women Handjievola, Nomadabi, Annatjie, Nodoli and others with awe. Us kids knew those women's names weren't clean, though we never knew why. But we knew they were the women that danced where Gashe played.

Gashe's dances were called "I-Tswari" where you paid 3d. at the door and entered into a dingy, stuffy room where the dust from the dancers' feet smothered the solitary paraffin lamp which flickered in the shadows of dancing partners who could hardly see or didn't know each other. The hostess hunched next to a four-gallon tin of beer in the corner. She sold jam tins full at 6d. a gulp and held her hand open for another 1s. if the client wanted to go into the room behind the curtain. But actually one saw nothing in that dust. Not even Gashe, who was bent over his organ in one corner, thumping the rhythm from the pedals with his feet, which were also feeding the organ with air; choking the organ with persistent chords in the right hand, and improvising for an effective melody with his left hand. He would call in the aid of a cuestick to hold down a harmonic note, usually the tonic (doh) or the dominant (soh), both of which persist in African music, and you saw the delirious effect of perpetual motion. Perpetual motion. Perpetual motion in a musty hold where man

makes friends without restraint. Where Gashe plays “I-Tswari” — a music consisting of three chords fighting themselves infinitely over four, five or six hours each night, punctuated only by murmurs and groans of deep satisfaction. Finished only when Gashe stops for a draught of beer, which is part of his pay.

In the morning, the men have pawned their papers, passes and purses. They’ve had their fun, and the women too. And Gashe trucks his organ to the next “Tswari.”

Gashe moved from Queenstown to explore the Golden City. He found

Chapter 33

What The South African Negro Reads And Writes

by

Ezekiel Mphahlele

In a renascent continent like Africa, it should be interesting to probe into the stuff that the South African Negro reads and writes.

There are about 3,000,000 Negroes living in the towns and cities of South Africa, 3,000,000 in the <reserves> (reserved rural areas) and another three million on white farms as labour tenants and contract labourers. So when we speak of the material that Africans write and

read, we are thinking of it mostly within the circle of the three million urbanized people and the smaller section of literate peasantry in the reserves. Farm labourers are discounted. In the towns and the cities we are thinking of the school teacher, the pupil, the literate factory worker, the literate clerk and messenger, who are increasing in number. In the rural areas, because of the constant movement of people between the reserves and the cities, Africans there are becoming more and more literate, although at a slow rate.

Although the percentage of literacy among negroes is not high generally there is emerging a most significant proletariat readership and literary activity.

First, what do our people read? For many years missionary church denominations have produced sectional religious newspapers, mostly in vernacular languages. With the attainment of higher educational standards and the rapid process of urbanization, the Negro has to a large extent shaken off missionary literature. As far back as seventy years ago a few Africans in the Cape Province struck out on their own to establish a weekly newspaper. They were prompted by the fact that they had been compelled to write certain things and not others (pertaining to politics) for missionary papers.

With the passage of time, discriminatory laws were piling up against Africans, and they were finding missionary teaching inadequate. Education was regarded as an economic weapon: you learned how to read and write because you had to work for a white man and had to understand his instructions. Because our parents were earning too little (average of £8 per month), they could not maintain you in school, and you had to leave school after four years—to work.

The same conditions prevail today. But there is the other plan on which the African has already begun to assess the value of education—the cultural, as distinct from the basic economic. The

most elementary kind of education is enough to set a spark that will put the whole human personality aflame, and start it in restless pursuit of further knowledge through the medium of the printed word. On both planes, Negro readership is assuming more and more important dimensions. But it is primarily proletariat. A Negro middle class in South Africa is still a myth in terms of readership. The Negro intellectual is among the poorest members of our society. If he does not take a teacher's course--the short cut to a means of livelihood,--he must be lucky enough to afford a medical or law profession. Otherwise, he is not wanted in the city. The white man regards him with suspicion; the higher his educational standard is, the less likely he is to get a job. The white man thinks the educated African is always "getting in the way".

It is from the ranks of the proletariat that you find hundreds of workers aspiring towards a literature that is commonly regarded as the privilege of the middle class. The Negro has become an avid reader of newspapers and periodicals, for local politics and international affairs and events. He wants to know a number of things, and that quickly. He laps up news material with an ever-burning thirst, because few Negroes have the opportunity of a decent schooling.

The last decade has seen the emergence of a number of magazines controlled by European enterprise (there is no independent Negro press. One independent Cape Coloured weekly exists in the Cape Peninsula). The white businessman could not have "cashed in" at a more opportune moment to exploit the ever-growing market. The proprietors have set arbitrary standards for the content of their magazines which they would like to believe will sell well. Sex, crime and love are some of the dominant features, presented often in semi-American slang, semi-literary English, in bright effervescent style that is a mixture of imitation and experimentation.

Outside these features, to take *African Drum*, a Johannesburg magazine, as an example, there are the short story, pen portraits of personalities, and political stories, written in good literary style. That has, however, not yet struck a distinctive note. Although this and other journals are exclusively for Negro and Coloured readership, they employ a white editor with an African editorial staff and reporters. *Drum* enjoys the biggest sales in Africa.

Then there is a good deal of cheap American and British fiction that finds favour with city workers. This includes crime and detective fiction (the most popular) like Peter Cheyney's, Mickey Spillane's, James Hadley Chase's. This and other brands of adventure fiction actually eclipse the love story. In this the African probably shares his preferences with the other workers of the world. Africans who have had the good luck to go up to secondary school and have been introduced to the classics, have a great love for Shakespeare, Charles Dickens, Dostolevsky, Gorky, and Edgar Allan Poe. They are loved for their robust characters and deep humanity, for the robust humour and for the paths and suffering that are so much a mirror of our own social set-up in South Africa. What is more, the Negro sees a bigness in these writers that goes beyond themselves and his frustration. The conflict between good and evil with which they are pre-occupied assumes in these writers immense proportions—larger than life. This is a land of violence and darkness, and Poe, as well as the others, fit into this mood, just as crime fiction, in some way effects a crude kind of catharsis.

Books that treat of contemporary South African life with a healthy perspective find a particularly soft spot in the Negro: books like Peter Abraham's, Alan Paton's and Harry Bloom's.

Statistics taken from eight municipal libraries in Johannesburg, which are exclusively for use by Negroes, show that over a particular year, the number of fiction books borrowed was 18,497, as against 17,885

non-fiction books. The significance of the small margin between the two figures lies in the fact that the Negro, even after leaving school, continues to thirst for factual knowledge—perhaps to make up for what he could not get at school.

I have here merely given outstanding signposts in the reading habits of the African. Library facilities are appallingly limited. No municipality in the country allows Africans to borrow their city library books or read on the spot. Municipal libraries in African locations house deplorably small collections and the Negro's income does not allow for much "literary luxury"—not even for cheap editions of good literature.

Any writer who seeks guidance from these signposts in determining what he will find himself on slippery ground. Just as in dress and food, popular taste in literature is an elusive element to deal with. Often it can be tyrannical, or tame, or indifferent, or downright crude and vulgar, or just stupid. And so we keep shifting our literary standards, taking up new positions in judging this or that literary work. And more often than not, modes of life determine what we want to read and therefore what we want to write for our readership.

One may get the impression that the reading public is always at the mercy of writers or vice versa. And yet, political, social and economic systems play an important role in deciding what people shall write and read; which, after all, accounts for the link between literature and human existence.

What does the Negro write? Vernacular writings have been confined to school readership up to now. This is a disaster, because school inspectors must advise publishers on any book written in the vernacular on its suitability or otherwise for pupils. If it contains anything that is likely to "Put the reader wise" on the South African political set-up, it cannot be published. And so, writers like Mofolo,

author of *Chaka* (a historical romance), Plaatjie, author of *Mhudi*—to mention only writers who have been translated into Continental languages—limit their literature to harmless if charming romances, versified praises and other lyrical vapourings and love stories. There are about ten other writers who, in spite of themselves, find themselves compelled to prostitute their literary gifts this way. They hardly touch the fringe of the poetry of our social evils and injustices.

Their works are gems for their own sake, “lying in state”, as it were, or standing still like statuettes, if you like. They lack the dynamic force that hits all the planes of our experience—the emotional, physical and intellectual; they are parochial; not because the writers lack force, but because they had to limit their literature to the school market dictated by “educationists” and missionaries, who are part of the ruling class. They do not tell the whole truth about life.

One writer whose Xhosa classic is being translated into English is A.C. Jordaan, a lecturer in African Studies at the University of Cape Town. A liberally translated title of his book is “*The Wrath of the Gods*”. It is a significant departure. It introduces for the first time in the history of Negro fiction writing in South Africa the intellectual element.

The story tells of a young man who is spirited away by a Pandomise clique (belonging to a Pondo tribe) for fear that he will _____ uncle who has usurped his chieftainship. They _____ the district of Alice where he lives in hiding. The word is spread he is dead. At Fort Hare University College, in the same district, he comes in contact with Western culture. During this time the young man falls in love with a girl who is attending school at Lovedale, a missionary institution near Fort Hare. He wants to marry her. Difficulties arise when the clique entices him back to the Pandomise tribe to claim his chieftainship.

His uncle is deposed. The tribe wants the new chief to marry a clan girl. If he insists, as he does, on marrying a Christian, he must take two wives. He gets his way and married the educated girl.

The wife finds it very difficult to conform to tribal customs in dress, code of behaviour, etc., and earns a bad name among the tribe. One day, as her baby plays around the hut, a harmless snake comes and coils itself near the child. The snake is the totem of the tribe, and is believed to be a child of the gods, --a blessed messenger.

The mother finds it and is filled with such horror that she beats it, in spite of the warnings of an old man who is about. She kills it.

The chief finds himself compelled to send his wife away to her home, as the whole tribe feels outraged and in bad odour with the gods. The woman becomes insane. One day she comes upon her son and drowns herself together with him, in a nearby river. The chief also commits suicide in the same fashion.

Jordaan portrays the clash between the two sides of our life—the Western Christian and the traditional. In a sense it is an allegory of the mightier ironic conflict between systems of life that may need each other to create a greater world.

The short story has now become the common medium of the younger African authors who write in English. (There being at least four main language groups spoken among Africans besides English and South African Dutch, most of us write in English so as to teach not only all our language groups but also the outside world.) And what short stories! They teem with kissing men and women whose “eyes hold” while “time stands still”; characters swoon and languish and dissolve in their sentimental tears, and choke in the “smoke raised with the fume of sighs”. The lovers end up sweetly and live happily ever after; and everybody in the story, the writer included, suffocates helplessly

under the tyranny of poetic justice that screams hoarsely in well-known American nation: "crime does not pay!"

The pattern is well known. It has a purely mathematical response: a breathtaking meeting and a sigh; a heartbreak and tears; a solution and happiness. Typical escapist literature that is a poor copy of Hollywood and half-crown thrillers.

There is a parallel to this trend of development—for it *is* a movement—in our music. There is a spate of Negro music "composition" in our country just now that his hatching hundreds of sentimental songs with vernacular love lyrics. They amount to some Americanized argon that fizzles out as soon as it has been conceived by a fevered brain. It has tons and tons of juke box stuff and very few or no traces of our indigenous idiom. Gramophone recording companies are thriving on this kind of music and therefore promoting it.

The one encouraging aspect of our music is that which shows an ingenious combination of indigenous idiom and rhythms with local and contemporary colour and history within the framework of European notation and form. This is to be found in all our music in varying degrees of sensitivity and ability.

In the same way, a small body of African writers are producing short stories an anthology of which would provide anybody with the rich multicoloured drama of Africa. *Drum* magazine, although still conservatively blind to the growing interest of Negro readers in things that have a serious social significance, is doing something to give expression to this talent. There is a deplorable lack of literature about peasants, because those of us who can write are for the most part urbanized or only semi-rural. Besides, owing to a shortage of land and the arid conditions of our rural life, there is very little of what one can call a stable peasantry. However, race relations on

white people's farms and the instability of life here and in the reserves afford a vast amount of material for fiction writing. Still this proletariat writing is very important for Africa. It tells the story of the violence, the strength and weakness, the laughter and tears, the enigma of our continent. We are still going to get more and more of it.

The story of Africa has not been told yet. The white man has tried to tell it, using black and white colours. But within the present social structure of South Africa, where intimate contact between black and white is often sinful, the white man has failed to tell the story adequately. To mention only the four first-rank writers ; (Olive Schreiner) in spite of her strong sense of justice regarded the non-white as part of the setting, passive and waiting for some individual philanthropy. William Plomeri was so cynical about white civilization that he romanticized and idealized African character from a superficial knowledge of it. Sarah Gertrude Millin (of *God's Stepchildren* fame) regarded her Hottentot and half-caste characters as groveling, helpless victims of a fate: accidental or self-imposed mixed marriages. Alan Platon, sentimentalized his black characters in order to prove the effectiveness of a liberal theory that he posed. Peter Abrahams has done his bit, but he has now adopted another climate.

Our intelligentsia have always been alive to the misrepresentation of our thoughts and feelings to the outside world by such white writers as Stuart Cloete. They have begun to realize that the real story of Africa will not be found in the sentimental puddles of Los Angeles; the luxury flats of London; the gambling and fashion houses of Paris; the bazaars of Cairo or Delhi; not even in the misty world of Rider Haggard's or John Buchan's lost cities and kingdoms and noble savages; or in the schoolboy adventure yarns or missionary case histories or pulpit morals.

It is found in our shanty towns; our dark cities; our hole-filled and squalid streets; living conditions not very different from those of Gorky's describes so vividly; in our longings, frustrations, hopes, loves and hates.

The intellectual element is vital in this context. What does the black man think about the scheme of things, his position in the polity? He has become disillusioned in missionary teaching. For three centuries the white man has been worried about evangelizing and teaching the African and not bothered an iota about learning from him. When the black man thinks about the scheme of things and his place in it, he begins to realize that a number of evils have for a long time been justified on "moral" grounds. The rest of society has taken its cue from the ruling class, and its organization, its newspapers, its literature have adopted corrupt political systems as morally acceptable.

The writer, however, refused to be told what to write by any political clique. He finds he is too close to the situation to write calmly, and too close not to be involved and entangled in its barbed coils. There's the rub. After all, bitterness is not a healthy state of mind and feeling to revel in. It is just as painful as, and even more dangerous than, chafing chains. You can cure a physical wound; it is not so easy to cure the malady of bitterness—and its after-effects.

These are the things that often bedevil Negro writing. The extreme opposite of overwhelming bitterness is the kind of escapism which produces love, sex and crime literature. Between the two extremes, the Negro writer is trying to find a way. He recognizes two planes of truth: absolute (or ultimate truth), and truth that lives in an historical context. The former does not interest him: he has heard historical truth, he tried to seek, through his writings, beauty in man, that thing in man which has permanence and stands the test of political change. And so, while his literature touches the chords of a brutal past and

present, he tried to direct a searching gaze into the misty but hopeful future.

Chapter 34

Dolly Rathebe

by

Can Themba

The first and most exciting man in my life, dear Can, was my father. I can't imagine any man having a greater influence on me. I simply worshipped the man, but, like all other things considers sacred, he didn't last long. After his death, men didn't seem the same to me; they seem to have lost that manly tang, that rough, tough masculinity that makes men so adorable. Nowadays, men have become catty, peevish, gossipy and mean; women haven taken to wearing pants. So say 26-year-old Dolly Rathebe, just about Africa's most famous and exciting woman torchsinger. *And yet she is not Dolly Rathebe at all.* She was born Josephine Malatsi. That's her real name.

When Dolly was still at school she had a friend whose name was Dolly Rathbe. Our Dolly loved her so much that she just took over her name and called herself Dolly Rathebe. And that is how the world came to know her. This Dolly Rathebe—the real one—is none other than Eileen Dolly Rathebe, the daughter of Mr. J. R. Rathebe. She later went to Fort Hare, where she won the B.Sc. degree. She is now married to medical student Edward Makbene, who is studying at Witwatersand University. The film star Dolly Rathebe just took over her friend's name for the fun of it. But back of it all was the uncertainty Dolly felt about conditions at home. Things were beginning to bust up.

And at school Dolly was a tomboy. (But she was fond of boys!) She looked at life from the male point of view and seemed to have a quarrel with her Maker for creating her female. At one time the reverend father of St. Cyprian's, Sophiatown, where Dolly schooled, wanted someone to go u the tower and release the hammer of the bell that had got caught. Without hesitation Dolly clambered up the tower and loosened the hammer. The boys still talk of the "bird's eye view" they got on that occasion.

But she was smart. Always trim and neatly dressed, she looked as if she came from a very good and decent home. Suddenly, however,

her parents died within a short time of each other, and Dolly had to face a hard, cruel world alone. She discovered that she had a fairly good voice, mellow and husky and she toyed with the idea of show business. First she started with that old theatre of African jazz, the Street. At that time Sophiatown was different from what it is now. It looked more or less like a country dorp. People were still planting peach and apricot trees in their backyards. In fact, one of Dolly's great pastimes was to pinch peaches from the backyards of other people. And when she and her young friends had made a good haul they would go to Makouviei—a waste dump just outside Sophiatown, near Waterval—make a feast of it, and start jitterbugging. Jitterbug held the place then that is held by jive now. They would hop around and kick their legs out to the rhythm of some catchy tune. It is about his time that Dolly discovered that she had a way of stitching a tune to the rhythm of their dancing. Of course, nobody at that time thought that Dolly had the voice to coo the blues through the hearts of a thousand stage-goers. To her friends she was just a boyish little kid who talked gruffly and sang just as gruffly the hits that went by.

But all agree that she was a naughty child, “very, very impossible,” as one of her teachers describes her. She was fond of pulling chairs from under other children, putting nails or drawing pins on their sitting places, attaching “Kick Me” notices to their behinds and she got a great thrill from watching their pained reactions. Still, at this time she did not consider boys as lovers. She thought of them and treated them as pals. Oddly enough, she rather liked them. She liked their rough-riding, rollicking sense of fun. She gamboled with them, pushed them around, got pushed around, played the African version of hide-and-seek called Blikmampatte with them.

Somehow in this wild young life she met Jeff. He was the direct opposite to Dolly. Quiet, dignified, halting of speech, shy, studious, well-shaved. But they fell in love. That was Dolly's earliest crush. She loved him with a wild, reckless abandon. “Jeff had something, Can.

He represented everything that in my secret moments I dreamed, hoped, yearned to become. I should have known that I wasn't made like that. For me life has always been too raw, too rough, too full of fun and trigger-quick happiness. And I have little time for gushing, sentimental spurts in human affairs. I have learned early enough to be tough and grabbling about the things I want from life. But Jeff. . . Jeff. . . dearest Jeff. . .

Unfortunately Jeff was just a flitting lightning flash. Sophiatown has never been a comfortable home for sweet-easy love affairs. The strong man filibuster met Dolly as she was going home from _____

For a time it was thrilling to be a strong-man's moll. The other girls envied her, the other men laid off, and she could go to shows and movies when she liked, unmolested, uninterfered with. But too soon it began to pull. Dolly discovered that many people she would have liked to accept her began to look askance at her. It wasn't quite the thing to be known as a gangster's girl. Moreover, Hasie was beginning to become jealously possessive. She couldn't even talk to other men, and Dolly who loved life and the dynamics of vital men, started to feel stifled. But it wasn't easy to break away from a strong-man, least of all a touchy guy like Hasie.

It had to take death—swift, brutal bloody death—to slit the unhappy love affair. Like all strong-men, Hasie had made many enemies. One afternoon he went with a handful of friends of Alexandra on a nice-time spree. They had more than a couple of drinks and Hasie started throwing his weight around. That gave his enemies just the break they wanted. They staged a quarrel and a fight broke out. Hasie got stabbed and died even before he got back home. That released Dolly from her affair with him.

There were, however, many other young love-lorn lads who were gasping for Dolly in secret anguish. But they didn't quite have the guts to go up to her and declare their hearts to her Allison Mhlongo, lately a respectable teacher in the now dead S t. Peter's Secondary School, Rosettenville, in Johannesburg, has once lamented to me: "The trouble with Dolly Rathebe at this prank-playing stage of her life is that she was an

Chapter 35

The Africanists And The Congress

by

Dan Tloome

[In the first of a series of articles Dan Tloome discusses the "inverted racialism" of the Africanists, their use of the "Big Lie" and the charge that 'the Congress of Democrats dominates and controls the African National Congress.']

Two leaders of the "Africanist" sect have recently been expelled from the African National Congress. Congress membership has, on the whole, warmly welcomed these expulsions, feeling that it was high time something was done to draw the line between legitimate criticism and open disruption. Some people, however, may feel that Congress should be more tolerant of dissidents. These people may change their minds if they consider what the Africanists themselves actually have to say.

I have before me a copy of "The Africanist" for June/July 1958 which must be presumed to put forward the official views of this sect. Insofar as they have views and arguments, of course, these must be met fairly and reasonably discussed. *The whole tone and content of "The Africanist", however, makes it impossible to deal with their arguments calmly and dispassionately, for the thing is saturated from cover to cover with the most venomous abuse and slander.*

From three pages of "The Africanist", I select the following terms used to describe the present leadership of the African National Congress:

"Lackeys of foreign ideologicities (sic); "discreated" (sic); "purblind" — (p. 11)

"Stooges"; "faithful servants of white dominion"; "robots and megaphones" — (p. 12)

"A careerist clique"; "hirelings"; "cranks and touts of white liberals" — (p. 13).

The Congress of Democrats is politely described as the "Curse of Democracy", and "New Age" as its "business journal" (p. 1).

The fact that the leaders against whom they direct these unbridled allegations are in the front-line of fire of Nationalist Party repression; that most of them have for the past eighteen months, as a direct result of their fight for African freedom, been facing the most serious of charges in the treason trial; that their courage and dignity in this trial have won them the admiration and respect of most of South Africa and indeed the whole world; that they have proved in deeds and not in words their high-minded devotion to their principles, sacrificing their careers and liberty, risking their all—these things mean nothing to the scribes of "The Africanist", hiding safely behind a screen of anonymity.

The Big Lie

Have the Africanists anything to offer besides cheap and vulgar abuse of the Congress leaders? Yes, they have lies. Big lies and little lies, lies of a truly breathtaking audacity.

They seem to have studied Hitler's dictum that no matter how far-fetched the lie you tell—the bigger lie said, the better—if you only repeat it loud enough and often enough, people will begin to accept it for truth.

The biggest and favourite lie of "The Africanist" repeated over and over ad nauseum in this issue, is that the African National Congress is not an independent body; that its policy is decided by others, and specifically, "that C.O.D. controls and dominates the A.N.C." the charge is made, with varying degrees of scurrility, throughout the magazine. It is, in fact, the main propaganda theme of the Africanist group, their trademark and slogan.

The first thing to be said about it is that it is utterly and demonstrably false.

For many years now, the African National Congress has as everybody knows, adopted the practice of joining forces with other organizations in struggles and campaigns of common concern. Even before the famous "Xuma-Dado Pact" of 1946, Congress, especially in the Transvaal, had been cooperating on specific issues with other organizations. One recalls the anti-pass campaign; the founding conference of the African Mine Workers' Union, and the great VE Day demonstration in Johannesburg. With June 26, 1950, and then the Defiance Campaign of 1952, planned and undertaken jointly with the S.A. Indian Congress, the A.N.C. took a big step forward in building a united front. Some older and more conservative Congressites went

into the venture with misgivings, but most of these were overcome by the brilliant success of the Campaign itself. (Even "The Africanist" is compelled to acknowledge this fact. "The stocks of the A.N.C. skyrocketed," it writes. "A disciplined grim struggle was carried on . . .")

Alliance

It is important to understand the reasons both for these misgivings and why they were overcome.

The African liberation movement had never lacked its well-intentioned advisers among non-members, and especially among Europeans. They flourished among liberal circles, in the Race Relations Institute, Joint Councils, "Natives Representatives" and so on. Their advice was always the same: they counseled "patience", "restraint", "moderation" — in other words, a "hamba kahle" policy. Africans noticed that those of their leaders who were much influenced by these "friends of the Natives" were always on the Right in any discussions about action, over-cautious, pouring cold water on militancy. Not unnaturally, militant Congressmen were justifiably suspicious of these outside influences. They demanded that Congress should be a fully independent body, whose members should have the sole right to lay down policy for the organization. And this was an absolutely correct and healthy demand.

But there was also another, far from healthy, element that crept in.

The ruling circles in this country preach a doctrine, open or concealed, of some sort of clash of fundamental interests between the various nationalities of our country. This racialist doctrine is variously known as "preserving White civilization", "segregation", "trusteeship" or "apartheid." It is, basically, and in the last analysis, a thoroughly false and mischievous ideology. It serves not only to maintain the African and other non-White peoples in servitude and

oppression, but also to cheat and deceive the majority of the Whites themselves, blinding them to their real long-term interests, and turning them, for the sake of ephemeral privileges, into tools of the big moneyed interests and cheapjack politicians who really run the country.

Inverted Racialism

Now some Africans swallow this fake theory, hook, line and sinker. Even when they emancipate their minds to the extent of joining Congress, they still cannot free themselves of the racist ideology of "White South Africa." All they do is modify it, turn it upside down. They continue to accept the phony categories, "White" and "Black".

And so these upside-down racials are only able to think of replacing "White domination" with "Black domination." Their vision does not extend to a South Africa freed altogether from the curse of racialism, where no political significance or legal differentiation attaches to the nationality or origin of those citizens who make up the citizens of South Africa. They think of Congress as a body hostile to all non-Africans. Hence, to such people, the mere idea of Congress co-operating with other, non-African, organizations is absurd, even treacherous.

They Got Out

When Congress began its new course of co-operating on an equal basis, first with the S.A.I.C., and later with other organizations as well, many of those who had at first been wary of such alliances out of fear that this would compromise the independence of the A.N.C., discovered that their fears were groundless. That where people work together for the same objectives, on a basis of mutual respect and confidence, a fraternity grows up which has no room for unworthy thoughts of "domination", or the one "using" the other. With a great

common goal, and a bitter common foe, all contributions and constructive suggestions are welcome no matter from whom they come.

As for those who opposed “on principle” (the racist principle) all co-operation between the A.N.C. and democratic groups of non-Africans, many of them got out of Congress altogether to form breakaway and splinter groups like the so-called “National-minded bloc”. And in so doing, they forfeited all respect and following among the masses of African people.

For, with their sound political instinct, the ordinary African working people show a far higher maturity than the parlour politicians and shebeen intellectuals. *The people know what they want—freedom, equality, a living wage—and they understand perfectly well that if people of Indian, Coloured or European origin are prepared to come forward, honestly and without reservations, as allies in the struggle for these things, such friendship must be welcomed with both hands.*

The people have endorsed and confirmed the course of the African National Congress of building a democratic alliance, a united front of militant struggle against apartheid and “White baasskap.” The proof is that never before in its history has Congress enjoyed such mass support and status as it has during the past decade in which that alliance has been built. Those politicians who stood for a policy of narrow racialism and isolationism, whether in the so-called “national-minded bloc”, or the “Bantu Congress”, or the present “Africanists” have without exception been repudiated and rejected by the people. And even “The Africanist” pays unwilling tribute to this fact. Although practically every page shouts that the Congress leadership is “discredited”, have “lost the confidence of the people” etc., etc., the Editorial grumbles that “the African masses *most of them blind followers of the present leadership* defended their programme.”

A European Organization

There have been many attempts in the past to build up a common front of the oppressed people of our country, to win freedom and equality: one notable effort was the “Non-European United Front” which, led by Dr. Dadoo and others, flourished in the late thirties.

When in the course of the Defiance Campaign the alliance between the major organizations of the African and Indian people was cemented in common endeavour and sacrifice, it seemed that this concept, the dream for many years of the best and clearest political thinkers in the country, had come far towards realization. True, an important element was missing. A major section of the oppressed population, the Coloured people—through individuals amongst them had volunteered—was lacking from the united front. Their oldest organization, the A.P.O., had been wrecked from top to bottom by Coloured counterparts of the Africanists (who would do the same to Congress if they every got the chance to seize control of it.) No Coloured organization existed apart from the arrogant little clique associated with “The Torch” newspaper, whose “boycott everything” policy proved in practice to mean only boycotting the Congress movement and every struggle it initiated.

And—what about the Europeans? Many had expressed their solidarity and admiration during the defiance campaign. Although without any organization which could enroll them as disciplined volunteers, a few such as Patrick Duncan and Betty du Toit, had actually been jailed as defiers. How did they fit into the picture?

It was here that the leaders of the African National Congress displayed a statesmanship and political wisdom rising far above the narrow race-colour confines in which official South Africa seeks to imprison our thinking. *This was not a clash of races, they declared, but a clash of principle.* The Nationalist and United Parties declared that

“White Supremacy” was in the interests of that section of our population (the second largest in the country) which is of European descent and they tried to give substance to this thesis by granting them various concessions and privileges. But in fact it was a lie. No nation or group which oppresses others can ever itself be free—or as Olive Schreiner put it, you cannot hold a man down in a witch without getting down in there with him. “White South Africa” was as much the prisoner of the Baasskap State as anyone else—and suffered a good deal more moral degradation than the unfortunate victims. *The Congress aim of equality was in the true and fundamental interests of the Europeans, as well as of the Non-European majority.*

What was needed then, was an organization which would have the will and the courage to go forth and preach these basic if unpopular home truths among the Europeans themselves: an organization of genuinely democratic Europeans prepared to join as an equal partner in the growing Congress alliance.

Armed with these undeniable conclusions, Congress went ahead to put them into practice. It took the bold and unprecedented step of calling a meeting of Europeans who had expressed their sympathy, and there called upon them to form an organization which would work for the Congress principles of freedom and equality among their own people. One section present at the meeting asked whether Congress insisted on a policy of full equality, or whether it would not be satisfied with, for example, a qualified franchise. They were told by Mr. Tambo, on behalf of the A.N.C., that nothing less than full equality would be acceptable, and they thereupon went their own way—a way which need not concern us here, as it is irrelevant to this article.

The remainder of those present declared their unqualified support for the policy of the African National Congress. And

they went ahead to form the organization now known as the Congress of Democrats.

Such was the genesis of the organization which has become the main target of the Africanists' curses and slanders. It was formed at the instance and on the initiative of the A.N.C. Since its formation it has acted as a loyal partner in the Congress alliance, which has since been joined by the S.A. Coloured Peoples' Organization, and the Congress of Trade Unions. The Congress of Democrats has campaigned among Europeans on every major issue affecting the African people—group areas and Western Areas removal, bus boycotts, passes for women, higher wages and a host of others, a hard and often thankless task. Though a small organization, it has pulled its weight in every Congress campaign. At present many leaders of the Congress of Democrats are sitting, side by side with their colleagues of the sister organizations, in the treason court.

At no time has the Congress of Democrats, or any other partner in the alliance, sought to impose its will on the sister organizations. There is an unwritten law in the alliance—that none of the allies should intervene in the internal affairs of the others. And at no time as the Congress of Democrats, or any other partner, broken this law.

So much the, for the general allegations of the Africanists. They are baseless, malicious fabrications.

But what about the specific allegations? What about the statement that the Congress of Democrats had Madzunya and Leballo expelled? What about their statements regarding New Age? What about their criticisms of the Freedom Charter? What about their slogan of "Africa for the Africans" and their other arguments? Why do they talk and behave like that, anyway? And what must be done about them?

All these questions need replied. I have used up all my space now, but I shall return to them in my next article.

[The first article in this series dealt with African National Congress co-operation with other bodies; the slander of so-called Congress of Democrats domination of the A.N.C.; and the "inverted racialism" of the Africanists.

This month the writer discussed the Leballo-Madzunya expulsions, Africanist attacks on 'NEW AGE', and opposition to the Freedom Charter under cover of a false slogan.]

There are two sorts of lie. Some lies are believed by those who tell them, because they are ignorant. For example, when a Nationalist politician gets up at the U.N. General Assembly and tells the world that the "Bantu" in South Africa are quite happy and contented and support apartheid, he may well imagine, in his ignorance and prejudice, that he is telling the truth. Similarly, when the "Africanists" keep repeating that the African National Congress is being "dominated" by the much smaller Congress of Democrats they are merely repeating a silly slander begun two years ago by Jordan Ngubane—and squashed pretty effectively by Chief Lutull at that time. If they actually believe this nonsense they are stupid and ignorant, but not necessarily dishonest.

But there is a second sort of lie which cannot possibly be believed by the person who tells it: because it involves a matter of fact, not of opinion, and because he has invented it himself. Inability to distinguish between this sort of lie and the truth is a mark not of ignorance but of insanity. In the absence of a medical certificate of lunacy, we must assume that a person who publishes such statements is a deliberate liar, dishonest with the intention to deceive.

A remarkable example of such a lie appears in "The Africanist" for June/July 1958, in an article headed "Africanist Statement", dealing with the summary expulsion of Messrs. Madzunya and Leballo. The article states (p. 6) that the National Working Committee of the A.N.C. was "instructed" to expel these two by a "committee." "We know" says this statement issued by the Africanists" that this committee "was composed of eight (8) Europeans, three (3) Indians and four (4) Africans. We also know that of these Africans only two voted for the expulsion."

The Facts of the Expulsion

Now, the anonymous "we" who issued this "Africanist Statement could not possibly "know" who was on the "committee" which they say "instructed" the A.N.C. to expel their two friends, or how the voting went, *for the simple reason that there is not and never was any such committee.* This is not the sort of statement which can be excused by ascribing it to ignorance or mistaken opinions. It is a pure invention.

The decision to expel Madzunya and Leballo was taken by the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress following a lengthy post-election review covering, among other matters, the setbacks of National Protest Week and the role played by certain Congress members therein. It can hardly be said that these expulsions came as a surprise. Both of these men, as leaders of the "Africanist" sect, had for a long time been openly and publicly flouting established Congress policy, particularly with regard to the Alliance and the Freedom Charter. In fact they had practically been asking for expulsion, and many Congress members had long been demanding that the leadership take action against them. The "Africanist's" open sabotage of the stay-at-home campaign was the last straw; it overcame the understandable reluctance of the N.E.C. to use disciplinary sanctions as long as there may be a hope of saving individuals for the

movement and led to a unanimous decision for their summary expulsion.

Obviously, the N.E.C. did not need any “instructions” to expel these strike-breakers.

The men who have been elected to the National Executive Committee of the African National Congress have been put there because they have earned a reputation of fearless and uncompromising opposition to White Supremacy. They have not hesitated to face police violence, deportation, prison, victimization in the cause of African rights and freedom. Yet the “Africanists” ask us to believe that men like this take “instructions” about Congress matters from others who are not members of the A.N.C.!

“The Africanists” says the Committee which decided the expulsion of Leballo and Madzunya was composed of Europeans, Indians and Africans. Now the only committee where national A.N.C. representatives ever meet Indians and Europeans to discuss matters of common concern is the National Consultative Committee (the N.C.C.). *Because the N.C.C. consists of representatives of all five organizations it could not possibly have had the composition described by “The Africanist.”* But leaving that aside, and more importantly, it could not possibly have “instructed” the A.N.C. to expel anyone—

1. Because, as a consultative body, the N.C.C., cannot issue “instructions” to any of the constituent bodies; it can only advise, and then only on matters of common concern;
2. Because the N.C.C. cannot and does not ever discuss or consider the internal and domestic concern of any of the Congresses.

In order to grasp this point fully, we should recall the fundamental nature of what for convenience we often call “the Congress

movement", which is in reality not a single organization at all, but a voluntary free alliance of several perfectly distinct and autonomous and independent bodies.

But I shall return to this point later.

"New Age" and the Congress of Democrats

The Editorial in "The Africanist" refers to "New Age as "the business journal of the firm of C.O.D." This, I suppose, is meant to be insulting, but the insult is so far-fetched as to be hardly worth consideration. If the term "business journal" implies that the object of "New Age" is to make money it is so far removed from the plain facts as to make the angels weep.

Everybody with the slightest knowledge of South African realities knows perfectly well that "New Age" appearing practically without advertising revenue, the mainstay of every other newspaper, only manages to keep up publication by some sort of miracle, by the self-sacrificing voluntary financial support of readers of the paper. The talented journalists and overworked administrative staff of the "New Age" are, without exception, making personal sacrifices to work on the paper, accepting salaries well below what they would expect from any purely commercial undertaking, and on to of it facing the continuing and very real danger of state and police victimization every day of their lives.

If ever there was a paper which no one in his senses could possibly call "a business journal, that paper is "New Age."

There is no paper in South Africa which is so much loved and respected by the downtrodden and oppressed people as "New Age" Why? Because, like the papers which went before it and which were banned, "New Age" has consistently exposed the crimes and

misdeeds of the South African Government against the voteless majority of the people. It has fought against low wages and pass laws and group areas and Bantu Education. It has stood side by side with the people in every struggle: in the bus boycotts and the rural struggles and in every one of the trials and tribulations of the Congress movement. Although it is not and never has been an official Congress organ, there is not a single loyal and sincere Congressite who does not appreciate and value what this paper has done and is doing for the movement and the people. By their cheap sneers at "New Age", the "Africanists" expose themselves as assistants, willing or unwilling of the oppressors.

It is not true that "New Age" is the organ of the Congress of Democrats. It is an independent newspaper. Certainly it supports the policy of the Congress movement. It gives more information about Congress activities than any other newspaper. If one reads the paper regularly one cannot help being struck by the fact that in proportion very little appears as a rule, about the Congress of Democrats. By far the greatest amount of space is devoted to the activities and statements of the African National Congress. This fact is not very remarkable, for the A.N.C. is, of course a much bigger and stronger organization. It would be hardly worth mentioning, but for the unwarranted slurs of "The Africanist."

The Dirty Stick

So far, I have been dealing with some of the more gross mis-statements of fact which the "Africanists" keep repeating, and which I am sorry to see are thoughtlessly taken up by the United Party press and even by elements within the Liberal Party, who seem anxious to find any stick with which to beat Congress—even if the stick is so dirty that it is bound to soil their hands.

It is not a very pleasant task to have to wade through and reply to these conscienceless fabrications. Nevertheless, it has to be done. Many new members and supporters of the Congress movement do not know the truth about these matters. If people are not aware of the facts they will swallow mis-statements which are repeated over and over again, unless those who know the truth are prepared to expose the lies and nail them in public for all to see.

An Africanist 'Ideology'?

The "Africanists" do not restrict themselves to spreading far-fetched slanders about inter-Congress relationships. They claim to have an "ideology". This so-called ideology finds its clearest expression in their abuse of the Freedom Charter, which they refer to contemptuously as "the Kliptown Charter", which they say "emanated from the Vodka Cocktail parties of Parktown and Loer Houghton." They profess to find some conflict between the Charter and the resolution (the Programme of Action) adopted at the A.N.C. Conference in December 1949. They keep repeating that the present Congress leadership has "abandoned" the 1949 resolution.

A detailed examination of their allegations against the Charter of the alleged conflict between the Charter and the Programme of Action, and of the steps taken by Congress to implement the 1949 programme, will show that the "Africanists" case is as untrustworthy and ill-founded in the field of ideas as I have already proved it to be in the field of facts.

"Africa for the Africans"

The main complaint of the "Africanists" against the Freedom Charter is the profound and challenging statement with which it opens:

"That South Africa belongs to all who live in it, Black and White."

The “Africanists” deny that they are racialists. But, in fact, their attitude towards this clause of the Charter shows beyond doubt that they are racialists that they are unable to emancipate their minds from the petty racial confines in which the ideologists of apartheid and “White domination” seek to imprison all of us.

They claim that the Preamble to the Charter is contrary to the slogan (which although they “claim” it, was not invented by them and does not belong to them) “Africa for the Africans.”

It is time some fresh thinking and analysis was applied to this slogan. Slogans are not Bible texts; they must not be treated as shibboleths which are holy and sacrosanct for all time and in all contexts, otherwise we shall not be rational political thinkers but mystics and mumbo-jumbo men.

In a certain sense and in a certain context, “Africa and the Africans” is a sound, militant and correct slogan. The continent of Africa is and has for a long time been the prey of foreign sharks, financiers and exploiters who have seized its natural resources and even its people, by force and by fraud, who have planted alien flags and administrations, carved up the continent among themselves, and sent their garrisons and settlers here to lord it over us and exploit our labour. When we say “Africa for the Africans” with a view to the Continent as a whole, we mean of course that this wicked and unjust state of affairs must come to a speedy end, that the peoples of this Continent must—as is already happening in some parts of it, and as has already happened in most of Asia—have restored to them their inherent human right of self-government and enjoyment of their own natural resources.

When we cry: “Africa for the Africans!” we are demanding that *foreign powers*, like Britain, France, Belgium and Portugal must quit

Africa and allow its people to conduct their own affairs. We mean that the land and natural resources which have been seized by these imperialist powers must be restored to their rightful owners. We mean that no special rights and privileges should be conceded to aliens in this continent. And these are all legitimate and proper demands.

But we cannot take this legitimate and proper general slogan and turn it into a sort of magical formula which is going to solve all of the problems of each of the countries and territories of this vast continent. And when people try to use the slogan in a purely racial sense, as the Africanists want to do, they destroy the value of the slogan and obscure its meaning. For, applied to particular countries, the slogan becomes, for example, "Ghana for the Ghanians!" or "Nigeria for the Nigerians!" Quite correct. And—South Africa for the South Africans!

And—who are the South Africans? They are the people who live in this country, who have made it their home, and who know no other home.

It is true, and most regrettable so that one section of the population through the imposition of a wicked and unjust form of government and social structure, dominates the rest, secures to itself a monopoly of all political, economic and other rights and privileges, and seeks to make the African, Coloured and Indian majority outcasts, pariahs and aliens in their own country. *It is precisely this wicked system and these unjust privileges and monopolies which the Freedom Charter challenges and seeks to eradicate.*

But the people of South Africa do not want to destroy one form of injustice, one form of racialism, and replace it with another. To do so would fatally weaken the overwhelming moral justice of our cause—and also make it infinitely more difficult if not impossible of realization.

That is why the Freedom Charter makes it quite clear that by South Africans we mean all the people who live here, Black and White. Through this clear formulation, the Charter makes it plain, once and for all, that we who support it fight for universally accepted human rights, not for narrow sectional privileges. We cut the ground from under the feet of those so-called Nationalists—whether of the Afrikaner or “Africanist” variety—who are so obsessed by differences of nationality that they can see nothing in our country but the “clash of race and colour.” That is why both of them hate the Charter so much.

I call them so-called Nationalists because they are not really Nationalists at all. A real South African Nationalist would be one who strives to build a real South African nation. But the tribalists and racialists, whether of the Swart-Verwoerd variety or the Leballo-Madzunya variety, do not want to do this at all. They want to keep our various population groups apart to accentuate their differences and hostilities.

The touchstone of a true South African patriot is his attitude to the Charter.

(In his next article, Mr. Tloome deals with further “Africanist” criticisms of the Freedom charter, and analyses “the myth of the 1949 Programme of Action.”)

The Freedom Charter and the 1949 Programme of Action

The previous two articles in this series dealt with African National Congress co-operation with other bodies, the slander of so-called Congress of Democrats domination of the ANC, the “inverted racialism” of the Africanists, and the Madzunya-Leballo expulsions.

The “Africanists” hate the Freedom Charter as much as the Nationalist Government does. The great majority of Congress members, who support the Charter, they refer to contemptuously as “Charterists”. They describe this noble document, which has won world-wide admiration for the clarity of its language and presentation, and which sums up the demands and aspirations of countless thousands of South Africans, as a “catalogue” of “ill-digested ideas and ill-defined statements.”

Yet apart from their objection to the statement that “South Africa belongs to all who live in it” — an objection which merely, as I have shown, exposes their own naked chauvinism — what is it that they really object to in the Charter? We may look for the answer in an article in “The Africanist” which claims, not very modestly, to be a “penetrative study and critical analysis.”

As usual the article starts off with the sort of ranting and nonsensical abuse which is the trade mark of the Africanists. Pretending to describe who was at the Congress of the People, it says: “The Whites who were at Kliptown, from the Special Branch, were mainly members of the Congress of Democrats.” Can you believe it? These people, who are persecuted day and night by the Special Branch, who have their homes raided, their telephone tapped, their letters opened, who are banned, arrested, vilified, victimized by the Special Branch — the “Africanists” tell us they were “from the Special Branch.” Who will believe them? Only political simpletons and people who are as crazy as themselves. And what was their purpose at Kliptown — where they voted for the most radical manifesto in the history of our country? “They are in reality concerned with the maintenance of the “status quo,” says “The Africanist.” Rather a strange way, isn’t it, to “maintain the status quo!”

The members of the S.A. Indian Congress who were at the Congress of the People are described as “the Merchant Class,” as “an exploiting alien group.” The African leaders present, we are told, “were mainly elements receiving economic benefits from the ‘Marshall Aid Plan of the C.OD. and the S.A.I.C.”

None of the allegations or imputations is evenly remotely true. All of them have the same purpose—to prejudice the mind of the reader against the text of the Charter. For when it comes down to the actual text the critics have surprisingly little to say that is either intelligible or worth saying.

Looking for Points

They do not like the formulation “That no government can justly claim authority unless it is based on the will of all the people.” Why? It should have said “the will of the majority.” But, as a matter of historical fact, all the great democratic documents, including the French and American declarations of the rights of man, say that government should be derived from the will of the people. Why, in South Africa, should we specify “all the people?” Precisely because the concept “will of the people” (or volkswil) has been narrowed down to imply a privileged minority which has a monopoly of democratic rights. Either the Africanists just don’t understand this, or—more likely, they are just looking for points.”

They say they do not agree that the people “have been robbed of their birthright to land, liberty and peace by a form of government founded on injustice and inequality.” What, you may wonder, could anyone who pretends to be an African patriot and a democrat find to object to in this formulation? Do they think South Africans have no birthright to land or liberty or peace? Do they think our government is founded on justice and equality? No, the gentlemen raise no such objections. They say the Charter *should have said*, rather, “The African people have been robbed by the European people.” They think (what

a petty quibble!) the word “freedom” should have been used instead of the synonym “liberty.” Well, in the first place, let me say that the Charter should not have said anything of the sort. The “European people” as a whole have not been the robbers, but the minority of imperialists, land-grabbers and exploiters among them: most of them do not themselves possess land, liberty or peace, and never will until the New South Africa envisaged in the Charter has been won.

The merit of the Charter is that it exposes this great central truth of our country and enables us to see the struggle as it really is, under its outward forms, as one of the great majority of the people, White as well as Black, against a wicked form of government — not, as the Nationalists, whether of the Verwoerd or Leballo variety would like us to see it, as a clash between White and Black.

A Common Programme

Let me add to that, that persons with any pretence to intellectual integrity cannot take a document like the Freedom Charter, a broad common programme meant to unite all the democratic forces in the country, and attack it not for what it says but for what it does not say. The Charter is not and is not meant to be a programme for the African National Congress alone, or for the Congress of Democrats, or the trade unions. It is not meant to be a programme for the right, or the left, or the centre, for workers or peasants or businessmen or intellectuals alone. *It is, and is meant to be, a common programme for all these elements, omitting those questions which we disagree about, which divide us, and outlining those minimum demands which we can all agree are ESSENTIAL for the building of a democratic South Africa.*

An African nationalist, for example, might feel that in certain directions the Charter does not go far enough, that as a programme for African nationalism it is inadequate. Nevertheless, if he is a genuine African patriot, he will recognize that its realization will

carry our people a long stride forward; he will gladly and unreservedly accept the Charter, therefore, as a basis of co-operation with philosophy. If he does not do this he merely exposes himself, as do our "Africanists" as not a patriot, but a disruptive and mischievous person who in fact harms African freedom instead of advancing it.

Again, to take another example, a Socialist might also find the Charter quite inadequate as a statement of his aims and outlook. He might feel that as it does not call for socialism it cannot solve the long-term problems of the country. Nevertheless, he should recognize that the abolition of discrimination and national oppression, as demanded by the Charter, will mean an immeasurable step forward for our country, and will liberate the energies and minds of the people from their grim preoccupation with "racial" problems, to tackle the great social problems ahead.

Wide of the Mark

It is precisely because they do not even begin to grasp this concept of the Charter as a broad *unifying* basis for the *alliance* of all the progressive and healthy elements in South Africa that the so-called "Africanists" criticisms are so wide of the mark.

In fact, when it comes to the demands of the Charter itself they are unable to find a *single one* which they are able openly to object to; for if they did so they would finally expose themselves as obvious reactionaries and upholders of White supremacy. *In a five-page "analysis" of the Charter (supposed to be "penetrative") there are four direct (out-of-context) quotations from the Charter itself. The rest consists of abuse.* When the Charter says "The People Shall Govern" they do not say "We disagree with this"; they say that the Congress movement does not really mean it, it really means that the people must carry out "directives" from the top leaders and their lackeys and flunkies."

With this sort of swindling argument one cannot really carry out a reasoned debate at all. Here is the Charter, gentlemen, it speaks for itself; tell us what you think is wrong with it. But they do not really tell us what they think is wrong with it; they merely swear at us and tell us we do not mean what we say!

The Myth of the 1949 Programme

The “Africanists” keep on saying that they stand by the “Programme of Action” adopted by the A.N.C. Conference in 1949. They suggest that this document is somehow in conflict with the Charter and the Alliance, and moreover that the A.N.C. leadership has failed.

Both suggestions are false.

The 1949 Programme is not, like the Freedom Charter, a comprehensive list of concrete demands, but a plan of work for Congress. Thus the two documents are quite different in character.

The 1949 Programme, however, does start out by announcing certain principles and demands, such as the rejection of “White domination, the right to direct representation in all governing bodies, abolition of differential political institutions, higher wages, education etc. *Every single one of these demands and principles is fully covered by relevant sections of the Freedom Charter.*

Considered as a plan of work—and it was a very ambitious one—most of the important tasks proposed in the Programme of Action have been carried out by the Congress leadership during the intervening years in a manner which many of those present at that Conference ten years ago would hardly have dreamed possible. Congress was then, after all, a comparatively small organization, without much mass influence. When it decided upon “boycotts, strikes, civil disobedience,” and

“preparations” for a one-day national stoppage of work, many people must have thought that this was just “big talk.”

Yet when we look back at the past decade of struggle at the Transvaal and National strikes of 1950, at the historic Defiance Campaign, at all the boycotts, campaigns and forms of action which Congress has initiated and carried out in the intervening period, which have built up the A.N.C. to a position of prestige, strength and influence previously unknown and placed it at the head of a great multi-racial movement fighting for democracy in the teeth of the most terrible persecution and tyranny this country has ever known—we shall realize that the leadership has carried out the 1949 Programme with honour and credit. These have not been as the Africanists maintain, years of failure. They have been years of great and proud achievement: the greatest, thus far, in the history of Congress and the prelude to a yet greater decade ahead.

The 1949 Programme is of great historic interest and importance, as marking a turning point from former, useless methods, to a new period of militancy and mass action. Yet, like all plans of work and programmes of action, it was right in those circumstances and at that time, but it was not and could not be meant for all circumstances and all time. The Natives' Representative Council, which it set to boycott, and now has been abolished by the Government, and similar institutions are fast being replaced by the even more undemocratic “Bantu Authorities in country and in town. It proved impossible to set up educational centres, as envisaged in the programme, ten years ago; it is even more impossible today, under Bantu Education, when even Catholic mission schools are being closed.

New Era—New Needs

We are approaching 1959. It is a new era. Under the Prime Ministership of Dr. Verwoerd, a time of increased taxes, of passes for women, of eve new trials and persecutions, bans and threats of more bans, the outlawing of Congress in certain areas, and the threat of further illegalization, we face a future of new, bitter and relentless struggles, with new problems, new conditions, new tasks. The 1949 Plan is no longer adequate for our needs; though we must preserve and extend its uncompromising and militant spirit in the new programmes of action that the present times call for.

In these bitter struggles we cannot afford, within our own ranks, to harbour a malicious Fifth Column, which is ever anxious to magnify and inflame any disagreement or misunderstanding which arises among us; whose weapons are lies and poisoned slanders; which absorbs our energies in barren and fruitless disputes and quarrels; which brings techniques of gangsterism and rowdyism into our own meetings and conferences, which the Government is making it more and more difficult to hold at all; which disregards every rule of Congress discipline and fair debate.

We can deal with the Government's attempts to smash Congress. We know why they make these attempts, and how to defeat them. It is far more difficult to deal with those who seek to smash Congress from within, using the name and adopting the outward colours of Congressmen. How are we to deal with these people?

Why are they receiving the support of certain Liberals and Chamber of Mines newspapers like the "World"? Can we really tolerate them within Congress, or regard them as part of Congress any longer? These are the questions I propose to answer in the next, and final, article in this series.

EXIT THE AFRICANISTS

The fourth and concluding article in the series.

During the time in which these articles have been appearing, a dramatic change has taken place in the fortunes of the “Africanist” clique and its struggle against the policy and leadership of the African National Congress. That change took place at the Transvaal Provincial Conference of the A.N.C. on November 9, 1958, when following their repudiation by the majority of delegates and members, and the determined repulsion of their plans to disrupt the conference by force the members of the clique, headed by the expelled ex-Congressmen Madzunya and Leballo, withdrew from the Conference and announced their intention of founding a new organization.

The walk-out was accompanied by a blare of publicity. In fact, few of those who declared they were “seceding” were really Congress members. Many of those who marched out of the Orlando Communal Hall were merely gangsters hired for the occasion. Others were members of Madzunya’s private “Congress branch” at Alexandra, which has paid no membership fees to head office for at least a year. Yet the newspapers did not scruple to present the incident as a “major split” in Congress.

Headline Sensation

The “Sunday Express” told its readers that Madzunya had become the most influential Non-European leader in the country. A week later the same “influential” leader could hardly gather half a dozen listeners to a meeting he tried to hold in the open air at Alexandra: while nearby a large crowd gathered to attend a meeting called by the local Congress branch.

The “Golden City Post” announced in screaming headlines, covering half its front page: “The Big Split is Spreading—NOW THERE ARE

TWO A.N.C.s.” The paper “revealed” that “the breakaway by the Africanists is developing into a full-scale national split—the most convulsive thing which has ever happened in the 46 years existence of the A.N.C.” Excitedly the “Post speculated whether Madzunya, Mothopeng, Raboroko or Sobukwe would be elected president of the “new A.N.C.” Its crypto-Africanist columnist Matthew Nkoana explained that the Africanists weren’t really anti-White, just anti-Communist. One spokesman of the clique is even quoted by the “Post”, in fat, black capitals, as being of the opinion that the present Congress leadership “would close up shop in the immediate future.”

Any readers of the “post” who might have rushed eagerly to buy the paper the following week for more exciting news of “the most convulsive thing in 46 years” were due for a serious disappointment. Supporters from the Cape Natal and the O.F.S. were not flocking to the Africanist colours, as the “Post” had promised. And Congress was by no means “closing up shop”! In fact, it was carrying on steadily organizing the people against oppression and for freedom, as it has done, for the past 46 years, and as it will continue to do until equality and democracy have been won.

Congress issues a brief statement describing the departure of the “Africanists as “a good riddance.” It did not seem to be very much worried about the “big split.” With passes for women being issued in Johannesburg there were far more important matters to worry about.

A Hot Brick

Far more realistic and accurate in its assessment of what had really happened at Orlando was “The World.” All along “The World” had been backing and boosting the “Africanists”, supporting Mr. Madzunya’s ridiculous campaign for presidency of the Transvaal A.N.C. (as if an expelled member could be seriously considered as a candidate for office!) and giving currency to Africanist propaganda

against the Congress alliance and the Freedom Charter. All of a sudden, after Orlando, "The World" dropped the "Africanists" like a hot brick. All of a sudden it discovered what everyone else had known all along—that these people were "disruptors." Has "The World" reformed? Has it decided to stop its old game of trying to stimulate discord in the A.N.C.? Not at all for in the very same breath it claims to have discovered a "new force" — "African nationalists" — who are going to steer Congress away from its present course of alliance with non-African democrats. The fact is that "The World", unlike the "Post", saw Orlando for what it was: a glaring exposure of the Africanists, a crushing defeat for them, and the end of their role as a public nuisance inside the Congress. And "The World" was furious with them. Inside congress the Africanists could always be a nuisance: "The World" could always pretend they were stronger than they are, the "true voice of the people," etc. Outside Congress they are useless. Their pitiful weakness and lack of public support will be exposed. "The World" knows. It has been through the whole experience before with its former editor, Mr. Thema, and his ill-fated "National-Minded Block."

Political Suicide

In this assessment "The World" is right and the "Post" and the "Express" are wrong. At Orlando the "Africanists" committed political suicide. The whole history of anti-Congress splinter groups, not only the "National-Minded but many others as well (and here I would include the sad fate of the All-African Convention, once it embarked on an anti-Congress path) indicates that the "Africanists" have put to sea in a leaky vessel which is unlikely to survive the first stiff breeze it encounters. As long as it was merely a question of getting up at a Congress branch meeting or conference and slamming out at the leadership, while carefully avoiding any constructive work, or anything likely to lead to trouble with the police, everything was fine, and these fellows were in their element. But once the have abandoned the shelter given them by the broad shield of Congress, once

they aspire to go out before the people and stand up as self-appointed "leaders", something more will be expected of them than ranting against President Lutuli, the Congress of Democrats and communism.

The people will ask: what is your positive policy, what is your alternative to Congress leadership in all hard and bitter daily struggles, against apartheid and job reservation and low wages and passes: for freedom and equality and democracy? And since these men, mostly embittered and frustrated intellectuals, have never had any real contact with or love for the working people, have never led or even taken part in a genuine people's struggle, but merely stood by and criticized those who were taking the brunt of those struggles, they will be unable to answer these questions from the people, and the people will turn their backs on them. And since they have only learnt to quarrel and to slander and never to co-operate and pull together, since they know only how to destroy and not to build it will not be long before they fall to bickering among themselves and any organization they try to create will soon fall to pieces.

To the patient reader who has borne with me for so long in this detailed, and not very edifying analysis of this sect who call themselves "Africanists", it may seem that they are not very important, and that I have spent too much time and space on them already. Yet there are implications in these events which go far beyond this unimportant group.

The "Africanists" were never able to muster much support in Congress. At provincial and national conferences they never got more than about half a dozen voices for anti-Charter and anti-alliance resolutions. No avowed member of the sect was ever elected to any senior office in Congress. The only times they have ever been able to cause any real trouble in the organization was when they attached themselves to the coat-tails of some group which had some genuine dispute or misunderstanding with the leadership. Yet certain journals

and journalists, outside the A.N.C., have consistently blown up their pretensions to be an “important” force in Congress, and inflated their significance to absurd dimensions. Why?

Mind you, I am not speaking here of such a newspaper as “The World” which has been announcing “major splits” in Congress weekly for the last ten years or more, or of the “Golden City Post” which obviously believes that any sort of irresponsible sensationalism is justified. But why should newspapers like the “Sunday Express” and the “Rand Daily Mail” imagine it to be in their interests to boost a rabidly anti-White sect? Even more strange-seeming—why do Liberal Party publicists like Jordan Ngubane of “Indian Opinion” and Patrick Duncan of “Contact”, flatter and pander to these illiberal meeting-breakers and racialists, and give currency to their slanders against the leadership of the A.N.C., with which the Liberal Party is anxious to co-operate?

Anti-Communist Phobia

An important clue to the solution of these riddles is to be found in the fact that—in addition to their chauvinism, malicious slander-mongering and other disorders—the Africanists suffer severely from malignant and obsessive anti-Communist phobia.

Now there are lots of perfectly reasonable, sane people who do not agree with Marxist philosophical outlooks and economic analyses, who indeed challenge them vigorously. Yet they are able to debate such matters rationally and calmly—or would be, were such debates permitted under the present laws of our country. In this they differ markedly from the man who has been bitten by the virus of Communophobia. The Communophobe might be able to talk fairly reasonably on various matters, but the moment his obsession is mentioned reason flies out of the window. He spends his life looking

under beds for Reds and inventing monstrous conspiracies instigated from Moscow.

When a body like Congress protests against the invasion of Egypt by imperialists, as at the time of Suez, they cannot understand the simple truth: that it is a perfectly ordinary act of African and colonial solidarity. They hint darkly that the protest is all part of a deep-laid Communist plot. Every simple act of the democratic movement is twisted to have some hidden and sinister significance.

The disease is extremely infectious and is rife in the Nationalist party where Minister of Justice Swart is practically the textbook example of an advanced and incurable case. His ravings about Communists being about to poison water wells and blow up power stations, which precluded and were supposed to justify the Suppression of Communism Act are characteristic symptoms of the mania.

It is surely because the Nationalists recognize the Africanists as fellow-psychopaths that people like Madzunya are permitted to get up, in the presence of the police, and get away with gross anti-White incitements such as would earn any other speaker an immediate arrest and conviction under the Riotous Assemblies Act or some other such law.

Strange Bed-fellows

Unfortunately the virus also got a hold on certain elements in the South African Liberal Party. Obsessive anti-Communism, like adversity, makes strange bed-fellows. It seems almost incredible that the reformists of the Liberal Party should find anything in common with the "Africanist" fire-eaters. *Yet it is because he recognizes the "Africanists" as fellow-sufferers from Communophobia that a Liberal like Mr. Jordan Ngubane displays such marked sympathy for them.* For Mr. Ngubane is indeed a sad case. For years he has been trying to smear Congress with the "red" brush, and he has not stopped yet. There is

scarcely a slander spread nowadays by the “Africanists” whose source cannot be found in the sort of things which Mr. Ngubane was writing in 1956. President Lutuli wrote a lengthy, dignified and restrained reply at that time, which tore Ngubane’s flimsy case to ribbons. But that did not deter or restrain him.

It is precisely here, on this ground of red-baiting and malignant Communophobia that the illiberal anti-Whites of the Africanist sect find themselves on common ground with certain Liberals of “Opinion” and “Contact” and the anti-Blacks of the Chamber of Mines press.

The Africanists, even though they may not recognize this, also find themselves on common ground here with Verwoerd, Swart, Redeemer and Company. Here, indeed, lies the whole weakness of the position of those who try to work the well-worn anti-Communist racket in this country. The Nationalists have done it to death. The people have learnt—that the man who comes along to “save them from the Reds” is in fact the man who suppresses not only the Communists, but also the whole of their civil, political, religious, educational, trade union and human rights.

The Horse Won’t Run

This is something that the Africanists and other political punters who put their money on the broken-down, discredited hack of anti-Communism, should understand. So far as the African people and other democratic elements in South Africa are concerned, this is a horse that definitely won’t run. Congress fought against the Suppression of Communism Act from the start, and it has never accepted that legislative abortion which conflicts with the whole democratic outlook of the liberation movement. The former Communist Party of South Africa, until its dissolution was forced by the Nationalist Government, was traditionally accepted and

welcomed as a partner and an ally in the struggle by the African National Congress, even under such conservative leaders as Dr. Xuma and Dr. Moroccan.

The late Mr. Mats eke, then Transvaal Congress President, invited the Party to co-operate with Congress in founding the African Mine Workers' Union in 1942. In 1943 the A.N.C. invited the party to be a co-sponsor in the anti-pass campaign. The Party was a member of the Congress-led United Front which held the monster V.D. Day demonstration in Johannesburg in 1945. Right up to the day of its dissolution in 1950 the same Party was one of the five-fold alliance which called the historic June 26 Day of Protest, under former President Moroccan.

Those who are really in earnest about the struggle for a democratic South Africa, who regard it as a matter of life and death, will not reject brave and sincere partners who are dedicated to the same goal—whatever differences they may have over philosophical conceptions and ultimate goals. The most urgent task of all South African democrats and patriots, of whatever school of philosophy, is the winning of freedom, the ending of the stifling autocracy which today makes free debate impossible. Afterwards we shall have time, opportunity and occasion to debate the rights and wrongs of socialism.

Neither the “Africanists” nor anyone else can succeed today in provoking a split between “Right” and “Left” in Congress.

The exodus of the “Africanist” group of noisy disruptors has not in any way weakened the African National Congress. On the contrary, it has strengthened the Congress and the entire democratic movement. Congress is a broad, all-embracing movement of all African patriots, democrats and fighters for freedom. It can, and will continue to, tolerate within its ranks men and women of many shades of opinion. But, obviously, in the stern struggles of the day, an element of discipline and unity is necessary. Once a majority decision has been

taken the minority must fall in line. A minority which does not, which creates its own hostile organization within the movement; which does not scruple to employ vicious slanders, gangster methods and outright sabotage, cannot be tolerated by any serious political movement.

No doubt all the Africanists and those influenced by them have not yet quit Congress. Perhaps some members who, in the past, were impressed by their demagoguery, will by now have been disgusted by their self-exposure at Orland and have seen them for what they are—open anti-congress disruptors. For such people who are prepared to support the decided and agreed policy of Congress based upon the Charter and the Alliance, I am convinced that there will always be a place in the national organization. But, from now on, it is clear that those who try from within to work on behalf of the hostile, anti-Congress organization of the “Africanists” will soon be given their marching orders and told to join their friends outside. Far too much time has been expended on barren controversies with this sterile and disruptive clique, and Congress has a big job of work to do.

And so I have come to the end of this lengthy analysis of the group of so-called Africanists. I cannot pretend that it has been a pleasant task. Although I have striven to write without rancor or bitterness, one cannot help feeling sad that it has been necessary at this crucial period in the struggle for freedom to devote so much space and time to so barren a sect. Yet I believe it has been necessary, and perhaps not without its lessons for the future. Though the leaders of the “Africanists” have departed, their ghost will no doubt return to haunt Congress in the future. The slanders they spread—the same weary old stories about “domination” of Congress by the Congress of Democrats: the distortions of the Freedom Charter: the smear of red-baiting—all will crop up again in the future as they have in the past. And our experiences with the Africanists will help us to deal with such attacks better in the future.

What of the “Africanists” themselves?

I cannot bring myself to believe that all of them are equally to blame. Let us hope that, with advancing maturity and understanding those who have been misled by the wild allegations and wild talk of this unhealthy sect will return to the broad main road of the struggle for the Freedom Charter and the Alliance for Democracy—the Congress Road.

Chapter 36

Satyagraha In South Africa

by

Fatima Meer

Satyagraha, a philosophy of non-violent opposition to injustice, comes to us in an age which has seen the worst forms of human violence. As a philosophy of social change, it advances the theory that social reform is dependent wholly on the method used to bring about reform. It thus denies the possibility of instituting good through methods of evil, of realizing peace through techniques of violence, of achieving democratic rights by forms of action hostile to the spirit of democracy.

The constant use of the name of Mahatma Gandhi, of the word Satyagraha, and of such terms as civil disobedience, "hartal" and non-violence in the non-European struggle against racial injustice in South Africa seems to suggest that the Gandhian concept has had a lasting impact on our people and is in the process of emerging as a salient factor in the struggle for democracy in the Union.

Literally translated, the word "Satyagraha" means the demonstration of a heart firm in the concepts of love and truth. To Gandhi himself, the author of the word and the philosophy it expressed, it was the

belief that social change, where necessary, can be effected by the impact of soul force upon the hearts of those in power.

It is doubtful whether this concept, deeply inspired by religious beliefs of a universal trend and significantly influenced by the writings of the Russian philosopher Tolstoy, was adhered to in its purity by many people other than Gandhi himself and a handful of his close disciples like Vinoba Bhave. To Nehru, Gandhi's personally chosen successor, and to the masses of India, it remained a political tactic to be utilized for the obtaining of greater political power by a voiceless people. The Indians of South Africa saw Satyagraha in this light when, under the leadership of Gandhi, they became the first people to use the weapon and develop its technique.

Numerically, the Indians constitute the smallest group in the multi-racial society of South Africa, representing only 2.9 per cent of her total population. For the most part, they share with the rest of the non-European peoples in the country an inescapable existence of slums, endless overcrowded dwellings and a low resistance to death and disease. Three-quarters of the Indian breadwinners earn less than £100 a year with an average family of five dependants to support. While European politicians utilize the high Indian birth rate to fan fears of insecurity in the minds of the vote-exercising public, some 5 Indian babies in every 1,000 never survive their first year.

The Indian, alone of the South African peoples, remains voteless. While some Africans have the ineffective "Native representation" and the Coloured is to be placed on a communal roll, even the Opposition United Party which in 1946 had prescribed a form of dummy representation for Asiatics, has in a recent statement expressed its complete aversion to the granting of any political rights to the Indian people. And yet, of all the non-White peoples in South Africa, it is the Indian community which has within its ranks the most articulate and powerful economic group – merchants and professionals who constitute that middle-class so vital to any suppressed people in its struggle for political rights.

It is through the unique presence of this class within the ranks of the non-European people that South African Indians have endured their peculiar oppression and earned their peculiar history in the development of the country. For basic to the emergence of the "Indian problem" is the question of European monopolization of South Africa's wealth. As early as 1880, the Indian middle-class revealed signs of entrenching itself as a non-European group of economic strength, and from that date onward, European politics commenced its bitter history of Indian antagonism.

The Indians migrated to Natal in 1860 essentially under the indenture system and on the clear understanding that complete and full participation in the citizenship rights of the country would be their ultimate reward when freed of their contracts.

It was this aspect of the British contract of indenture which allowed some compensation for the harsh and slave-like conditions of labour embodied in the agreement. At the time, the Indians held a crucial potential for increasing the numbers of a White minority which lived in perpetual fear of an African avalanche. The presence of a Black people, however, in the urban life of the colony, sharing privileges equally with the Whites, was a contradiction in a society conceived for the exclusive benefit of a White pigmentocracy. The theoretical acceptance of Indian citizenship rights was bound to lead to a practical rejection as soon as Indians in sufficient numbers gathered sufficient sophistication to threaten the economic monopoly of the dominant group.

The breach in the agreement which followed was inevitable, and the Indian problem emerged as the problem of a White government seeking constitutional means to whittle away Indian rights and reduce their status to that of the other non-White peoples.

From 1883 onwards the Indians in Natal and in all the provinces to which they traveled became subjected to discriminatory legislation. The Transvaal treated them as pariahs who, on grounds of hygiene, were to be separated from the European community. The Orange

Free State banned them completely from its territory, while in Natal, restrictions on license applications and severe taxes crippled their freedom. The poll tax introduced in Natal to resolve the conflict between industry which depended on Indian labour and commerce which believed itself outdone by Indian competition, was exorbitantly high. Equivalent to six months' salary under indenture, it applied to all indentured Indian males over the age of 16 and all females over the age of 13, who failed to return to India or to re-indenture themselves. It set up such barriers to enterprise that some 32,000 Indians, representing 25 per cent of the population, repatriated themselves during the years of its operation.

The situation called for counter-action, but the Indians were divided among themselves economically and ethnically, with religious and linguistic barriers preventing the organization of a common front. Whilst the business class made legal representations of a personal type or organized petitions of a small group nature, the large majority of the indentured labourers remained inarticulate and inhibited in their social and economic depressions. Generally, the Indians possessed little appreciation of the efficacy of the vote, and even when entitled to it, used it to little purpose.

The dramatic awakening of Indian political conscience may be traced to 1890, when Gandhi came to Natal. A highly educated and principled young man, he was appalled by the degradations imposed on British Indian subjects. On a journey from Durban to Pretoria, he was thrown out of the coach at Pietermaritzburg for daring to travel first class with Europeans, soundly boxed about the ears at Charlestown for exerting his rights as a passenger, and rudely pushed off the sidewalks in Johannesburg. He felt keenly the need for enlightened guidance in the Indian community and accurately diagnosed its immediate weakness as its complete inarticulateness in the language of the government.

Founding the Natal Indian Congress in 1894, he accepted the challenge of his environment, and with the theme of Satyagraha, succeeded in identifying the political purpose of the Hindu with the

Muslim, the freed with the indentured, the South Indian with the North Indian.

His first reaction to the Indian problem in Natal was to inform the British government and public of the atrocities committed under their names. He was convinced of their ignorance in the matter and believed the solution to the question to lie in British enlightenment. Satyagraha itself, expressing active opposition to inflexible authority, developed as a final appeal to the British conscience when all other constitutional methods of approach had failed.

Despite the magnificence of his contribution in arousing the political consciousness of the Indian people and giving to the world a new approach to political struggle, his philosophy has not remained unchallenged, even by his followers. No great figure of theory remains without criticism, and Gandhi himself admits to having committed Himalayan blunders, which have had the effect of placing brakes upon the militancy of the people. There is little doubt that in South Africa, as later in India, his preoccupation with the impact of soul force reacted against the interest of the people's immediate and material benefits, and tended to validate the accusation that the allegiance of Satyagraha ultimately and objectively served the interests of those in power.

The practical applications of his philosophy in the South African passive resistance campaigns of 1908 and 1913 resulted in meager gains and frustration for the Indian people. As forces of political education, their impact was unquestionable. But as techniques of liberation, they were ineffective. While both campaigns unified and strengthened the Indians in their struggle, they also halted progress during moments of supreme strategic importance, because Gandhi placed greater value on the achievement of spiritual victory over the hearts of those in power than on the acquisition of material benefits for the Satyagrahis.

In 1907 he called off the Transvaal campaign, after a 100 percent boycott of the Indian pass-imposing Act had been achieved and a

popular resistance movement launched, on the misguided assumption that governmental overtures to compromise were caused by a conversion of heart. In 1913, at a time when it appeared obvious to all that the government had been brought to bay, he choose to demonstrate Indian magnanimity of heart, rather than exploit the situation for the immediate rectification of Indian rights. Never before and never since have the Indians in South Africa held such a position of crucial economic importance. The mammoth Indian strike, in sympathy with the heroic march of the Newcastle mine workers who, with women and children, had set out to cross the Transvaal border on foot in violation of unjust anti-Indian laws, had disastrous effects for industry in natal. The European mineworkers' strike on the Rand coinciding with this demonstration, placed the government in a particularly precarious position. Gandhi, however, intent on his spiritual victory, called off the Indian campaign, thus leaving the government unhampered to deal all the more effectively with the European strikers.

Gandhian concepts never quite convinced the Indians in South Africa or in India. The technique of passive resistance was invariably used with a difference in interpretation between Gandhi and his followers. Gandhi himself had visualized such a misunderstanding and, in order to obviate it, had in the first instance suggested the restriction of its use to highly trained personnel. He conceived passive resistance as a specialized weapon which only the spiritually pure could utilize.

His concept, logically followed, precluded mass utilization of the technique, and his first appeal was thus made to the middle-class trading element, who he felt would be sufficiently enlightened to appreciate and follow it. It was the unsophisticated worker, however, who gave passive resistance its strength and developed its potential as a force of mass coercion. In 1913, he followed Gandhi with unflinching faith. In 1946, he responded to the call of Satyagraha with matching valour, and, in more recent ears, the non-European workers have responded to the call of non-violence with admirable discipline.

It is undoubtedly the aspect of Passive Resistance which gives forth hope for the effecting of social change without recourse to violence which has upheld it in the hearts of the Indian people. It is also this aspect of the philosophy which has attracted to its orbit the co-operation of large groups of people professing allegiance to different ideological creeds.

Satyagraha as a weapon of multi-racial usage, however, did not occur until almost half a century after its origin on South African soil. For many years after the departure of Mahatma Gandhi from the country, the creed of Satyagraha lost its continuity in the life of formal Indian political expression. The period following his departure, however, a period offset by two World Wars and the tremendous impact of industrialization, laid the basis for a vitally changed South African society, in which circumstantial forces paved the way for a future state of non-European cooperation.

Economic factors, especially in Natal, acted as great levelers of African and Indian interests. The "civilized labour policy" had retrieved and isolated the European worker from the morass of labour competition and assed economic legislation which affected all non-European workers equally.

Indians, though organized into a strong trade union movement, realized the futility of their labour strength in the absence of an equally strong African labour movement. Tragically they watched their strike actions increase their own unemployment as unsophisticated African workers replaced their labour.

The Gandhian movement had based itself on the theory of Indian exclusiveness, and had believed in the political distinctiveness of the Indian problem. To the average Indian who groped in the maze of industrial competition and who became quickly identified with the social and economic depletions of the non-European people, this was a myth which exploded all too dramatically.

Unfortunately, formal Indian political organization did not reflect the vitally changed situation in which Indians were finding themselves. The post-Gandhian era saw a leadership which remained pathetically aloof from the problems of its following. Inheriting neither the philosophy of Satyagraha nor formulating any political principles of its own, it preferred a state of precarious suspension between the two major race groups, in the false belief that acceleration of their acceptance within the ranks of the dominant class depended on Indian isolation from the general problems of racial discrimination in South Africa.

Indian political leadership approved the diplomatic interference of the British Indian government and the conclusion of the Cape Town Agreement in 1927 – an Agreement which accepted the principle of repatriation for South African Indians at a time when every Indian had become a Union national. Instead of a principled and logical opposition to all facets of racial discrimination, it endured in 1944 the conclusion of the Pretoria Agreement, which accepted the policy of segregation from the Indian people in return for certain economic concessions of a temporary nature safeguarding the vested interest of a small section of the community.

It was inevitable that a leadership at such variance with its following would soon lose its authority. In 1946, it was finally ousted by those who joined together working class interests with the intellectual guidance of Gandhian principles and Socialism. It had watched in awesome anticipation the forces of Satyagraha under the emotional impact of Mahatma Gandhi and the practical guidance of Nehru cleave the path to Indian liberation.

In 1946, this new leadership restaged Passive Resistance in South Africa and led some 2,000 enthusiasts to prison in opposition to an Act which sought their isolation from the rest of South African society. Their campaign, though in obvious form similar to the original Gandhian campaign, was appreciably different in its ultimate direction and political aspirations. It was launched in a mood which understood both the expediency and ethics of joint

political action, a mood which sought non-European rather than Indian liberation.

For South Africa, this revised interpretation of the Passive Resistance weapon held crucial significance. It accelerated the growth of united militancy among the non-White peoples and heralded anew era in the development of a non-racial united democratic front in the country. There is little doubt that, despite its 'Indian' character, the campaign stressed and eloquently exhibited faith in a united struggle, ultimately directed towards the achievement of ends which would benefit equally all South Africans, not Indians alone.

Fundamental to non-European political maturity in South African has been the alliance of the African and Indian Congresses. Whilst 1946 saw the organization of an Indian political front which had rid itself of group restrictive sentiments, it was not until 1950 that a similar change expressed itself on the African frontier; a year after the tragic racial disturbances in Durban between the Indian and African peoples. The riots came as a serious warning to the Leadership, who realized that if the economic identification of the two peoples did not receive progressive political guidance, the situation could be horribly misused by the government to create racial strife within the ranks of the non-White race. It expedited united action on the part of the two Congresses who, despite the Dadoo-Xuma Pact of 1946, had remained aloof from each other. In 1950, Africans and Indians jointly and equally participated in the National Day of Protest against racial discrimination, and in 1952, the two Congresses together launched the Defiance of Unjust Laws Campaign, patterned on the lines of the 1946 Passive Resistance movement. The success of their unity served as a forerunner to the formation of the Coloured and European Congresses and to the setting up of an effective united barrier against anti-democratic forces.

Though many factors have combined to effect this democratic unit in South Africa, central to its theme of action has been its adherence to the form of Satyagraha. There is little doubt that, but for the profound humanitarianism and the generous tolerance of all creeds

intrinsic in its philosophy, it could not have drawn together such diverse elements of political struggle. It also seems fairly clear that without its direction in the non-European movement itself, the non-White struggle for self-expression would not have drawn to itself the magnificent world support which it has done.

The racial situation in South Africa beckons a major upheaval. The Indians are aware of this and see the solution in the alliance of their political sympathy with those who wish to broaden the frontiers of democracy and who readily accept that the lead in this respect lies in united thought and action.

Satyagraha, non-violence, passive resistance, civil disobedience – one may choose any of these terms and accept either the Gandhian philosophy or the tactics of the struggle. The fact is that the Indian people are marching forward as a vital section of the democratic force of South Africa, and their philosophy of Satyagraha continues to play an invaluable role in their progress to freedom.

Chapter 37

The African Journalist

by

Tom Hopkinson

Ten years ago I was editing the leading British picture magazine, the *Picture Post*. It was a paper with a high and steady sale, big profits, produced by a team of writers and cameramen chosen out of the entire field of British journalism.

Today, I am the editor of *Drum*, a South African magazine for “non-whites” or “non-Europeans,” a struggling magazine with a circulation reckoned in tens of thousands. Our tiny staff---with its abilities and shortcomings, its courage and energy, its unexplained absences and occasional despairs---is virtually irreplaceable; only a handful of Africans have any journalistic training.

Drum is a monthly picture magazine, dependent for its interest mainly on photographs. It is published in four editions: the original South African, almost eight years old, with a circulation of 80-90,000; two editions for West Africa, one of 90,000 for Nigeria and one of about 60,000 for Ghana. There is also a small but growing East African edition. All are entirely in English; all are printed in Johannesburg from material compiled in their own territories, and, after printing, face journeys up to six weeks before they are put on sale.

Because most of the readers are bitterly poor, each copy is read to pieces by as many as twenty people; so that each month's edition has a readership approaching 5,000,000 Africans, Indians and Coloureds. But, unlike Britain or America, where a single article might produce 400 letters, ours is a silent audience. They read; perhaps they absorb; but they rarely answer back.

Secondly, our readers are intensely local in their interests. For our South African edition alone, we must think of satisfying our sophisticated, politically conscious African readers in the big cities as well as the uneducated mine workers; we have to please the cultured

and self-conscious Indians of Natal (there are more than 150,000 of them in Durban alone); in the Cape we must draw at least 15,000 readers from the Coloureds, a racially mixed community a million and a quarter strong, whose origins belong to a time when rigid separation of the races was not yet believed to have been ordained by God.

Each of these sections---and subsections within these sections---requires special consideration, and is quickly resentful if its achievements are not recognized or its difficulties recorded. Each tends to resent the space allotted to the other. When I asked a leading Coloured citizen in Capetown what we could do to make our paper more interesting, his reply was: "If you wish, Mr. Hopkinson, to secure Coloureds as readers of your paper, you must remove from it what I call 'the African taint.'"

So much for our readers! Now what about the staff? It is hard for anyone outside to form a picture of social conditions in South Africa. I find among people I met, Afrikaners and English, great interest---quite often a friendly interest---as to what editing a magazine for "non-Europeans" involves. The interest is mixed with astonishment and an almost total ignorance of how three quarters of the human beings in this country live and think and feel. Perhaps two questions from different people, both asked in good faith and not unsympathetically, give some suggestions of the atmosphere.

"Do you mean that you work in the same room with them?"

"Then you actually talk over with natives what you're going to do?"

An African journalist or cameraman in South Africa faces enormous handicaps. He has difficulties in getting about. Parts of the country where trouble breaks out are from time to time banned to journalists---and remained banned. There are parts even of the city of Johannesburg, our headquarters, which are hard for him to reach promptly because there is so little public transport which a black man

may use. A piece of most mornings has to be spent organizing how our one small car can be made to cover the most ground.

Though some government officials are friendly and helpful, this applies as a rule only at a high level. Petty officials will keep the black reporter waiting on principle, send him round to the back door, refuse information they supply at once when a white reporter asks for it.

He is involved in clashes with the police who resent the idea of a black man as a journalist, and particularly as a photographer. Our cameramen have been "taken inside" on the grounds that they are "obstructing the pavements," "impeding the police," or on suspicion of having stolen their own cameras. It is fair to add that if one can get access to an officer, the matter will usually be put right; it is not, as a rule, the officers but the teen-age youths they command, and an occasional bullying sergeant, who resent "the natives' cheekiness" in aspiring to be journalists. (I have had, in the interest of my staff, more contact with the police in the twelve months I have been with Drum than in the whole of my previous life---starting with my first Saturday in Johannesburg, when I had to try to recover our office boy who had been arrested for leaving his all important "pass" at home.)

The giving or refusal of police passes is another means of discrimination. In South Africa the police chiefs decide who is a recognized journalist. Any journalist or cameraman who cannot show an officially signed police pass can be---and often is---treated as an impostor. But it is the police themselves who sign or do not sign the passes, so it is they who have created the imposture.

Nor is the decision based on a person's criminal record, or on some knowledge of his political or social views. I myself was refused a police pass almost as soon as I arrived in South Africa.

This is perhaps the place to mention that---contrary, I think, to most outside opinion---there is no direct interference with press freedom in South Africa. I have never received official criticism of anything

published in Drum, nor have I ever experienced official pressure either to publish or to refrain from publishing any article.

A further difficulty for the African journalist is that he has so limited an opportunity to acquire training in his profession. Few papers or magazines are either owned or run by Africans. No South African "white" newspaper---and this is to me one of the most astonishing features of South African journalism---employs an African columnist or reporter. Although in the struggle for circulation an increasing amount of space is given to "the natives," the reporters' positions are all filled by white men.

Not only is there no training available for the African journalist on white newspapers but also he has very little prospect of obtaining it on publications of his own---which as yet scarcely exist. This poses a considerable problem in maintaining discipline: "You won't be able to fire anyone," I was warned when I started work, "because nobody can possibly be replaced." It is surprising, under these conditions, to find talent, enterprise and a readiness to learn. Another thing I constantly find, and this forms one of the principal enjoyments of my work, is a delightful freshness and directness in the writing, which means, of course, a directness and freshness in the point of view.

The African reporter goes straight at or into his story. He sees everything new, as a fresh personal experience, and he writes as he thinks, not in a made-up journalistic language. Take this account of a children's party:

It starts an hour late and there are so many kids around I can't even count them. Only they are on the outside goggling in. Inside the house there are only adults making merry and long-winded speeches. The only kid around is Teaspoon in whose honor the party is being held. Teaspoon is crying his little head off, and I don't blame him.

Or this, at a police station:

A few more guys, including the old geezer who's wearing an outfit that looks like a hand-me-down from Noah, were

also then charged.

The word "guys" is the key to a point of special interest---the difference in outlook between the African of South Africa and the West African. The African of South Africa wants to be white: he is strongly attracted to the language, manners, interests of the white man. *Drum* is full of advertisements for products which claim to help the black man, or woman, look more like the white---hair straighteners, powders and creams to lighten the skin, English and American clothes and hats.

The black man in South Africa is not as yet actively hostile to the white: he is in the position of the constantly rejected wooer still hoping against hope, the could-be friend who continues to hold out his hand. And the center and focus of his admiration is the United States. The African likes American films and records; he is proud of the influence of American and African music and dancing on each other. His big shots---who, in the conditions of this country, are mainly gangsters---drive American cars and copy American mannerisms and slang. So, too, the African journalist takes American writers as his model.

Here is an extract from a record review by a well-known writer and composer, Todd Matshikiza:

Brothers. . . I've got smashing news for you. Real hot-poker stuff. The kind of dope that you get once in a blue moon. D'you know King Force? Hey? The big, broad-shouldered, hawk-eyed veteran sax maniac. Hey? The chap that's the life blood of the great Jazz Maniacs Orchestra of Johannesburg. You should know who I'm talking about, man. The fellow that lots of recording firms have begged and begged with big bags and bundles of dough to make discs for them. And he always said, "Nix." The great guy that gulps giggle water by the gallon and makes greater and greater sounds with every additional drop. What a man. Everybody that's ever heard this sax giant has been raving mad about him. If

you've never had the upper-tune-ity, well it's here, because King Force, alias Wilson Silgee, has gone and made a disc at last. Yes, man, King Force is now uptainable on record. He's gone and taken a few fine birds from the Jazz Maniacs Ork, put them plumb in the middle of Gallos studio and cut Sibatatu and King Force Drag on Gallotone G. B. 1953. He calls his combo "King Force and his Jazz Forces." For a label nothing could be more suitabler. King Force once chased a man around a whole block of houses with an axe. The man had broken one of King Force's discs. He has over one thousand. The famous chase just shows you his character. Powerful, forceful, hot, dripping with go. His music is just like that. Man, I can't describe music when it's great. Can you describe what you heard when it made you mad when you heard it? If you can then I'm loony . . .

In West Africa this admiration for America is entirely absent. The West African doesn't imitate anybody; he is content, often bubblingly delighted, to be himself. West African publications do not print advertisements for hair straighteners or skin-whitening creams. The West African prefers his gleaming blackness and is happy to wear his traditional togalike, brightly colored dress. He is becoming increasingly master of his own destiny, and he expects to play a big part in this destiny of his continent, and indeed of the whole world.

"You wait!" I have been warned by a Nigerian acquaintance. "It will not be long before we Nigerians come down on you in South Africa and sort matters out with our own hands."

If West Africans have a model, it is Britain rather than America---but Britain of the 18th, not the 20th, Century. I have noticed that the characters they admire are the dominating and swashbuckling, the man who can force his way to the top in politics or money-making, or else fall with a resounding crash. They like ruthlessness, ebullience, extravagance, which is why attempts made to discredit their leaders nearly always operate to make them even more popular.

“What!” I once heard a listener say, whose hero was accused of dipping into the public till. “You mean he’s been getting away with fifty thousand pounds a year? What a man! Why can’t we have him as prime minister?”

In journalism also, the 18th Century, with its vigor and freedom of speech, is the accepted model. There is a good daily and weekly press in Nigeria, as there is also in Ghana. In Nigeria the *Daily Times*, *Daily Service*, *West African Pilot*, and *Nigerian Tribune* are all ably written and edited, have a developing sense of responsibility and are continually interesting to a reader like myself. Their specialty is political attack, with a refreshing freedom of vituperation and no pressing fear of the law of libel. Here is a typical extract from an editorial:

The forthcoming general election is going to be a battle of life and death. We admit that ‘life and death’ is quite a strong phrase to use. But we are just being very plain and realistic. It is now clear beyond cavil that it is a battle between a single political party and a combined force of autocracy, bad faith and brutality. The naked truth is that the Action Group must win the election. Any other choice means that the Federation of Nigeria is doomed. It might as well go to the dogs.

The party is the only saviour Nigeria possesses at the moment. If an organization is so full of lazy yawning drones that it is always at pains to produce election manifestoes or memoranda on matters of the moment, if a party is so hopelessly draft that it has to wait for the leader of the Action Group to speak only to follow up with childish comments, then it is time all lovers of progress should decide to keep it at arm’s length. The conspiratorial gang that now challenges Nigeria must be broken by all means.

Besides political vituperation, the distinguishing marks of West African journalism are a voluptuous enthusiasm in the writing, a rolling rotundity of phrase and a shy deprecating humor. Here is an example of each mood; both pieces are the work of the same man---

Nelson Ottah, editor of *Drum's* Nigerian edition. The first refers to the sensational life and violent death of a Nigerian politician:

Then, on March 25, this year, came another sensational story about the man whose whole life has been like a meteoric flame. THE STORY WAS THAT ALHADJI ADEGOKE ADELABU WAS DEAD!

How did he die? Some said he had been shot. Some said he was killed with juju. Many others said he was run over by his political enemies. A few said he had died in a suicide drive. Only the well-informed knew then that he had died in a car accident. But the fantastic story of his death had gone round Ibadan. Alhadji Adelabu dead? Impossible! But if he is dead, others will die with him! Down with his killers! Down with all those who have hands in his death! Kill and burn them! Spare no one! Let no one live after Ade! Over his grave let us march!

There was the shout of the Ibadan masses. And it was no idle cry. . . .

After a volcanic life and a volcanic death, with the souls of twenty men to keep him company. Alhadji Adegoke Adelabu – the colossal egotist, the god and prophet of Ibadan – must still now, if there is afterlife, be stepping it off to brass band and bugle to keep his rendezvous with the noble and gallant band, composed of all the manic personages who had with lines of fire stamped their names on the face of our all-too-sane world.

And for the puncturing humor, this account of an elephant hunt:

Let's go a big-game hunting with Mr. Y. O. Yarro, the best known of Nigeria's elephant killers. Well, here we are, Mr. Yarro, the best known of Nigeria's elephant killers. Well, here we are, Mr. Yarro! And what is this place called, eh? Oh, Annam, you say. Very well. Where are the elephants.

Mr. Yarro led us into the jungle. Then, suddenly, he stopped, and said to me, "Be quiet. Do you hear something? Here they come. Now, don't make any move. Hold your breath a bit. Elephants have a very keen sense of smell. Take a look at that pair, a husband and a wife. I'm going to get the husband. Wait here!"

And, of course, I waited. Mr. Yarro started forward, almost crawling on his belly, dragging his rifle with him. After a very little time he disappeared from view.

Then I became nervous. The jungle was having some effect on me. I was shaking all over. What has happened to Mr. Yarro? Why hasn't he shot the damn thing? Supposing a leopard should decide to pay me a visit! How am I to deal with the noble beast? Show a pair of legs or shake hands and become matey?

I could no longer stand it. I coughed nervously. After a while Mr. Yarro appeared almost from nowhere. His appearance nearly gave me heart failure. He eyed me steadily for some time, and then muttered, "The elephants have made off. Your coughing scared them."

One final feature of West African journalism is an occasional inconsequence, a liberated absurdity of phrase or gesture. West Africans do not enjoy references to this characteristic by others than themselves. However, it is one of the things which make life in their countries so agreeable---and one I always look forward to. It is summed up by this notice on a chemist's shop in Accra:

ENSIGN FILMS

LEICA FILMS

ANSCO FILMS

KODAK FILMS

BOW TIES

Here is a prose sample from another part of Africa:

It must be brought to the notice of the public and the world at large that Nyasas have proved beyond any margin of doubt that Mr. Chirwa's politics is all hypocrisy; which employs merely as a means to an end, that end being self-enrichment.

Mr. Chirwa had full opportunity to try his chance as a national leader since he arrived in the country from South Africa until Nyasas passed a resolution that no further representation in the Federal Assembly was necessary. Hence Mr. Chirwa has lost both his chance and popularity and *is no longer* recognized in the political field of Malawi people. He must clearly understand that people can do, will do, and are doing smoothly better *without him*.

To Dr. Banda, we rejoice in saying that that is one of the signs of your unparalleled victory. Proceed! Dr. Banda, you have our fullest mandate, and are all in the innermost pocket of your political overcoat. To Mr. Chirwa, we warn you that we shall keep you howling on because your political socks are worn out beyond repair, so that your attempt to pull them up just exposes your burnt heels!

This extract from a manifesto put out by the Nyasaland African Congress Youth League---in support of its hero, Dr. Hastings Banda, and against his rival, Mr. Wellington Chirwa---gives a glimpse both of politics and of African journalistic style in the Federation of Northern Rhodesia [today Zambia], Southern Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] and Nyasaland [today Malawi].

Journalistically, both the Federation and the East African territories (Uganda, Kenya and Tanganyika [today Tanzania]) show a rather similar picture. There are a number of competently run papers for the white man, most of them accepting the necessity for political and

social change but wishing it would not come quite so fast. On the other side are African journals, mostly in Swahili, ill-printed and restricted to local news, yet with boundless enthusiasm and confidence in their own future, and with much the same uninhibited vigor of language found in West Africa.

Among such papers are *Tazama, Jicho* ("the eye"), and *Uhuru* ("Freedom"), a mimeographed broadsheet put out by the People's Convention Party in support of its political hero, Tom Mboya. All these are published in Nairobi. The *Nyanza Times* is published in Kisumu, Kenya, and *Mwafrika*, a lively weekly newspaper written in Swahili with a circulation of about 20,000, has its center in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanganyika.

Recently the two editors of *Mwafrika*, Robert Makange and K. R. Baghdelleh, had to serve a six-month prison sentence for publishing an article "likely to raise discontent or promote ill-will between the communities." The article contained a sentence which read, translated literally, "the British are not here for the benefit of our country but for sucking our blood." Though it was argued in court that literal blood-sucking was not implied---merely economic exploitation---the prison sentence was passed and served. Racial antagonism in Tanganyika, however, is happily slight, and at the party following the editor's release, two leading white newspaper executives were honored guests.

Finally, a word about magazines. In South Africa there are, besides *Drum*, two monthly magazines for "non-white" readers, *Zonk* and *Bona!* *Zonk*, which takes its name from a onetime popular company of entertainers, is a lighthearted medley of stories, photographs, jokes and drawings.

Bona! Is a magazine produced with government sympathy and a substantial indirect subsidy in the form of some 35,000 or more copies bought at full retail prices for compulsory distribution through government-run schools. It has three language editions---Zulu, Xhosa and Sesotho. It is largely photographic, old-fashioned in layout, but

skillfully edited to cover a wide field of African interests---apart, of course from the two main interests of politics and racial problems, upon which it never touches.

In the Federation an interesting venture has recently been making progress. This is a monthly, *Parade*, mainly in English but partly in vernacular, which boasts it is "the only magazine in Southern Africa edited and printed by Africans for Africans." It is believed to have a circulation of from 20-30,000. In content it resembles an old-fashioned "home magazine," with all the conventional features, social and party gossip, dress patterns, cooking instructions, jokes and riddles, as well as a children's club run by "Uncle Zoom Zoom." A special feature is made, as with all magazines for Africans, of advice to the lovelorn:

Dear Jenny, My heart is very sorrowful. I do not know what to do with the problem that faces me. I am fifteen years of age and I have put a girl of fourteen into pregnancy. I am a schoolboy and she is not. I cannot imagine leaving school at this stage for marriage. I am too young for that and the girl is unlearned.

My principal does not know about it. The day he does I shall be finished as far as learning is concerned. My parents advised me to agree to the girl's parents that I was responsible for her present situation and that I would marry her after my schooling and I did this, but I do not love the girl. Shall I just go on pretending that I am going to marry the girl when I am not going to? I ask you, Jenny, should I reject her now or after my schooling?

N. V. M. M.
Belingwe.

(Be faithful to the girl you have put into trouble. After finishing your schooling you will be old enough to make a happy home of your own with her. You would not like to be let down by anybody yourself, so why want to let anyone down especially the girl whose future is now at your mercy? She is your wife and after school you should settle down and make a home with

her.---JENNY.)

In Nairobi a fortnightly picture magazine called *Picha*---“picture” transposed into the vernacular---has just been started, but it is too soon to know how it will shape, or whether indeed it will survive. The French produce, from Dakar and Paris, an intelligent monthly picture magazine with the engaging title *Bingo*, whose aim seems to be to cement the ties between France and her newly established “Franco-African Community.”

Apart from these, there is little in the field of magazines south of the Sahara.

What is the future for African newspapers and magazines? The answer is in one word---boundless. The African all over the continent craves education. Hundreds of thousands---probably millions---of new readers are being turned out every year. Except in one or two patches---such as South Africa---there is a desperate dearth of reading matter. Papers can establish themselves now, play a real part in Africa’s mental opening up, and have decades---indeed centuries---of profitable life before them.

To the work of journalism the African brings a sharp eye, a nose for news, and an extremely uninhibited pen. His greatest need is a sense of responsibility and the understanding that tolerance and moderation are not weaknesses; they are the slow distillation of confidence and strength.

Responsibility only comes by exercising it, and for this, over most of Africa, he has had small chance indeed. But an entirely new era is now beginning in which the African will increasingly and rapidly take charge of his own journalistic, as of all his other, affairs.

In the meantime it is, for the white man in black journalism, a lively and rewarding life.

Chapter 37

Freedom For Africans Means Freedom For All

by

Robert Sobukwe

The Pan-Africanist Congress came into being at Orlando during the Good Friday week-end. It issued quite a number of statements which shed light on Pan-Africanist policy. We propose to publish some of these because of their importance to all the peoples of South Africa. We start with the opening speech given by Mr. Robert M. Sobukwe,

who was elected President of the Pan-Africanists:--Mr. Chairman, Sons and daughters of Africa.

The Chairman has already informed you that we had hoped that this inaugural convention of the Africanists would be opened by Dr. Kamuza Hastings Banda, failing which, by Mr. K. Kaunda of the Zambia ANC in Northern Rhodesia. Both have been unable to attend our convention for both are now, in the language of the colonialists, "detained" in some concentration camps, because they dared to demand the right of self-determination for the indigenous African people of Nyasaland and Northern Rhodesia. The honourable task of opening this conference has, therefore, fallen on me, an Africanist, and I wish to thank the Central Committee for the honour. I am particularly grateful for the opportunity this offers me to treat briefly of certain issues relevant to our struggle which though adequately treated in the documents that will be considered by this convention require to be presented to such a gathering.

I hope then, Mr. Speaker, in the course of my address, to answer broadly questions pertaining to our stand in contemporary international politics, our relation to the states of Africa, independent and dependent, our attitude to the Nationalist movements in Africa, our stand on the question of race in general and the so-called racial question in South Africa. Finally, I hope to outline briefly our ultimate objectives.

We are living today, Sons and Daughters of the Soil, fighters in the cause of African freedom; we are living today in an era that is pregnant with untold possibilities, for both good and evil. In the course of the past two years we have seen man breaking asunder with dramatic suddenness the chains that have bound his mind, solving problems which for ages it has been regarded as sacrilege even to attempt to solve. The tremendous, epoch-making scientific achievements in the exploration of space, with man-made satellites orbiting the earth, the new and interesting discoveries made in the Geophysical year, the production of rust resistant strains of wheat in the field of agriculture, the amazing discoveries in the field of

medicine, chemistry and physics, all three, mean that man is acquiring a better knowledge of his environment and is well on the way to establishing absolute control over the environment.

However, in spite of these rapid advances in the material and physical world, man appears to be unwilling or unable to solve the problems of social relations between man and man. Because of this failure on the part of man, we see the world split today into two large hostile blocs, the so-called Capitalist and Socialist blocs, represented by America and Russia respectively. These two blocs are engaged in terrible competition, use tough language and tactics, employ brinkmanship stunts which have the whole world heading for a nervous breakdown. They each are armed with terrible weapons of destruction and continue to spend millions of pounds in the production of more and more of these weapons. In spite of all the diplomatic talks of co-existence, these blocs each behave as though they do not believe that co-existence is possible.

The question then arises, where does Africa fit into this picture and where, particularly, do we African nationalities, we Africanists in South Africa, fit in. There is no doubt that with the liquidation of Western Imperialism and Colonialism in Asia, the Capitalist market has shrunk considerably. As a result, Africa has become the happy hunting ground of adverturistic capital. There is again a scramble for Africa and both the Soviet Union and the United States are trying to win the loyalty of the African States. Africa is being wooed with more ardour than she has ever been. There is a lot of flirting going on, of course, some Africans flirting with the Soviet camp and others with the American camp. In some cases the courtship has reached a stage where the parties are going out together; and they probably hold hands in the dark, but nowhere has it yet reached a stage where the parties can kiss in public without blushing.

This wooing occurs at a time when the whole continent of Africa is in labour, suffering the pangs of a new birth, and everybody is looking anxiously and expectantly towards Africa to see as our people so aptly put it *ukulhi iyoza nkomoni* (what creature will come forth). We

are being wooed internationally at a time when in South Africa the naked forces of savage Herrenvolhism are running riot; when a determined effort is being made to annihilate the African people through systematic starvation; at a time when brutal attempts are being made to retard, dwarf and stunt the mental development of a whole people through organized "mis-education"; at a time when thousands of our people roam the streets in search of work and are being told by the foreign ruler to go back to a "home" which he has assigned them whether that means the break-up of his families or not; at a time when the distinctive badge of slavery and humiliation, the "dom-pas" is being extended from the African male dog to the African female bitch. It is at this time, when fascist tyranny has reached its zenith in South Africa, that Africa's loyalty is competed for. And the question is what is our answer.

Our answer, Mr. Speaker and Children of the Soil, has been given by the African leaders of the Continent. Dr. Kwame Nkrumah has repeatedly stated that in international affairs, Africa wishes to pursue a policy of positive neutrality, allying herself to neither of the existing blocs but, in the words of Dr. Nuamdi Azikiwa of Nigeria, remaining "neutral in nothing and independent in everything that concerns the destiny of Africa." Mr. Tom Mboya of Kenya has expressed himself more forthrightly, declaring that it is not the intention of African sisters to change one master (Western Imperialism for one other master (Soviet tutelage).

We endorse the views of the African leaders on this point. But we must point out that we are not blind to the fact that the countries which pursue a policy of planned State Economy have outstripped, in industrial development, those that follow the path of private enterprise. Today, China is industrially far ahead of India. Unfortunately, this rapid industrial development has been accompanied in all cases by a rigid totalitarianism notwithstanding Mao Tse Tsung's "Hundred Flowers" announcements. And Africanists reject totalitarianism in any form and express political democracy as understood in the West. We also reject the economic exploitation of the many for the benefit of a few. We accept as policy

the equitable distribution of wealth aiming, as far as I am concerned, to equality of income which to me is the only basis on which the slogan of “equal opportunities” can be founded.

Borrowing then, the best from the East and the best from the West, we nonetheless retain and maintain our distinctive personality and refuse to be the satraps or stooges of any other power.

Our relation to the States in Africa can be stated most briefly and precisely by quoting from George Padmore’s book, *Pan-Africanism or Communism*. Discussing the future of Africa, Padmore observes that, “there is a growing feeling among politically conscious Africans throughout the continent that their destiny is one, that what happens to one part of Africa to Africans must affect Africans “living in other parts.”

We honour Ghana as the first independent State in modern Africa which under the courageous nationalist leadership of Dr. Nkrumah and the C.P.P. which positively interested itself in liberation of the whole continent from White domination and has held out the vision of a democratic United States of Africa. We regard it as the sacred duty of each and every African state to strive ceaselessly and energetically for the creation of a United States of Africa stretching from Cape to Cairo, Morocco to Madagascar.

The days of small, independent countries are gone. Today the most powerful countries in the world, America and Russia, cover huge tracts of land territorially and number hundreds of millions in population. On the other hand the small, weak independent countries of Europe are beginning to realize that for their own survival they have to form military and economic federations – hence NATO and the European Market.

Besides the sense of a common historical fate that we share with other countries of Africa, it is imperative for purely practical reasons, that the whole of Africa be united into a single unit, centrally

controlled. Only in that way can we solve the immense problems that face the continent.

It is for the reasons stated above that we admire, bless and ally ourselves with all the Nationalist movements in Africa. They are at the core, the basic unit, the individual cells of the large organism it is our duty to nourish—the United States of Africa. A Union of free, sovereign independent democratic sisters.

For the lasting peace of Africa and the economic, social and political problems of the continent, there needs must be a return to democratic principles. This means White supremacy, under whatever guise it manifests itself, must be destroyed. And that is what the Nationalist movements on the continent are settling out to do. They are all agreed that the African majority must rule. In the African context, it is the overwhelming African majority that will mould and shape the content of democracy. Allow me to quote Dr. Du Bois, the father of Pan-Africanism, “Most men in the world,” writes Dr. Du Bois, “are coloured. A belief in humanity means a belief in coloured men. The future of the world will, to all reasonable possibility, be what coloured men make it.”

As for the world, so for Africa. The future of Africa will be what Africans make it.

And now for the thorny question of race! I do not wish to give a lengthy and learned dissertation on race! Suffice it to say that even those scientists who do recognize the existence of separate races, have to admit that there are borderline cases which will not fit into any of the three races of mankind.

All scientists agree that all men can trace their ancestry to the first Homo Sapiens, that man is distinguished from other mammals and also from earlier types of man by the nature of his intelligence. The structure of the body of man provides evidence to prove the biological unity of the human species. All scientists agree that there is

no "race" that is superior to another and there is no race that is inferior to others.

The Africanists take the view that there is only one race to which we belong and that is the human race. In our vocabulary, therefore, the word race, as applied to man, has no plural form. We do, however, admit the existence of observable physical differences between various groups of people. But these differences are the result of a number of factors, chief among which has been geographical isolation.

In Africa, the myth of race has been propounded by the imperialists and colonists from Europe in order to facilitate and justify their inhuman exploitation of the indigenous people of the land. It is from this myth of race with its attendant claims of cultural superiority that the doctrine of White Supremacy stems. Thus it is that an ex-engine driver can think of himself as fully qualified to be the head of an African state, but refuse to believe that a highly educated Black doctor, more familiar with Western culture than the White Premier is, can run even a municipal council. I do not wish to belabour this point. Time is precious. Let me close discussion of this topic by declaiming, on behalf of the Africanists, "that with UNESCO we hold that every man is his brother's keeper. For every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main because he is involved in mankind."

In South Africa, we recognize the existence of national groups, which are the result of geographical origin within a certain area as well as a shared historical experience. Of these groups, the Europeans are a foreign minority group which has exclusive control of political, economic, social and military power. It is the dominant group. It is the exploiting group, responsible for the pernicious doctrine of White supremacy which has resulted in the humiliation and degradation of the indigenous African people. It is this group which has dispossessed the African people of their land and with arrogant conceit has set itself up as the "guardians", "the trustees" of the Africans. It is this group which conceives of the African people as a

child nation, composed of boys and girls ranging in age from 12 years to one day.

It is this group which after 300 years can still state with brazen effrontery that the Native, the Bantu, the Kaffir is still backward and savage, etc. But they still want to remain “guardians”, “trustees” and what have you of the African people. In short, it is this group which has mismanaged affairs in South Africa just as their kith and kin are mismanaging affairs in Europe. It is from this group that the most rabid race-baiters and agitators come. It is the members of this group who, whenever they meet in their Parliament, say things which agitate the heart of millions of peace-loving Africans. This is the group which turns out thousands of experts on the new South African science – the Native mind.

Then there is the Indian foreign minority group. This group came to this country not as imperialists or colonists but as indentured labourers. In the South African set-up of today, this group is an oppressed minority. But there are some members of this group, the merchant class in particular, who have become tainted with the virus of cultural supremacy and national arrogance. This class identifies itself by and large with the oppressors, but, significantly, this is the group which provides the political leadership of the Indian people in South Africa. And all that the politics of this class have meant up to now is preservation and defence of the sectional interests of the Indian merchant class. The down-trodden,, poor “stinking coolies” of Natal who alone can identify themselves as a result of the pressure of natural conditions with the indigenous African majority in the struggle to overthrow White supremacy, have not yet produced their leadership. We hope they will do so soon.

The Africans constitute the indigenous group and form the majority of the population. They are the most ruthlessly exploited and subjected to humiliation, degradation and insult.

Now it is our contention that true democracy can be established in South Africa as on the continent as a whole, only when White

supremacy has been destroyed. And the illiterate and semi-illiterate African names constitute the key and centre and content of any struggle for true democracy in South Africa. And the African people can be organized only under the banner of African Nationalism in an all-African organization where they will by themselves formulate policies and programmes and decide on the methods of struggle without interferences from either so-called left-wing or right-wing groups of the minorities which arrogantly appropriate to themselves the right to plan and think for the Africans.

We wish to emphasize that the freedom of the African means the freedom of all in South Africa, the European included, because only the African can guarantee the establishment of a genuine democracy in which all men will be citizens of a common state and will live and be governed as individuals and not as distinctive sectional groups.

In conclusion, I wish to state that the Africanists do not all subscribe to the fashionable doctrine of South African Exceptionalism. Our contention is that South Africa is an integral part of the indivisible whole that is Africa. She cannot solve her problems in isolation from and without utter disregard of the rest of the continent.

It is precisely for that reason that we reject both apartheid and so-called multi-racialism as solutions of our socio-economic problems. Apart from the number of arguments that can be advanced against apartheid, we take our stand on the principle that Africa is one and desires to be one and *nobody*, I repeat *nobody*, has a right to Balkanise our land.

Against "multi-racialism" we have this objection that the history of South Africa has fostered group prejudices and antagonisms and if we have to maintain the same group-exclusiveness, parading under the term of multi-racialism, we shall be transporting to the new Africa those very antagonisms and conflicts. Further, multi-racialism is in fact a pandering to European bigotry and arrogance. It is a method of safeguarding White interests implying as it does proportional representation irrespective of population figures. In that

sense it is a complete negation of democracy. If this is not what is meant by multi-racialism the term then implies that there are such basic insuperable differences between the various national groups here that the best course is to keep them permanently distinctive, in a kind of democratic apartheid. That, to us is racialism multiplied, which probably is what the term truly connotes.

We aim, politically, at the government of the Africans, by the Africans for the Africans, with everybody who owes his only loyalty to Africa and who is prepared to accept the democratic rule of an African majority being regarded as an African. We guarantee no minority rights because we think in terms of individuals not groups.

Economically we aim at the rapid extension of industrial development in order to alleviate pressure on the land which is what progress means in terms of modern society. We stand committed to a policy of guaranteeing the most equitable distribution of wealth.

Socially we aim at the full development of the human personality and ruthless uprooting and outlawing of all forms or manifestations of the racial myth.

Here is a tree rooted in African soil nourished with waters from the rivers of Africa. Come and sit under its shade and become, with us, the leaves of the same branch and the branches of the same tree.

Sons and daughters of Africa, I declare this inaugural Convention of Africanists open.

Iswe Lethu I

Chapter 38

1959: What Is Apartheid?

by

506

Nadine Gordimer

Men are not born brothers; they have to discover each other, and it is this discovery that apartheid seeks to prevent.

What is apartheid?

It depends who's answering. If you ask a member of the South African government, he will tell you that it is separate and parallel development of white and black. If you ask an ordinary white man who supports the policy, he will tell you that it is the means of keeping South Africa white. If you ask a black man. . .well, he may give you any of a dozen answers arising out of whatever aspect of apartheid he has been brought up short against that day, for to him it is neither an ideological concept nor a policy, but a context in which his whole life, learning, working, loving, is rigidly enclosed. He could give you a list of the laws that restrict him from aspiring to most of the aims of any civilized person, or enjoying the pleasures that everyone else takes for granted. But it is unlikely that he will. What may be on his mind at the moment is the problem of how to save his bright child from the watered down 'Bantu Education' which is now being substituted for standard education in schools for black children. Or perhaps you've merely caught him on the morning after he's spent a night in the police cells because he was out after curfew hours without a piece of paper bearing a white man's signature permitting him to do so. Perhaps (if he's a man who cares for such things) he's feeling resentful because there's a concert in town he'd not be permitted to attend, or (if he's the kind of man who isn't) he's irked at having to pay a black market price for a bottle of brandy he's debarred from buying legitimately. That's apartheid, to him.

All these things, big and little, and many more.

If you want to know how Africans – black men and women – live in South Africa, you will get in return for your curiosity an exposition of apartheid in action, for in all of a black man's life, all his life, rejection

by the white man has the last word. With this word of rejection apartheid began, long before it hardened into laws and legislation, long before it became a theory of racial selectiveness and the policy of a government. The Afrikaner Nationalists did not invent it, they merely developed it, and the impulse of Cain from which they worked was and is present in many white South Africans, English-speaking as well as Afrikaner.

Shall I forget that when I was a child I was taught that I must never use a cup from which our servant had drunk?

I live in the white city of Johannesburg, the biggest city in South Africa. Around the white city, particularly to the west and north, is another city, black Johannesburg. This clear picture of black and white is blurred only a little at the edges by the presence of small Coloured (mixed blood) and Indian communities, also segregated, both from each other and the rest. You will see Africans in every house in the white city, of course, for every house has its servants' quarters, built not less than a certain minimum regulation distance from the white house. Sophisticated Africans call this backyard life 'living dogs-meat' – closer to the kennel and the outhouses than to the humans in the house. But no black man has his *home* in the white city; neither wealth nor honour or distinction of any kind could entitle him to move into a house in the street where I or any other white persons live. So it easily happens that thousands of white people live their whole lives without ever exchanging a word with a black man who is like themselves, on their own social and cultural level; and for them, the whole African people is composed of servants and the great army of "boys" who cart away or deliver things – the butcher's boy, the grocer's boy, the milk boy, the dust boy. On the basis of this experience, you will see that it is simple for white men and women to deduct that the black men and women are an inferior race. Out of this experience all the platitudes of apartheid sound endlessly, lie the bogus sea from the convolutions of a big shell: *they're like children. . . they don't think the way we do. . . they're not ready. . .*

Black men do all the physical labour in our country, because no white man wants to dig a road or load a truck. But for every kind of work a white man *wants* to do, there are sanctions and job reservations to shut the black man out. In the building trade, and in industry, the Africans are the unskilled and semi-skilled workers, and they cannot, by law, become anything else. They cannot serve behind the counters in the shops, and cannot be employed alongside white clerks. Wherever they work, they cannot share the washrooms or the canteens of the white workers. But they may buy in the shops. Oh yes, once the counter is between the black customer and the white shopkeeper, the hollow murmur of the apartheid shell is silenced – they *are* ready, indeed, to provide a splendid market, they *do* think enough like white people to want most of the things that white people want, from LP recordings to no-iron shirts.

The real life of any community – restaurants, bars, hotels, clubs, and coffee bars – has no place for the African man or woman. They serve in all these, but they cannot come in and sit down. Art galleries, cinemas, theatres, golf courses, and sports clubs, even the libraries are closed to them. In the post offices and all other government offices, they are served at segregated counters.

What it means to live like this, from the day you are born until the day you die, I cannot tell you. No white person can. I think I know the lives of my African friends, but time and time again I find that I have assumed, since it was so ordinary a part of average experience, the knowledge in them of some commonplace experience that, in fact, they could never have had. How am I to remember that Danny, who is writing his Ph.D. thesis on industrial psychology, has never seen the inside of a museum? How am I to remember that John, who is a journalist on a lively newspaper, can never hope to see the film I am urging him not to miss, since the township cinemas are doubly censored and do not show what one might call adult films? How am I to remember that Alice's charming children, playing with my child's toy elephant, will never be able to ride on the elephant in the Johannesburg Zoo?

The humblest labourer will find his life the meaner for being black. If he were a white man, at least there would be no ceiling to his children's ambitions. But it is in the educated man that want and need stand highest on the wrong side of the colour bar. Whatever he achieves as a man of learning, *as a man* he still has as little say in the community as a child or a lunatic. Outside the gates of the university (soon he may not be able to enter them at all; the two 'open' universities are threatened by legislation that will close them to all who are not white) white men will hail him a 'boy'. When the first African advocate was called to the Johannesburg Bar, just over a year ago, government officials raised objections to his robbing and disrobing in the same chamber as the white advocates. His colleagues accepted him as a man of the law; but the laws of apartheid saw him only as a black man. Neither by genius nor cunning, by sainthood or thuggery, is there a way in which a black man earn the right to be regarded as any other man.

Of course, the Africans have made some sort of life of their own. It's a slum life, a make-do life, because, although I speak of black cities outside white cities, these black cities are no Harlems. They are bleak rectangular patterns of glum municipal housing, or great smoky proliferations of crazy, chipped brick and tin huts, with a few street-lights and few shops. The life there is robust, ribald, and candid. All human exchange of the extrovert sort flourishes; standing in a wretched alley, you feel the exciting blast of a great vitality. Here and there, in small rooms where a candle makes big shadows, there is good talk. It is attractive, specially if you are white; but it is also sad, bleak, and terrible. It may not be a bad thing to be a Sophiatown Villon; but it is tragic if you can never be anything else. The penny whistle is a charming piece of musical ingenuity; but it should not always be necessary for a man to make his music out of nothing.

Some Africans are born, into their segregated townships, light enough to pass as Coloured. They play Coloured for the few privileges – better jobs, better housing, more freedom of movement – that this brings, for the nearer you can get to being white, the less

restricted your life is. Some Coloured are born, into their segregated townships, light enough to pass as white. A fair skin is the equivalent of a golden spoon in the child's mouth; in other countries coloured people may be tempted to play white for social reasons, but in South Africa a pale face and straight hair can gain the basic things – a good school, acceptance instead of rejection all the way along the line. It is the ambition of many coloured parents to have a child light enough to cross the colour bar and live the precarious life of pretending to be white; their only fear is that the subterfuge will be discovered. But, the other night, I was made aware of a different sort of fear and a new twist to the old game of play-white. An Indian acquaintance confessed to me that he was uneasy because his thirteen-year-old son has turned out to have the sort of face and complexion that could pass for white. 'He's only got to slip into a white cinema or somewhere, just once, for the fun of it. The next thing my wife and I know he'll be starting to play white. Once they've tried what it's like to be a white man, how are you to stop them? Then it's the lies, and not wanting to know their own families, and misery all round. That's one of the reasons why I want to leave South Africa, so's my kids won't want to grow up to be something they're not.'

I've talked about the wrong side of the colour bar, but the truth is that both are the wrong sides. Do not think that we, on the white side of privilege, are the people we might be in a society that had no sides at all. We do not suffer, but we are coarsened. Even to continue to live here is to acquiesce in some measure to apartheid – to a sealing-off of responses, the cauterization of the human heart, as well as to withholding the vote from those who outnumber us, eight to one. Our children grow up accepting as part of natural phenomena the fact that they are well-clothed and well-fed, while black children are ragged and skinny. It cannot occur to the white child that the black one has any rights outside of charity; you must explain to your child, if you have the mind to, that men have decided this, that the white shall have, and the black shall have not, and it is not an immutable law, like the rising of the sun in the morning. Even then it is not possible entirely to counter with facts an emotional climate of

privilege. We have the better part of everything; how difficult it is for us not to feel, somewhere secretly, that we *are* better?

Hundreds of thousands of white South Africans are concerned only with holding on to white privilege. They believe that they would rather die hold on to it than give up the smallest part; and I believe they would. They cannot imagine a life that would be neither their life, nor the black man's life, but another life altogether. How can they imagine freedom, who for years have had to be so vigilant to keep it only to themselves?

No one of us, black or white, can promise them that black domination will not be the alternative to white domination, and black revenge the long if not the last answer to all that the whites have done to the blacks. For such is apartheid that, like many whites, many blacks cannot imagine a life that would be neither a black man's life or a white man's life.

Those white South Africans who want to let go – leave hold – are either afraid of having held on too long, or are disgusted and ashamed to go on living as we do. These last have become colour-blind, perhaps by one of those freaks by which desperate nature hits upon a new species. They want people of all colours to use the same doors, share the same learning, and give and take the same respect from each other. They don't care if the government that guarantees these things is white or black. A few of these people go so far as to go to prison, in the name of one political cause or another, in attempts that they believe will help to bring about this sort of life. The rest make, in one degree or another, an effort to live, within an apartheid community, the decent life that apartheid prohibits.

Of course, I know that no African attaches much importance to what apartheid does to the white man, and no-one could blame him for this. What does it signify that your sense of justice is outraged, your conscience troubled, and our friendships restricted by the colour bar? All very commendable that your finer feelings are affronted – he's the one who gets it in the solar plexus. All this lies heavily, mostly

unspoken, between black and white friends. My own friends among black men and women are people I happen to like, my kind of people, whose friendship I am not prepared to forego because of some racial theory that I find meaningless and absurd. Like that of many others, my opposition to apartheid is compounded not only out of a sense of justice, but also out of a personal, selfish, and extreme distaste for having the choice of my friends dictated to me, and the range of human intercourse proscribed for me. I am aware that, because of this, I sometimes expect African friends to take lightly, in the ordinary course of friendship, risks that simply are not worth it, to them, who have so many more basic things to risk themselves for. I remember a day last year when some African friends and I went to the airport to see off a close friend of us all. I had brought a picnic lunch with me, and so had Alice, my friend, for we knew that we shouldn't be able to lunch together in the airport restaurant. What we hadn't realized was that we shouldn't be allowed to sit outside on the grass together and eat, either; "non-Europeans" were not supposed to be admitted to the lawns. I wanted to brazen it out, sit there until we were ordered off into segregation; it was easy for me, I am white and not sensitized by daily humiliations. But Alice, who has to find words to explain to her children why they cannot ride the elephant at the zoo, did not want to seek the sort of rebuff that comes to her all the time, unsought.

Black and white get to know each other in spite of and under the strain of a dozen illegalities. We can never meet in town, for there is nowhere we can sit and talk together. The legal position about receiving African guests in a white house is unclear; we do have our friends in our houses, of course, but there is always the risk that a neighbour may trump up a complaint, to which the police would always be sympathetic. When you offer an African guest a drink, you break the law unequivocally; the exchange of a glass of beer between your hands and his could land you both in the police court on a serious charge. Officially, you are not supposed to enter an African 'location' without a permit, and when we go to visit friends in a black township we take the chance of being stopped by the police, who are looking for gangsters or caches of liquor, but will do their duty to

apartheid on the side. Three days ago I was one of a small group of whites who had to get up and leave the table at the wedding reception of an African medical student; a white official of the gold-mining company for whom the bride's father worked, and on whose property his house was, drove up to inform us that our invitations to the wedding were not sufficient to authorize our presence in living quarters provided for Africans.

No friendship between black and white is free of these things. It is hard to keep any relationship both clandestine and natural. No matter how warm the pleasure in each other's company, how deep and comfortable the understanding, there are moments of failure created by resentment of white privilege, on the one side, and guilt about white privilege on the other.

Another life altogether.

Put the shell to your ear and hear the old warning: Do you want to be overrun by blacks?

I bump an African's scooter while parking, and before he and I have a chance to apologise or accuse, there's a white man at my side ready to swear that I'm in the right, and there are three black men at his side ready to swear that he is in the right.

Another life altogether.

Put the shell to our ear and hear the old warning: Are you prepared to see white standards destroyed?

A friend of mine, a dignified and responsible African politician and an old man, is beaten up by white intruders while addressing a meeting of dignified and responsible white people.

Living apart, black and white are destroying themselves morally in the effort. Living together, it is just possible that we might survive white domination, black domination, and all the other guises that

hide us from each other, and discover ourselves to be identically human. The least we could all count on would be the recognition that we have no more and no less reason to fear each other than other men have.

*--African Seminar
Washington, D.C., 1959*

Chapter 39

The History of the Indians in South Africa: A Hundred-Year Journey

by

G. R. Naidoo

The small ship *Truro* nosed its way into Durban harbour. The quayside was lined by an excited group of people. A small man with a black bag in his hand was pacing agitatedly up and down, waiting for a boat to take him to the ship, which had by now anchored in the harbour. He was Dr. Helland, the medical officer of Port Natal. He had to examine the passengers, and was not looking forward to it. He expected them all to be emaciated and infected with cholera. The doctor was not on board as long as he had expected to be. He came off with a broad and satisfied grin. The human cargo was healthy in every respect.

The date was November 16, 1860 – a historic day in South Africa. The first Indians had arrived in the country. This is how a newspaper of the day described the arrival: “A very remarkable scene was the landing and one worth remembrance and record. Most of the many spectators who were present had been led to expect a lot of dried-up, vapid and sleepy-looking anatomies. They were agreeably disappointed.

“As the swarthy hordes came pouring out of the boat’s hold, laughing, jabbering and staring about them with a very well satisfied expression of self-complacency on their faces, they hardly realized the idea one had formed regarding them and their faculties. They were a queer, comical, foreign-looking, very Oriental-like crowd. The men with their huge muslin turbans, bare scraggy and thing bones and coloured garments; the women with their flashing eyes, long disheveled pitchy hair, with their half-covered well-formed figures and their keen inquisitive glances; the children with the meager, intelligent, cute and humorous countenances, mounted on bodies of unconscionable fragility were all evidently beings of a different race and kind to any we have yet seen either in Africa or England. Master Coolie seemed to make himself perfectly at home and did not appear in the least disconcerted by the novelty of his situation.

The arrival of Indians had been preceded by lengthy argument and negotiation in the Colony of Natal. In the 1850's, the sugar planters began making covetous glances towards Mauritius, which had been enriched by the immigration of Indians a few years earlier. Public pressure on the Government in Natal mounted, and in 1855, while Natal was still a district of the Cape Colony, Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape, was asked to allow a limited number of Indians to come.

Though there was an African population of over 100,000 at the time, they could not be induced to work for long periods on the sugar plantations. For the most part they were able to raise nearly all they required on their own lands.

So, after protracted discussions between the Colony of Natal, the British Government and the Indian Government, the Indian Legislative Council passed an Act in 1860 providing for the indenture of Indians to Natal on certain specific conditions.

From 1860 to 1866, there was a steady flow of Indian immigrants to Natal. Their effect on the sugar industry was soon felt. In 1857 sugar to the value of £2,000 was exported, but four years after the arrival of the Indians the figure had jumped to £100,000.

It was generally accepted at the time that the immigration of the Indians had benefited the country, and that more were needed to ensure its future prosperity. A large section of the whites wanted the Indians to achieve greater prosperity in the knowledge that it would at the same time help the rest of the community. In 1865 one newspaper said that there was no reason why an Indian should not be encouraged in his natural wish to make money more rapidly by working for himself. "In creating wealth, he must benefit the community in a greater degree. Hence we think the Government might lay out small plots of land, among those to be allotted to Kaffirs, for sale to free coolies of course at the upset price. . ."

Indians were encouraged to acquire land. A number of them were allotted land by the authorities at Umzinto after relinquishing their right to a passage back to India at the end of ten years.

One of the main problems facing the Indians was that of women. There were too few women among the labourers. The Natal Government was reluctant to encourage their immigration, but was forced to allow some for fear that a refusal would stop the flow of labour to the sugar, coffee and arrowroot plantations.

The planters themselves wanted the number of women to be strictly limited. But the Indian Government insisted that a definite proportion of women should accompany each group of men. The precise number of women was not mentioned in the negotiations which took place, but it was agreed that women totaling 35 per cent of the number of men should be allowed to come in the first year; 43 per cent in the second; and 50 per cent in the subsequent years. The Natal Government, however, was keen to keep down expenses, and the proportion was later reduced to 25 per cent, which remained the legal minimum during the first period of immigration.

It was often difficult to make up the proportion of women, and ships were sometimes held up in India while the Agent (commonly known as the "Coolie Catcher" at the time) looked around for some. In her *History of Indians in Natal*, Dr. Mabel Palmer says: "It can be imagined that under these circumstances the women were not always of the most respectable type. The Indian Government admitted that the statutory proportion of women was hardly ever made up without enlisting large numbers of prostitutes or women of the lowest class in whom habits of honesty and decency were non-existent. No evidence was required of legal marriage between a man and the woman who accompanied him. Indeed, the Coolie Agent in assigning labourers simply linked together any two convenient individuals and sent them for indenture as husband and wife. They had, however, to give their formal consent.

There was many a brief union between the men and women immigrants. Indian marriages, whether contracted in the colony or in India, were not recognized as legal in themselves in Natal. Because of this, couples parted after the smallest argument. Women were quite prepared to have affairs with several men, and some changed husbands three or four times.

In spite of the large number of African women in the areas where the Indians worked, there was very little (if any) miscegenation between them. There are various explanations for this. One lies in the Indian caste system, which forbids a man to have an affair with a woman outside his group.

Caste ties in India at the time were very strong. To cross the seas was strictly taboo to Hindus, and anyone transgressing this rule was treated as the lowest of the low (Gandhi was excommunicated from his caste when he went to England to study in his youth). The bulk of indentured immigrants, however, were drawn from the Sudra caste, the lowest of the four main strata in the Hindu caste hierarchy. Many of them, on landing in Natal, assumed caste names, such as Singh, Pillay, Naidoo, Maharaj, thus breaking through the "caste barrier." They were reluctant to do anything which might jeopardize their new-found "status"

In addition, there were religious, cultural and sociological differences separating the Indian and African.

The Indian labourers had other troubles too. Some of the first immigrants returned to India in 1871 after completing the five years of indenture and the five years of free labour with complaints that they had been flogged and ill-treated by their employers.

The Government of India said that it could not allow emigration to be resumed until it was assured effective measures had been taken to ensure that the immigrants received proper protection in Natal. This statement led to the appointment of the Coolie Commission, which

reported in 1872 that there was no general systematic bad treatment, though there were certainly isolated instances of deliberate ill-usage.

Laws were passed to satisfy the Government of India, and immigrants began coming into the country again. At their own request, they were no longer referred to officially as coolies," but as Indians.

As the years went by, the immigrants slowly became assimilated into their new society. Though a steady flow of people returned to India after their period of indenture, most immigrants remained. At the same time, more and more were brought into the country to satiate the labour thirst of the sugar farmers. Some Indians were employed on the railways.

A number of the immigrants took to farming in a small way after completing their indentures.

There was some mild opposition to the presence of the Indians, but the majority of people in Natal saw them as a valuable addition to the economy.

Some Indian traders began to arrive. Free immigrants also appeared, mainly to trade. Some Indians who had made good in Mauritius and were looking for fresh fields emigrated to Natal and opened businesses. The traders were called "Arabs."

These traders spread throughout Natal, and their presence was felt by the whites, who had until then conducted their businesses without any real competition. Some whites were forced to close down. One magistrate reported: "There are, including Arabs chiefly, 37 males and 13 females, in all 50 Indians, in this district. These are resident in Pomeroy, and are either shop-keepers or hawkers, carrying on trade with the Natives around, selling many ploughs, hoes or picks, blankets, beads, inferior classes of clothing, and fancy articles for wear. Nearly all the £5,865 2s. 7d. money orders obtained for the year ended 30th June, 1892, was paid in by these Arab shop-keepers."

Ill-feeling against the Indians grew as they made their mark in business. They were accused of insanitary habits and unfair competition. A commission was appointed in 1887 to investigate various allegations. One of the recommendations of the commission was that indentures should terminate in India, which meant that an immigrant could come to the country only for his period of indenture.

This suggestion was opposed by some whites as well as the Indians. A Mr. J.R. Saunders, who had for years tried to help the immigrants, said this of the proposal: "What is it but taking the best out of servants and then refusing them the enjoyment of their reward – forcing them back (if we could but we cannot) when their best days have been spent for our benefit."

While the whites agitated about unfair trading and insanitary habits, the Indians complained about harsh treatment on some of the estates. On one estate on the South Coast, there was a private police force which prevented workers from leaving to complain to the magistrate. There were five suicides on this estate on one day.

The suicide rate amongst Indians was very high. On the North Coast of Natal some of the older men still talk of "suicide trees" – trees from which more than one man had hanged himself.

From 1893, a definite pattern seemed to be establishing itself in the legislation passed in Natal. The few rights of the Indian people were being slowly whittled away, with no benefits being given in return.

II

The white mob was in an ugly mood. They didn't like the mild-mannered Indian barrister who had come back to South Africa to lead his people in their struggle. "Hang old Gandhi on the sour apple tree," they cried as they hurled stones at him. But Gandhi was to survive that ordeal, and many others, to become one of our century's great men.

In May, 1893, a young, inexperienced barrister, who was to change the course of Indian history, landed in Natal. At that stage the name of Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was quite unknown. He had left India many years before to study in Britain, and had returned to set up a legal practice in Bombay.

The practice, however, proved a failure. He waited for months before getting his first client, and when he rose to argue in court, his nerve failed him, and he could not utter a word.

He then decided to open an office in Rajkot, his home town, but there too he made little headway. Suddenly he got an offer from Dada Abdulla & co., of Durban, to come to South Africa to appear on their behalf in a case. He jumped at the opportunity.

Thus it was that the slightly-built young man, wearing a fashionable frock coat, carefully pressed trousers, shining shoes and a turban arrived in Durban. Little did he realize that this "short visit" was to last nearly 20 years.

The first thing he sensed in Durban was that all Indians were looked down upon by the whites as pariahs. They were called coolies or samis. Gandhi himself was referred to as the "coolie barrister."

A few days after his arrival, he was taken to the Durban law courts, where a magistrate ordered him to remove his turban. Gandhi refused, and left the court. He later wrote to the Press about the incident, which became widely publicized. Gandhi was referred to by some people as the "unwelcome visitor."

After staying in Durban for about a week, he left by train for Pretoria in connection with the law suit. When the train reached Pietermaritzburg, a white passenger in the first class compartment complained to railway officials that he would not sit next to a "coloured." Two officials asked Gandhi to move to a third class

compartment. He refused. A constable was called, and Gandhi was pushed off the train with his luggage.

He went into the third class waiting room, taking his handbag. His other luggage was picked up by railway authorities. It was a bitterly cold night, but he did not ask for his overcoat, which was in his other bags, for fear of being insulted again.

The room was dark, and the lone figure sat freezing through the night. A new Gandhi was being shaped in that dismal room.

The following morning Gandhi sent a long telegram to the General Manager of Railways complaining about the way he had been treated by the police and railway authorities.

Waiting till night, Gandhi boarded a train to Charlestown, on the Transvaal border, from where he had to take a stagecoach to Johannesburg. All the other passengers on the coach were white, and he was made to sit with the coachman. He pocketed this insult, and sat meekly outside. On the way the white conductor, who was inside, wanted to smoke, and as he was not allowed to do so inside, he ordered Gandhi to sit on the dirty piece of sacking on the foot-board so that he could take his seat. Gandhi refused and the conductor hit him. It was only after some of the white passengers had intervened that Gandhi was left in his place.

In Pretoria, Gandhi's main concern was the law suite, but his sense of social justice led him to summon the local Indians to a meeting, where he urged them to revolt against discrimination. He also asked them to observe truthfulness in business and reminded them that their homeland would be judged by their actions.

He also appealed to them to forget all distinctions of caste and religion, to adopt more sanitary habits, and to learn to read and write English.

Gandhi had no intention then of remaining in South Africa. He thought that, having aroused some political consciousness in the people, he could return to India as soon as the law suite ended.

Indians in the Transvaal at that time were worse off than those in Natal. They had no franchise, were allowed to own land only in a special location, and could not move out of doors after 9 p.m.

Gandhi himself, however, had been exempted from the curfew regulations. One evening, while taking his usual walk in Pretoria, he strolled past the home of President Kruger, where the policeman on duty pushed him off the pavement and kicked him. An English Quaker, a Mr. Coates, who was passing by, urged Gandhi to institute proceedings against the constable, and offered to give evidence. Gandhi refused, saying that it was against his principles to go to court to further a personal grievance.

Early in 1894 Gandhi completed his work in Pretoria, and returned to Durban to prepare for his departure to India. A farewell party was arranged for him at Sydenham. While he was thumbing through a newspaper at the party, he saw a paragraph under the heading "Indian Franchise." It referred to a Bill before the House of Legislature seeking to deprive Indians of their franchise. In those days Indian men were allowed a vote under the original Charter of Natal, subject to certain property and educational qualifications. There were between three and four hundred Indians on the roll.

Gandhi immediately understood the ominous implications of the Bill. He advised the people at the party to resist every effort to disenfranchise them.

A meeting was later held at the home of Abdulla Haji Adam, said to be the richest Indian in the country at the time, to plan a campaign of action. The leader of the Indian community, Sheth Haji Muhammad Haji Dada, was elected president of the committee. Among those who pledged their support were Mr. Subhan Godfrey, headmaster of a mission school, a Mr. Paul, a court interpreter, and a number of

merchants, including Dawud Muhammad, Muhammad Kasam Kammuddin, Adamji Miyakhan, A. Kolandavelu Pillay, C. Lachhiram, Rangasami Paciachi, Amod Jiva and Parsi Rustomjee.

The Bill had already passed its second reading. Telegrams were immediately sent to the Speaker of the Assembly requesting him to postpone further discussion on the measure. Telegrams were also sent to other leading figures. A petition was drawn up to be presented to the Legislative Assembly, but nothing could stop the Bill, and it was passed.

Gandhi then organized a monster petition of about 10,000 signatures, and sent it to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, in London. The Natal Government pointed out that the Bill had gone through its final stages without any dissident vote, but the Colonial Office refused to give the consent necessary to make the Bill a law.

Because of the important role he was taking in Indian affairs, Gandhi was asked by friends to remaining Natal permanently. They offered to pay him for his services. Gandhi agreed to stay, but said he would not take money for public work. He asked, however, that members of the community should guarantee him legal work to the extent of £300 a year, which was what he felt he needed to maintain a household in keeping with his position as a barrister.

This assurance was gladly given, and Gandhi settled in Natal.

He applied to the Supreme Court of Natal for admission as an advocate. His application was opposed by the Law Society of Natal, but he was admitted after some delay.

Gandhi's office was on the corner of West and Field Streets, and his home was in Beach Grove, near where the Durban law courts are today. Mr. Harry Escombe, who was then Prime Minister of Natal, lived opposite.

Gandhi later moved his offices to Mercury Lane.

Three Durban Indians, who were employed as clerks by Gandhi, are still alive. They are Mr. Vincent Lawrence, Mr. J. Royeppen, now an advocate, and Mr. J. W. Godfrey, also an advocate.

Mr. Lawrence has some interesting recollections of his days with Gandhi. There was the Balasundarum case, for instance. Balasundarum was a Tamil indentured labourer. One day he entered Gandhi's office in tattered clothes and with two front teeth broken. His mouth was bleeding. Gandhi, who could not understand Tamil, asked Lawrence to get a statement.

Balasundarum was serving his indenture under a well-known Durban European, who had thrashed him so severely for some trivial offence that two teeth had been broken.

Gandhi took Balasundarum to a doctor and secured a certificate. He then went to a magistrate and filed an affidavit. He finally had Balasundarum's indenture transferred to another European.

The case received widespread publicity, both in South Africa and abroad, and from that time the indentured Indians looked to Gandhi as their protector, the man who would listen to their troubles and would fight their battles. They had troubles enough under the system, which some people saw as virtual slavery.

In face of the continued anti-Indian feeling and legislation, Gandhi felt that the only way his people could achieve anything was by forming a permanent political body to carry out sustained protest. As a result, the Natal Indian Congress was formed on May 22, 1894.

Meanwhile, there was a growing competition between free Indians and whites in commerce and other spheres. The Natal Government again asked the Government of India to agree to the indenture of Indians being terminated in India. The request was rejected. The Natal Government wanted to limit the growth of the Indian population by the measure.

In 1896, Gandhi left South Africa to bring his family from India. While in India he addressed meetings, wrote articles and gave interviews on the problems of his people in Natal. A garbled version of his statements was cabled to South Africa, and incensed the whites, who got the impression that he was returning to South Africa with nearly 800 free Indians in two ships.

The whites held large protest meetings, and demanded that Gandhi and the free Indians should be prevented from landing. They threatened that if the Natal Government failed to stop the immigrants, they would take the law into their own hands.

When the two ships arrived at the Port of Natal, they were kept in quarantine for 23 days. Many passengers were in fact old residents of the country. Notices were served on the passengers by a committee of whites warning them that they would be pushed into the sea if they attempted to land.

After a time, however, the white leader appealed to his followers not to prevent the landing, saying they had given sufficient expression to their feelings, which would make a profound effect on the Imperial Government.

The Indians were allowed to land. Gandhi's family was sent to the home of Parsi Rustomji, an old friend, but Gandhi was advised to remain until evening, when he would be escorted home by the Superintendent of Water Police. In the afternoon, however, he was persuaded by a friend, Mr. F.A. Laughton, Q.C., to go ashore with him.

It was about half-past four when Gandhi and Mr. Laughton began their walk. The whites who had come to protest at the landing had left, but there were still some sightseers at the port. A few white youngsters recognized Gandhi, and began shouting: "Gandhi! Gandhi! Thrash him!" Part of the crowd threw pebbles at them.

The two lonely figures walked on, the crowd gradually growing. Laughton, realizing the danger, hailed a riksha, but the puller was warned by the crowd that if he carried them, he would be beaten up.

By the time the two men reached West Street, there was a huge crowd around them. Suddenly a burly man ran forward and pulled Mr. Laughton away from Gandhi. Gandhi was showered with stones and whatever else the mob could lay hands on. His turban was knocked off. He was nearly unconscious, but the mob kept pelting him, singing "Hang old Gandhi on the sour apple tree."

Fortunately, a Mrs. Alexander, wife of the Superintendent of Police, came on the scene and saw the cowardly attack. Opening her umbrella, she shielded Gandhi and helped him to the police station.

Gandhi refused to take shelter at the police station, and proceeded to Rustomji's house, where his family had gone, without any further mishap.

Later, about a thousand whites gathered outside the house and demanded that Gandhi be handed over to them. Rustomji was warned that if he did not hand over Gandhi, the house would be burnt, with all the occupants inside. Just then Superintendent Alexander arrived. He sensed the angry mood of the crowd, and got a message through to Gandhi that he should address himself as an Indian constable and leave the building. Gandhi did so, and escaped.

While Gandhi was getting away, Alexander was leading the mob of whites in a sing-song. When the crowd later found that Gandhi had gone, they dispersed.

The British Government was incensed at the way Gandhi had been treated, and the Secretary of State, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, cabled the Natal Government demanding that it prosecute the assailants and see justice done. Gandhi, however, refused to prosecute.

In the meantime, fresh steps were taken in South Africa to restrict the immigration of Indians and to impose further disabilities on those in the country. The subsidy of £10,000 for the introduction of indentured labour was withdrawn, and in 1897 an Act was passed prohibiting free immigration to Natal, except under certain conditions. At first the conditions were made easy, but they became more difficult in 1903.

After the war, Gandhi at last returned to India, promising that he would come back to South Africa if the people needed him.

Indian hopes that their conditions would improve after the war proved to be false. When the Transvaal became a British Colony, Indian grievances were soon forgotten. Instead, the provisions of Law No. 3 of 1885 were enacted. In terms of this legislation, Indians were forbidden to own fixed property, except in special areas. In addition, restrictions were imposed on the movement of Indians from Natal to the Transvaal.

In 1903, Gandhi was asked by the Indian people to return to South Africa. He did return, and set up a practice, this time in Johannesburg.

In 1904 he established the Phoenix Settlement, which was inspired by the idea of forming a class of people dedicated to working the lands and to handcraft. It was his belief that man could achieve his greatest peace by such work. Gandhi acquired a 100-acre site for the settlement. It was decided that everybody on the settlement should be taught typesetting in addition to working the land. This, it was believed, would enable them to live full and satisfactory lives.

Again, during the Zulu rebellion of 1906, Gandhi formed an ambulance corps, which did invaluable work among the wounded tribesmen, who would otherwise have had no skilled attention.

This is the story of a hundred years of Indian progress; a saga of a people. It tells of the lives of dozens of ordinary men and women whose courage and convictions made them rise to the ranks of heroes: How a people loved its country and yet struggled against the injustices and discriminations that were perpetrated in that country's name. This is the tale of the followers in the great tradition of Gandhi, and of their hopes for tomorrow.

The hundred years since the arrival of Indians in South Africa is a story punctuated with hardship, tears and joy. We have had colourful heroes, both men and women, who have added a touch of romanticism to our history in South Africa. Some of them have been great political leaders; some simple folk dedicated to a cause; some business tycoons; some ordinary men and women whose stories have never been told, even some gangsters who have added their own sinister glamour.

A lot has happened during our first hundred years in South Africa. In spite of the immense setbacks we have had in our political struggles and the almost monotonous regularity with which anti-Indian laws have been passed, we can still look back with a sense of pride and achievement.

In practically all the different phases of our history, individuals stood out as martyrs and heroes. The world knows of the greatest of them all, Mahatma Gandhi, who gained his political inspiration in South Africa, and whose theory of passive resistance brought India its independence. But there were lesser heroes the present generation scarcely knows.

One of the most outstanding in our early history was a woman who gave her life for the cause of her people. She was Villiamah Mudaliar, the daughter of a Johannesburg labourer. Valliamah was a mere wisp of a woman who was imbued with the spirit of Gandhi and his passive resistance movement. She served her first term of imprisonment at the age of sixteen and when she returned from her term of imprisonment, she contracted a fatal fever.

It was on February 22, 1914, that Gandhi was summoned to her bedside. He could not help but brush aside a tear when he saw the tall girl, her body emaciated beyond description. Though she was dying, she had a flicker of a smile on her girlish face. "Valliamah, you do not repent of your having gone to jail?" asked Gandhi.

"Repent? I am even now ready to go to jail again if I am arrested," replied the girl. Gandhi was deeply moved by the simple and sincere words of a girl dedicated to his faith. He later told friends that if he had only a dozen Valliamahs, the cause of the Indians would be won. Valliamah hovered between life and death after her last conversation with Gandhi. But within a few days she died.

Gandhi paid the following moving tribute to her: "She built her temple of service with her own hands and her glorious image has a niche even now reserved for it in many a heart. And the name of Valliamah will live in the history of South African Satyagraha (Passive Resistance) as long as India lives."

There were several others who stood out during the great political campaigns of Gandhi. One other was Ahmad Muhammad Kachhalia of Johannesburg. Kachhalia was an unostentatious piece-goods trader from the Transvaal who rose to become a respected leader of his people through sheer honesty and his determination to do the Indians in South Africa a service without any personal reward.

In some of the most difficult times in the Gandhian era, Kachhalia was elected a "captain" by Gandhi. He cheerfully accepted jail in the cause of his people. The greatness in Kachhalia became apparent when white creditors put the squeeze on him to dissuade him from campaigning with the political firebrand Gandhi. Kachhalia owed large sums of money to white firms and, though his credit was the best in the country, the companies demanded that he meet his dues immediately. It was suspected that the white traders were instructed to start their campaign of persecution by the government of the day.

The affected firms told Kachhalia that they would not press for immediate payment if he left the Satyagraha movement. Kachhalia would have no truck with the suggestion that he give up politics. He told his creditors that his participation in the struggle was his personal affair. He considered that his religion, the honour of his country and his own self-respect were bound up with the struggle. He assured them, however, that their money was safe, and that as long as he was alive, he would repay them in full, at any cost.

A meeting of creditors was held in the offices of Gandhi at the beginning of 1909. With the consent of Kachhalia, Gandhi invited the creditors to take over the business if they wished. If this did not satisfy them, the creditors could take over the stock at cost price and if an part of their dues still remained unpaid, they would be free to take over the book debts sufficient to cover the deficit. But the merchants were not out to seek justice. They were out to bend Kachhalia.

When he would not waver from his stand, insolvency proceedings were instituted against him and he was declared insolvent. Bankruptcy amongst Muslims was considered an unpardonable sin, but his insolvency only enhanced Kachhalia's prestige among the community. Within a year after being declared insolvent, Kachhalia paid his creditors twenty shillings in the pound.

A completely unknown indentured labourer played one of the most dramatic and dangerous roles during the Boer War. He was Parbhusingh of Ladysmith, who formed part of a small Indian settlement in the town. When the Boer War was at its height, the officer in command at Ladysmith assigned various duties to every resident of the place, irrespective of his race. A most dangerous and most responsible task was assigned to Parbhusingh.

The Boers had stationed a long-range gun, known in those days as the "pom pom," on a hill near Ladysmith. The gun was doing a great amount of damage, both to property and to lives. Because of the antiquity of the weapons used in those days, there was an interval of over a minute from the time the guns were fired to the time its shells

hit the town. If the townspeople received warning immediately the gun was fired, they had the opportunity to take cover and save their lives.

Parbhusingh was allotted the task of sitting on a huge tree and ringing a bell the moment he saw the flash of the gun on the hill. It was realized that the role given to him was a very dangerous one. He perched himself on the tree and without fail sounded the bell each time he saw the flash of light. A number of lives were saved because of his heroic devotion to duty.

The story of Parbhusingh's bravery was soon known in Natal. In his own simple way he typified the spirit of the ordinary indentured Indian labourer of his days. They were not cowards. The Viceroy of India, Lord Curzon, sent a Kashmir robe for presentation to Parbhusingh and asked the Natal Government to carry out the presentation at a public ceremony. The unknown man from Ladysmith was given a civic presentation by the mayor of Durban.

To many of the early Indians, South Africa was a land of promise. And people were prepared to achieve their ambition even at the risk of their lives and the lives of their children.

An Muni Gadu, left South Africa with his two sons and daughters to settle in India under the repatriation scheme. In terms of the scheme, an Indian who sought voluntary repatriation could return to South Africa within a three-year period.

When he arrived in India, he discovered that his relatives had left the district in which they lived and he was not able to trace them. He remained in India for a while, but decided to return to South Africa within the stipulated time of three years. The man found that the money in his possession could only purchase tickets for his family and himself to Dar-es-Salaam.

This did not deter him. He bought tickets to Dar-es-Salaam and from there wrote to the South African Ministry of Interior for financial

assistance to enable him to proceed to Durban by ship. Financial help from the South African government was refused.

The father, two sons and daughter were bent on returning to Durban. This was the only home they knew. With no money in their possession, the family started their long trek from Dar-es-Salaam to Durban by foot.

The trip was hazardous. The man walked with his children through forests infested with wild animals, passed through areas of tropical disease without being immunized, and swam across the many rivers. They saved themselves from starvation by eating herbs and fruit.

After several months of walking, they arrived at the Natal border. Instead of the welcome they expected, they were arrested. The distraught family who risked life to get back to what they thought was their home, were declared prohibited immigrants and put on board the next ship to India.

One of the pioneer teachers amongst Indians was Mr. Henry Nundoo. In 1886, he published a book titled "Light of Knowledge" in Hindu and English for use by Indians learning English. In the preface to the book, Mr. Nundoo said: "The reader will find this book an easy introduction to the English language, either with or without the aid of a teacher."

It was, however, not as easy as Mr. Nundoo made it seem. Six years after his book was published, an Education Commission was set up by the Government to go into the education needs of Indians. This commission recommended that "the Protector of Indian Immigrants should correspond with the proper authorities in India with a view to securing for the Colony the services of efficiently trained teachers capable, not only of conducting a central school for "coolies," but also of preparing young men to become teachers at the schools on the plantations."

The first fully-qualified woman teacher was brought from India to Natal in 1889. She was Mrs. S. P. Vedamuthu, who was brought by the St. Aidan's Mission to teach in one of the two girls' schools then established.

The first contingent of fully qualified Indian teachers to lecture in a College was imported from India in 1904. They were Rev. D. Koilpillai, B.A.(Principal), Samuel Jesudas, B.A., Gnanamuthu Thungasamy, B.A., and Samuel Joseph, F.A. And from these humble beginnings in the field of education, the community has produced men and women who have excelled themselves in all fields.

Standing out amongst the hundreds of unknown and unsung heroes of our century was a young father who gave his life in saving others from certain death.

It happened during the great floods of the Umbilo River. After the deluge, the river was a mass of swirling water which took everything in its wake. Families living in the low-lying lands were swept out to sea. Some were rescued, but others met a watery grave. Helpless men and women stood in silence on the hills overlooking the river, bearing witness to this tragedy. There were poignant scenes as mother cried out for help and offered all their possessions as reward for their rescue as they clung to rooftops which were being tossed about like corks in the water.

A young father stood within reach of the edge of the water clasping his infant son, horrified at the sight. Not more than twenty yards away, a mother – with her own child held tightly to her bosom – was being swept away. The mother was quietly sobbing as she realized that nobody would dare undertake her rescue. Suddenly the man on the river bank set down his little son in safety, and dived into the water fully-clothed. He reached the near-drowning mother and child and brought them safely to shore. But before the hero could climb the bank to safety, he lost his footing, slipped back into the river – and was swept away.

As was detailed in previous stories by DRUM on Indians in South Africa, a mass of laws restricting Indians in many ways were introduced from time to time by the different governments. While Gandhi was in South Africa, he led the struggle of the people as an undisputed leader. But after the withdrawal of Gandhi and the passing away of the co-workers, the community was in need of a new leader.

It was at this time that Abdulla Ismail Kajee filled the gap. There were many who did not agree with the politics of the late "A.I.," as he was popularly known, but he did make a significant contribution to the history of the Indians in South Africa. Some called him a "quisling" and a "seller-out" of Indian interest, whilst some said he possessed rare quality of statesmanship and that, had he been white, he would have been Prime Minister.

A.I. had a stormy political career and eventually managed to lead the Natal Indian Congress and its parent body, the South African Indian Congress and its parent body, the South African Indian Congress. He concluded several agreements with the government of his day. But he was often accused by his opponents of looking after the interests of the rich at the expense of the poor.

He led Congress through difficult times until he was finally ousted from office together with his colleagues in 1946, when the "Progressives" took over. Kajee was an embittered man, but this did not lead him to forsake politics. He was too deeply engrossed in it and for some months acted as a freelance, still retaining his contact with members of the Government. During discussions with Mr. H.G. Lawrence of the Smuts Government, he collapsed and died a few hours later.

A.I. was the stormy petrel of Indian politics in South Africa, but even his opponents admit that he was devoted to his cause, though that cause deviated from the policy of his opponents and the vast majority of the people he tried to represent.

For the first hundred years of our existence in South Africa, Indians can certainly boast of having produced men and women of outstanding quality and caliber. We have shown that we are not cowards in times of need. We did not allow running political battles with government of the country to overshadow a natural loyalty and patriotism to South Africa.

Indians have often been accused of being bad South Africans, but we have made our contribution in both the great wars. Indians fought alongside other South Africans on the battlefields of Africa and Europe.

The main criticism of Indians in South Africa, in the early years, that has some weight, is that we lived in a cultural vacuum. We had very few poets and authors, writers and musicians. Despite the fact that we struggled against racialism, it is also fair to say that for most of the early part of our hundred years of history of our existence we have been as racist as other sections in this race-conscious country.

It has only been in the past few decades that we have seen signs of a revolution in our social life. There have been changes in our political outlook, our social outlook, our cultural outlook, and in every aspect of our lives, Indian society is now beginning to play its full part in the modern world of today.

IV

It is 1907. The "Black Act," imposing harsh restrictions on the Indian population, is passed in the Transvaal. This proves the last straw, and a passive resistance movement sweeps the country under the leadership of Gandhi. In spite of the hardships involved, even women and the aged rush to take part. Then comes the Smuts-Gandhi agreement. G.R. Naidoo recalls here those momentous days.

The Transvaal was in a turmoil. Agitation against the Indians had been increasing.

Then, early in 1907, the Transvaal was granted responsible government, and Parliament rushed through the Asiatic Registration Act. The Bill was to become law on July 1. The law provided for anyone without a certificate to be imprisoned, fined or deported from the Transvaal.

The Indian people were determined to defy the law.

And thus began the passive resistance campaign. A new political “weapon” had been born.

The Indian people swarmed to the banners, courting arrest.

The authorities were at their wits’ end. During Christmas week of 1907 they ordered some of the leading men in the movement – including Gandhi, Mr. Leuing Quinn, the leader of the Chinese community of Johannesburg (the Act also applied to Chinese) and Mr. Thambi Naidoo, also of Johannesburg were to appear in court to show cause why they should not be ordered to leave the Transvaal. Each of the men was later ordered to leave, but none of them did so, and all were consequently jailed.

Instead of intimidating the population, the trials sparked off even greater enthusiasm than before. After the sentences had been passed, an exultant crowd, carrying black flags, marched through the streets. Within a week no less than a hundred people sought imprisonment for some minor breach of the law.

It was at this time that Mr. Albert Cartwright, editor of the “Transvaal Leader,” began to mediate in the dispute. General Smuts welcomed this intervention, as he was worried about the momentum the movement was gaining. Mr. Cartwright suggested a compromise – which was either drafted or approved by Smuts – providing for the Indians to register voluntarily.

On January 30, 1908, Gandhi was removed from the Pretoria Prison and taken to see General Smuts. Smuts reiterated that the Black Act

would be repealed as soon as there was voluntary registration in accordance with the terms of settlement. Gandhi was set free, with the promise that the other prisoners would be released the next day.

Gandhi wanted to be the first to register voluntarily, but there was some opposition to the plan. Some of those close to Gandhi feared that the agreement might not be honored. There was also malicious gossip that Smuts had bribed Gandhi with £15,00 to sell the Indians. The Pathans, a fighting tribe of Indians, warned Gandhi that anybody who registered would be killed.

One Pathan, Mir Alam, attempted to fulfill this threat, with Gandhi as the victim. On the morning of February 10, as Gandhi was going to take out his registration permit to honour his agreement with Smuts, he was accosted by Mir Alam and some other men, who demanded to know what he was doing. Gandhi had scarcely finished replying, when he was struck on the back of the head. He crumpled to the ground, and was kicked and hit by the incensed Pathans, who were arrested soon afterwards while running away.

Gandhi was removed semi-conscious to the home of a Mr. Doke, a Baptist minister and friend of his, but even while in that condition he asked that the registration papers should be brought to his bedside. He also wrote to the Attorney-General asking for the release of Mir Alam and his companions as he did not want to prefer charges against them. Despite Gandhi's pleadings, the Pathans were sentenced to three months' hard labour.

The Pathans were eventually proved to be right in their argument that the Government could not be trusted. Although a number of Indians had registered voluntarily, General Smuts maintained the Black Act on the statute book.

In face of this flagrant breach of promise, the Indians sent an ultimatum to the Government that if the Asiatic Act was not repealed in terms of the settlement, the people would burn their certificates.

A mass meeting of Indians was held in the grounds of the Hamidia Mosque in Johannesburg on August 16, 1908, the day on which the ultimatum expired. Every inch of space in the grounds was filled. In one corner, on a platform, was a large cauldron in which it was intended to burn the registration certificates. Just as the meeting was about to begin, a volunteer dashed up and handed a telegram to Gandhi. It was from the Government and said that the authorities "regretted the determination of the Indians," and were unable to change their line of action.

At the end of the meeting more than 2,000 certificates were soaked in paraffin and set ablaze by Mr. Essop Mian of Johannesburg.

In addition to the Black Act, another inroad had been made into the civil liberties of Indian of the Transvaal – during 1906 – when the Transvaal Immigrants Restriction Bill was passed. It treated as prohibited immigrants those who could pass education tests but were not eligible for registration under the Asiatic Act.

The Indian people decided to use passive resistance against the Immigrants Law too.

There were several Indians in Natal who possessed the right to stay in the Transvaal. The resisters decided that two classes of Indians should enter the Transvaal as part of their campaign – some traders who had previously lived there and some "educated" ones. The traders, led by Daud Mahomed, president of the Natal Indian Congress, were arrested on the Transvaal border, and served a three-month sentence at Volksrust.

The movement began to increase rapidly. Hundreds of Indians from both Natal and Transvaal courted imprisonment, and the jails were filled. The resisters were drawn from all walks of life. There was Imam Abdul Kadar Bavazir of Johannesburg, who defied the law despite his very delicate health.

Another was the Cambridge-graduate barrister, Joseph Royeppen, for Durban, who left his law books, took up a basket of vegetables, and was arrested as an unlicensed hawkker. Even youngsters, like 14-year-old Mohanial Manji Ghelani, who also went to jail.

Gandhi himself was arrested and sent to jail in Pretoria, where he was put in solitary confinement.

Then the Government began deporting people to India in an attempt to crush the campaign. Many of the victims of this inhuman measure were poor folk. The Indian people denied the Government's right to deport people, and successfully fought it on legal grounds.

In the meantime negotiations were afoot for the formation of Union and Gandhi and some of his followers went to England to try to settle the Indian question through the British Government, who were at the time discussing Union with General Smuts and General Hertzog. He was unsuccessful, and on his return to South Africa he removed the Transvaal passive resisters to "Tolstoy Farm," a settlement on similar lines to the one established at Phoenix to encourage people to work on the land. The farm was the property of Mr. Kallenbach, and was placed at the disposal of resisters.

Gandhi, although married had by that time taken a vow of celibacy, and looked on his wife as a sister rather than a wife. He was very easily disturbed at any sign of his followers having "evil thoughts," as he put it, about sex.

There were both males and females at Tolstoy Farm, and Gandhi watched them with the eyes of a hawk. The boys and girls slept around him, and he arranged their beds in a certain order to try to ensure that there was no misbehaviour. One day one of the lads at the settlement passed a remark at two of the women. Gandhi heard about it, and clipped off the long, beautiful hair of the two girls as a "sign of warning to every young man that no evil eye might be cast upon them."

Gandhi had had similar problems at the Phoenix Settlement. One day, while in Durban, he received an urgent message that there was a sex scandal at the settlement. He rushed to Johannesburg, and was told that an unmarried woman was pregnant. The man who was responsible was a close relative of Gandhi's. Gandhi went on a fast, presumably to atone for the act of his followers.

Passive Resistance was now being conducted on a small scale only. Neither the Indians nor the Government was prepared to make any concessions.

About the time there was a ruling by Mr. Justice Searle in the Cape Supreme Court that only marriages solemnized according to Christian rites and registered by the Registrar of Marriages were legal. By a single stroke of the pen, Justice Searle had reduced most Indian wives to concubines.

Indian women clamoured to go to jail in protest against the ruling and against the Government's failure to fulfill new promises made in 1912 to repeal the Black Act and abolish the £3 tax. Eleven women from the Transvaal were selected to break the law. But try as they would, the authorities refused to arrest them.

The resisters decided to give the campaign a renewed spurt by getting Natal women to enter the Transvaal and Transvaal women to cross into Natal, all without permits. The Transvaal women would try to persuade Indian coal miners at Newcastle to go on strike.

The Natal party was arrested, and the members were sentenced to three months' imprisonment for breaking the provincial barriers on September 23, 1913. The women from the Transvaal were not arrested, however, and they went on to Newcastle, where they got the coal miners to strike. These women were then arrested, and were also sentenced to three months in jail.

One of the Johannesburg women died shortly after her release from jail. She was sixteen-year-old Valiamma R. Munusami Mudaliar.

Meetings were held throughout the Transvaal to pay tribute to this brave young woman who was said to have sacrificed her life for the cause of her people.

The strike at Newcastle started off with only a few hundred men taking part, but it was not long before four thousand were out on strike. On the advice of Gandhi, they left their mine compounds after their employers had tried to intimidate them to go back to work. The number swelled to about six thousand when workers from other industries joined them.

Gandhi realized that he could not keep his "army" inactive in Newcastle, so he organized a mass march into the Transvaal, in defiance of the immigration laws, to bring things to a head. The march began in thick mist on the morning of October 28, 1913. It was the biggest protest march the country had ever seen. Led by Gandhi, small and frail, the men, women and children were hailed in every little dorp and town on their way to the Transvaal from Newcastle. Each person was on a ration of a pound and a half of bread and an ounce of sugar per person per day.

Two of the women in the group lost their children on the march. One child died of exposure, and the other was drowned when it fell from the arms of its mother while crossing a stream.

Throughout this historic march, Gandhi was attempting to reach a settlement before finally crossing into the Transvaal. Just before they reached the border, General Smuts was phoned and asked to abolish the £3 tax. In a conversation with the General's secretary, Gandhi said: "Tell General Smuts that I am fully prepared for the march. . . . If he promises to abolish the £3 tax, I will stop the march, as I will not break the law for the sake of breaking it, but I am driven to it by an inexorable necessity."

He received a curt reply: "General Smuts will have nothing to do with you. You may do just as you please."

It was November 6, 1913, and the time 6:30 a.m. The multitude of marchers turned towards the East, offered their prayers, and began the last stages of their march to the Transvaal.

The Volksrust whites had threatened to shoot any Indian who crossed into the Transvaal, but they did nothing when the resisters eventually entered, dirty, disheveled and exhausted at five that evening. That night Gandhi was arrested, and was released on £5 bail. He rejoined his contingent the next morning. A number of the aged or ailing volunteers were left at Volksrust with Indian merchants.

Gandhi was again arrested at Standerton, and allowed £50 bail.

Between Standerton and Greylingstad, Gandhi was arrested for a third time, and taken on warrant to Dundee, where he was accused of inducing miners to go on strike. Polak was charged with the duty of leading the resisters.

Gandhi was tried at Dundee and sentenced to nine months' imprisonment. He was then taken to Volksrust to appear on the charge against him there. He found both Kallenbach and Polak also under arrest at Volksrust. Each was sentenced to three months' imprisonment.

The rest of the army were also arrested, and were taken to Natal, where they were imprisoned. The Government then proclaimed the mine compounds as out-stations of the Dundee and Newcastle gaols, and appointed the white staff as warders.

But the floodgates were now open, and soon thousands of labourers on the sugar estates of Natal went on strike. The Government adopted a policy of blood and iron. Mounted military policemen chased strikers and brought them back to work. Several were killed by the police, and many were wounded. All the leaders of the Indian struggle were arrested.

The eyes of the world were now focused on South Africa. Smuts could no longer handle the situation. He was finding it difficult and embarrassing to keep thousands of resisters in jail. A commission was eventually appointed. Before beginning its sittings, it requested the unconditional release of Gandhi and two whites involved in the resistance. Mr. Kallenbach and Mr. Polak. The three were let out of prison after having been held about six weeks.

The Commission unhesitatingly recommended the abolition of the £3 tax and that non-polygamous marriages should be registered by the immigration offices in each province, thus meeting most of the Indian demands on this matter.

There were several meetings between Smuts and Gandhi after the commission had announced its findings. This resulted in an agreement, known as the Smuts-Gandhi agreement, which was enshrined in a series of letters between the two men. Smuts introduced the Indian Relief Act of 1914, which abolished the £3 tax; settled the marriage question by recognizing Hindu, Mohammedan and the Parsee marriages; and provided for the immigration of the wives and children of Indians living in the Union. The provincial barriers, however, were not removed, though Indians born in South Africa before August 1913 were allowed to enter the Cape.

Gandhi had achieved most of what he had set out to do in South Africa, and decided that it was now time for him to go back to India. Before leaving, in July 1914, he was feted by the Indian people.

As a parting gesture to his political adversary, Smuts, Gandhi presented him with a pair of sandals he had made in prison. Smuts wore the sandals on his farm for many years, and returned them to Gandhi in 1939, on the Indian leader's 70th birthday

Following the Smuts-Gandhi agreement, it was hoped that the voiceless Indian community would be treated fairly as members of a settled population of South Africa. But this was not to be.

The anti-Asiatic agitation grows worse. Then, in 1927, Cape Town Agreement is reached.

During the years 1910 to 1920, the position of the Indian in South Africa changed from that of a serf to a wage earner. At the same time, the "Indian menace" bogey was kept constantly alive. Many whites, fearing Indian economic competition, looked for any excuse to attack them. They alleged that the Indians always sent their money out of the country; that they were a danger to public health because of their "unclean habits;" that their presence depreciated the value of property in a neighbourhood; that their trading and business methods were "foreign" to the country.

Then, in 1925, Dr. Malan, Minister of the Nationalist-Labor Coalition, introduced the Areas Reservation and Immigration and Registration (Further Provisions) Bill, which envisaged the rigorous residential and commercial segregation of Indians in Natal.

This legislation raised a great storm of protest among the Indian people, who were being led by the South Africa Indian congress, which had been formed in 1920. The concerted opposition to the Bill led Dr. Malan to refer it to a Select Committee. After continual pressure from Indian, however, a conference was called at which a delegation from Indian met leaders of the South African Government.

As a result of these talks the Cape Town Agreement was published in 1927.

In terms of the agreement, India agreed to accept voluntary repatriates from South Africa if the Union Government paid their passages. The Union Government undertook to drop the Areas Reservation Bill and to provide for the cultural and economic uplift of the Indians who remained in the country.

The agreement, however, was essentially a compromise, and achieved very little. This Union Government expected that Indians would submit to voluntary repatriation in large numbers, while the Indian people expected that conditions would be improved for those of them who wished to remain.

From August 1927, when the agreement came into operation, until the end of 1940, only 16,201 Indians took advantage of the repatriation offer.

In spite of the weight of the forces against them, the Indian people were unable to achieve unity among themselves. There was a serious split in Congress in 1933, and a settlement was reached only in 1939.

There was trouble the following year again, however. There was an outcry at the time that Indians were penetrating into white areas and thus devaluing white properties. The Lawrence Committee, which included representatives of the Natal Indian Community, was set up with the purpose of dissuading Indians from buying land in white areas.

The participation of the A. I. Kajeer group of Congress in the Lawrence Committee led the "progressive bloc" (often referred to as the leftwing group) to revolt against them.

The white cry of "penetration" continued, and finally the committee was disbanded in the face of a demand that legislative restrictions should be instituted to stop Indians from buying in white localities.

The Government then appointed the Broome Commission to investigate the question of Indian penetration. As a result of its report, which said that Indian penetration was increasing, the Trading and Occupation of Land (Transvaal and Natal) Restriction Bill was passed in 1943. This Act became known to Indians as the Pegging Act, and was widely opposed by Indians both here and overseas.

But even this legislation was not considered adequate to control the Indian people, and in 1946 General Smuts introduced the Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill.

And thus the tussle went on, with no sign by the whites that they were prepared to treat the Indian people as human beings entitled to decent rights. There seemed to be no end to the discussions and negotiations on the Indian people. Another compromise settlement followed – the Pretoria Agreement. The Indian Congress led by Mr. Kajee and Mr. Pather, agreed that their people would buy land for investment purposes only in white areas, but not for occupation. This raised a storm of protest from the poorer section of the people, who accused Congress of “selling” them out so that the wealthy would be able to invest in white areas. The signing of the Pretoria Agreement brought an open split in Congress. An Anti-Segregation Council was formed, headed by Dr. Naicker and his progressive bloc. The Council had only 15 members on the Natal Indian Congress Committee, while the “Kajee-Pather Group” had 125.

The council urged co-operation with other non-white groups.

Hostility grew between the two Indian groups. Matters came to a head in August 1945, when members of the Anti-Segregation Council applied to court for an order directing the committee of Congress to hold an annual general meeting. The council felt that Congress was afraid of allowing members to discuss its policy, and was evading an annual meeting. The court found against the Congress officials.

When the annual meeting was held in terms of the court order, the people returned the Anti-Segregation men to power. The progressives had now taken over the running of the Congress. The “Old guard” later formed the Natal Indian Organisation, which still exists to this day.

The Asiatic Land Tenure and Indian Representation Bill was passed in 1946, and the Indian Government, at the request of the Indian Congress, severed diplomatic relations with South Africa. One of the

reasons for this decision was the fact that the Union Government had refused a request to hold a Round Table Conference.

Congress denounced the Bill as the “Ghetto Act.” It felt that determined measures were needed to oppose it, and it was decided that a passive resistance campaign should be launched.

The campaign began when people occupied a piece of land in the Umbilo area of Durban. Soon afterwards the tents of some resisters were burnt down by white hooligans.

As the campaign got under way, some people sought arrest by entering the Transvaal without a permit. The resistance snowballed, and nearly 2,000 Indians, including about 300 women, went to prison. There was never any lack of volunteers.

Another major step taken by the new Congress was the decision to place the “Indian question” before the United Nations Organisation. The issue is still brought up regularly at the United Nations, where the majority of nations have constantly attacked the treatment of Indians in the Union.

The coming to power of a Nationalist Government in the Union in 1948 brought a number of fresh blows to the Indian people.

One of the most crippling was the Suppression of Communism Act in 1950, which led to almost their entire leadership being banned from political activities at one period or another. Even people who had never been members of the Communist Party – while it was still legal – were affected.

The Group Areas Act was also mooted in 1950. Indian leaders immediately attacked the measure, pointing out that it could mean the economic strangulation of a community which had played a vital part in developing the country. There seemed little doubt among the Indian people that the Act was aimed primarily at them.

In 1952, the Indian Congress, in cooperation with the other non-white Congress movements, began the Defiance Against Unjust Laws Campaign. A number of whites also took part in the campaign, which has come to be recognized as one of the most important milestones in the non-white political struggle in South Africa.

What the Indian people are fighting for most is the recognition that they are a part of the South African people. To the vast majority of them, South Africa is the land of their birth, the only country they know as home. It is the country on which they base all their hopes for themselves and their children.

Chapter 39

From Veld to the City: The Bantu Drama

by

Anthony Sampson

Cutting through the middle of the lives of the black people of South Africa is one of the swiftest and sharpest breaks in the history of any race. It is the crossing from the placid, Stone-Age existence of the tribal reserves to the bustling, twentieth-century cities of modern South Africa – Johannesburg, Durban or Capetown. It is a contrast that lies inside the minds, to a greater or lesser extent, of all black South Africans. This contrast is at the very core of the current South African crisis, for as firmly as the Government of Dr. Verwoerd believes that the native people should remain in their primitive tribal state, so do the natives themselves desire passionately and unchangeably to become part of the modern cities.

To white observers, indeed, the metamorphosis of the Africans from the country to town is the most fascinating aspect of South Africa. The image of the blanketed tribesman, with bare feet, tribal scars and plugs in his ears, arriving bewildered and innocent in the middle of industrial Johannesburg is one which runs through the white literature of South Africa with a repetition that irritates the Africans themselves.

William Plomer's "Ula Masondo," Alan Paton's "Cry, the Beloved Country," Mopeli-Paulus' "Blanket Boy's Moon" all have the same basic theme. More recently, Lionel Rogoain's film called "Come Back, Africa," shot in Johannesburg last year, has the same tribal hero.

The theme is, undoubtedly, an evocative one, but it is perhaps less simple than it appears. Educated Africans, who resent the white

men's dramatizations of their tribal antecedents, suspect that the writers' interest is based on the old myth of Rousseau's "noble savage" – the quest for some imaginary innocence which sophisticated man has lost. They argue that their own transition has been no more abrupt than that of the English of Shakespeare's time – the "country gulls" who swagger into Elizabethan plays. Above all, they suspect that nearly all white men prefer their Africans to be primitive and untouched, and like to think that black men cannot be assimilated into white cities. In fact, the African intellectuals say, most white men believe in *apartheid* in their hearts.

Certainly, few white visitors could fail to be attracted by the outward appearance of life in the tribal reserves. Only a hundred miles from the industrial cities of Port Elizabeth or Durban, you can see the clusters of plain mud huts, with nothing but grass mats for furniture, and old women pounding maize with tree stumps outside. A Xhosa girl, her hair wound into a headdress of red clay, and her brown arms jangling with rings, walks by the side of the main road, balancing a pitcher on her head, staying erect and unworried as the Chevrolets and jaguars swish past her.

To the nerve-racked white business men living their complex urban lives, it is hardly surprising that the tribal Africans stand for all the peace they miss in their own existence.

Their tribal life appears magnificently unchanged. The community is dominated by two ancient leaders: the chief and the witch doctor. The chief, it is true, has not the gaudy splendor of the West Africans, with their umbrellas, embroidered gowns and rich jeweled headdresses. A South African chief is likely to wear white man's mufti, or a vague, cast-off uniform with only a ceremonial blanket, a leopard skin or a shield to signify his status. But the chiefs retain a splendid dignity and apparent authority: they rule through a gathering of elders, and when important issues arise they hold a special meeting of the tribe, or *kyotla*, which constitutes a kind of *ad hoc* democratic process. On festive occasions, they hold a beer-drink,

sitting around the floor of a mud hut, and passing a calabash of home-brewed beer from man to man.

There are many aspects of this tribal life that are endearing. There is the responsibility of it – the sense of duty to the family, the chief and the tribe. There is the courtesy, the consideration and the dignity of individuals, particularly old men and women. There is the laughter, the peasant wisdom, and the straightforward human values. Even the witch doctor, hung with bones, hides and bangles, is far from a figure of fun. He is, as a missionary doctor will tell you, a home-grown psychoanalyst who can, in a society riddled with fears and superstitions, cure a psychosomatic illness when Western medicine has failed.

But in this attractive-looking community, there is one indication of a fatal flaw: there are no young men, and even among the older generation there is a vast disparity between men and women. The reason is obvious: the dry, cracked land cannot support the men. They go, as soon as they reach manhood, to earn their livings in the gold mines of Johannesburg or the kitchens of Durban, and to send back money to their families.

The lack of men has corrupted the character of tribal life. The pivot of the community is no longer the chief's court, but the little hut, which exists in every small community, called Wenela – from W.N.L.A., the initials of the Witwatersrand Native Labor Association, the organization of mine-owners which brings 400,000 Africans every year to the gold mines.

They are taken in train loads for six- or nine-month contracts, and come back with new suits, hats and phonographs. They leave for second contracts and then, perhaps they take permanent city jobs and never come back again.

They leave behind them a community demoralized by their absence. The land, eroded and poor as it is, is not properly cared for. The women without their husbands, become undisciplined, promiscuous or prey to mysterious mental diseases and imagined pregnancies. Families are disorganized, and the children are often brought up by an aged grandfather or a drunken uncle. Above all, the country remains desperately poor. The 13 per cent of South African land on which the 3,000,000 tribal Africans live was never enough to sustain them, but the system of migratory African labor, while it provides the reserves with pocket money from remittances, insures that the country areas can never be developed properly.

Doctors, however, more than economists, are the ones who can perceive the true misery of the tribal reserves. To the mission doctors who deal with underfed children, fear-ridden mothers and miners sent back with TB, there is nothing romantic about tribal life; it is nasty, brutish and short.

The main cause of African migration is necessity. Every since Cecil Rhodes devised a poll tax for rural Africans to insure a labor supply for his diamond mines in Kimberley in the Eighteen Seventies. Africans have been forced by taxes and poverty to go to work in the cities.

But even without compulsion, many of them would go; it is more than poverty that brings Africans to Johannesburg from as far away as Nyasaland or Mozambique. All the lure and the glory of Johannesburg – *Geols*, the Golden City – is summed up for Africans in two letters – “TJ,” standing for “Transvaal Johannesburg” – on the number-plates of Johannesburg cars. As the big cars screech past the dry mud huts, the little pot-bellied Zulu or Xhosa children dance up and down with delight, and shout, “Tee Jay! Tee Jay!”

“TJ” stands for everything that is exciting: not only cars, but skyscrapers, trains, elevators, cinemas and radios. “TJ” stands for everything that the young tribal recruit sees as he gazes out at the

street from the Johannesburg station. But “TJ” does not mean only the half-million whites of Johannesburg and the white en’s wonders; indeed, it is noticeable that the raw Africans are never quite as astonished by the “houses on wheels” or the “huts on top of each other” as the white men expect them to be. No, “TJ” means more than anything else the black metropolis – the city with 700,000 Africans, the biggest black city in the continent.

It is a very different place from white Johannesburg, and to the Europeans it seems far less attractive than the reserves. The “locations’ or “townships,” where the Africans live are mostly clusters of boxlike brick houses, beginning ten miles southwest of the city center in the area known as the “Orlando Complex,” and spreading over the brown hillsides in bleak, unvarying rows, like huge chicken farms.

The locations, although they have become more hygienic and less slummy in the past few years, are uniformly dismal. The houses are all single-story, built at minimum cost. Although there is a large power station near by, the rooms in the African townships have no electric light. The roads are unpaved, full of ditches and boulders. The largest building in most locations is the police station, with the administrative offices of the location superintendent next door.

The skyline of bungalows is unbroken, except for billboards advertising, beauty cream, corn flakes, or flashlights (“Be safe at night – carry a torch!”) One house is distinguished from another only by its number: a typical African address is 3586B, Orlando West Extension, Johannesburg. The country Africans call a boy born in the city “the son of a number.”

But to the Africans who live in Orlando – so named before the war, after a paternalistic city councilor who laid out the “model township” – there is nothing impersonal about their city. In spite of the police raids, the mass removals and the pass laws designed to

circumscribe and control their daily lives, they love the city, and out of it they have built a new and vibrant society.

The streets which seem so impersonal and bleak to the white visitor have, to the Africans, all the nuances and variations of Manhattan or Mayfair. The extensions and postal districts, or the townships named by the municipality after tribal heroes are quickly renamed by the Africans after snob white districts or American Negro heroes, like "Killarney," or "Satchmo." Many of the bleak numbers turn out to be "shebeens," or illicit African drinking places, with names like "Falling Leaves," "Back o' the Moon" or "Thirty-Nine Steps."

The shebeen might be taken as the cornerstone of this new metropolis, for it is here that the new society is most vocal and expressive. The contrast with the chief's beer-drink in the reserves is a bizarre one. Instead of the chief and elders, sitting on the mud floor, passing a calabash around, the superior shebeens have a mixture of teachers, bus drivers, nurses and gangsters, sitting around a polished mahogany table, drinking European brandy under a kerosene lamp.

There is little connection with the old society: a teacher might turn out to be a chief's nephew, but descendants of the old Zulu royal family are quite likely to end up as messenger boys or domestic servants. The conversation in a shebeen will not be about tribal customs or chiefly intrigue, but about Hollywood films, football, jazz or Shakespeare. If some newly arrived innocent, perhaps, raised the subject of tribal ritual, he might well be met with a shout of, "Jeez, man, go back to the kraal! We don't want blanket-boys here."

There are, of course, many tribal relics embedded in this new society, particularly among the newly arrived groups. Some, like the Basutos or the Vendas, still in their multicolored blankets, stride through the crowds as if they were among their native mountains.

Tribal myths and superstitions still play their part in urban life. Five years ago a story suddenly became current that a *tokoloshe* – a kind of Zulu imp – had been discovered in Johannesburg, and for two weeks

copies of the local African newspaper, *The Bantu World*, were sold out with stories of the *tokoloshe* – which turned out to be an otter.

Sometimes the tribal relics are of a grimmer kind, as when a homemade liquor brew is discovered with bits of flesh mixed in it, supposed to strengthen the courage of its drinkers. Witch doctors still do business in Johannesburg, in musty little shops hung with skins, bones and medicines: and when a paramount chief such as King Cyprian of the Zulus or King Sobhuza of the Swazis comes up to Johannesburg, he is besieged by humble tribesmen and guarded in his small location house by bus drivers or municipal clerks.

These tribal memories are often said by whites to be a sign that Africans will never be assimilated into city life, and the Government of Dr. Verwoerd has done everything possible to encourage the continuance of tribal feeling, with special “ethnic grouping” in the layout of the townships, and special entries in the passbooks for each person’s chief and tribe.

But to hundreds of thousands of urban Africans these subdivisions mean nothing: some of them have lived for three generations in the towns, have intermarried among tribes, and speak English and Afrikaans at home. For them, it would be as unthinkable to return to the reserves as for the Afrikaners to return to Holland.

The black cities of South Africa are kept separate from the white cities by all the elaborate devices of apartheid. By day the Africans work in the same offices, factories or shops as the white men, and jostle in the same streets: but every night they are separated, and travel in their segregated trains to their segregated townships.

To the whites, the lives of their black office boys or chauffeurs seem unimaginably separate and isolated from their own. Although African jazz has lately become fashionable among white liberals, very few white South Africans have ever made their way into a shebeen, and even to be found drinking with an African constitutes an offense. But to the urban Africans, the “Europeans” are the ones who seem

isolated, in their remote and hidden mansions in the superior suburbs. The Africans no longer feel themselves reliant on white patrons or promoters for their education and cultural development; they see themselves as the heirs of Western civilization, and the “Europeans” as the imposters.

In much of the black metropolis, there is a fearful rootlessness – the other side of the imbalance which shows itself in the reserves. There are too few girls, no land, no freehold rights, broken families; often husbands who work as domestic servants are not allowed, because of the Group Areas Act, to sleep with their wives. And all the time, the townships are subject to the perpetual insecurity which comes from the police state – the threat of being waked at midnight for not having a pass, of being exiled to the farms, of being jailed indefinitely or suspected political views.

All these factors have produced ugly elements in the African townships – violence, gangsters, promiscuity and wild drunkenness. They show themselves at their worst each Christmas-time when, maddened with liquor and frustration, the wilder Zulus and Bantus engage in atavistic faction fights, and a score or so are murdered.

But against these grimmer sides, there is much that is infinitely exciting and hopeful about this African “Harlem.” “The truest optimism in South Africa,” wrote the greatest of South Africa’s historians, Dr. DeKlewlet, “is in the crowded, disease-ridden and crime-infested urban locations.” Anyone who spends some time in the shebeens or social gatherings of Orlando, Meadowlands or Sophiatown can understand what he means. The Africans have not, as a race, been demoralized by the white men’s cities; they have taken to them with all the enthusiasm of a London Cockney, and in them have built their own society, hierarchies and prides.

Hundreds of thousands of the new Africans are no longer men of two worlds, but of one – the world of the city, *their* city. One of their varied backgrounds – motorcars, blankets, cinemas, witch doctors,

physicians, chiefs, lawyers – they have forged something new, confident and civilized.

Signs of this new amalgam take many forms: the new African jazz blending old monotonous tribal chants with sharp new rhythms from America; the all-African musical “King Kong,” which appeared last year in Johannesburg and will come to New York next year; the young African writers and journalists who have produced a jazzy, expressive English of their own; even the curious Johannesburg wedding ceremonies, with their mixture of tribal courtesy. Western formality and all-African prolixity.

But the new character can be seen most simply in the urban Africans themselves. Though the whites may view them as clowns, dandies, imitative monkeys, the Africans are fundamentally confident – of themselves, and of their right to Western civilization. The more one sees of them, the more one feels that Dr. Verwoerd, who is determined that they shall have no place in the white men’s cities, has bitten off more than he can chew.

Chapter 40

The Creator of *King Kong* Jazz Opera

by

Mona Glasser

The musical—which seems to have lost its earlier designation of musical comedy—has developed from the comic opera world of Balkan principalities and Cinderella heroines and now aims at a higher artistic level. Although retaining many of the features of burlesque, vaudeville and comic opera from which it sprang and the elements of song, dance and humour that these media thrived upon, the musical began in the depression years of the early thirties to have a more serious purpose. Nowadays the musical is often an expression of the sociological times, and it seemed the ideal way to present the life story of Ezekiel Dhalamini.

Harry Bloom, an author best known for his novel *Episode* which won the British Authors' Club Award for 1956, describes in the *King Kong* programme the tremendous success of the Township Jazz concerts, and the encouragement they gave to African artists. But, says Harry, the events 'were merely the first step, playing a similar role to the old Coon shows which anticipated the great flowering of Negro music in the United States'. The Township Jazz series had reached a plateau and the need for greater expression became obvious. 'And so the idea of a jazz opera grew. It would not only present the music, but the colour and effervescence—and the poignancy and sadness—that make up the peculiar flavour of township life. When I read of the trial

of King Kong I saw that here was the story I had been waiting for. From then on', writes Harry, 'everything has led straight to tonight'.

Indeed everything did lead to the opening night but 'straight' is hardly the word for the endless 'King Kong crises', the obstacles that were overcome before opening night—some of them of a typically Johannesburg nature, others a reflection of the wider South African scene, yet others of the usual theatrical kind.

In late 1957 Harry Bloom together with members of what came to be called the creative group. Clive Menell, a young and imaginative business executive, went with Harry to the Union to find subjects for portraits he wished to paint and was introduced to Todd Matshikiza, the composer with whom Harry was working on the King Kong story. Harry's idea at the time was to write a series of vignettes strung together by a calypso-style singer with a guitar. Clive, interested, offered Todd and Harry the use of his studio.

At the home of Clive Menell and his wife, Irene, who were to give endless help and encouragement to the project, Harry Bloom and Todd Matshikiza, now joined by architect-painter Arthur Goldreich, would meet. In the romantic atmosphere of a lovely studio-room with its striped woven curtains, easel and points, records and piano, they would visualize (and act out) many of the separate scenes, characters, sequences, and facets of the story they wished to produce, and the aspects of the black man's life they wished to portray. At that time, however, Harry left, having decided to practice law in Cape Town.

The bearded and volatile Arthur Goldreich was the catalyst through whom ideas and inspiration would flow at the story sessions in the studio. He would rush about playing everyone's part. He would arrive on an imaginary bicycle, leap off and be the character who had been waiting for him, return to his bicycle and ride off again only to

reappear as a bootlegger, shebeen queen or whatever was called for at that moment.

Todd Matshikiza, born at Queenstown in the Cape Province, was one of a family of ten whose lives were surrounded by music. They all sang or played and Todd grew up with a sure musical instinct which found expression in composition.

There are a few composers who are not forced by society to earn a living in other ways and Todd was no exception. In turn he had been bookseller, messenger, waiter, and journalist and was currently a salesman for a firm selling razor-blades. All this time, however, he continued to develop his musical talent. Music flowed from within, and his varied experience enabled him to appreciate the struggles of King Kong, and to translate them into melody.

'It grew in those days, ja, just after Harry had left for Cape Town,' said Todd in an interview, 'just by talking and feeling the story. We'd talk, piling up the ideas, discussing backwards and forwards, and that's how I wrote the music. Gee, it was great.'

Some months later Harry Bloom, passing through Johannesburg, went along to the Menell's home to see how things were developing. Clive had written an outline in which the story of King Kong was related against the background of a township day starting with everyone waking up and going about their activities, and closing with people coming from work, night setline and people going to sleep. Filled with excitement and enthusiasm Harry rushed home and, in the two nights he was in Johannesburg, typed out a 40-page script delineating sequences, situations and characters.

But Harry left again, and the remaining 'creators' asked journalist Pat Williams to take over the script of the show, which was then known in reference to the shebeen of the play as 'Back o' the Moon'. Pat had

a full-time job and a home and family to look after, and was reluctant to accept. Finally, however, she was persuaded. During the following months she wrote about four drafts of the play and completed many of the lyrics.

While these developments had been taking place Ian Bernhardt, behind the scenes and in his capacity as kingpin of the promotional body, was committing himself and the Union of Southern African artists to an opening night in February 1959. What was to be the biggest success in south African theatrical history was, at this time, the biggest risk and it was Ian who steam-rollered the project through to its ultimate realization.

The Union had long previously decided to work with the African Medical Scholarships Trust Fund which was conceived in 1949 as a reaction to the withdrawal of Government bursaries for Africans at the University. The appeal of *King Kong* was immediate and the two organizations decided to set up a joint 'King Kong Committee' of representatives of the Fund and of the Union. Together they would take on the production and share the profits.

The only available stage in Johannesburg with sufficient facilities to handle *King Kong* was the Great Hall of the University of the Witwatersrand, an ideal launching place for such a project since it is one of the few venues in the country where, appropriately enough, a mixed audience could enjoy the product of a mixed creative team. The hall was booked for February 1959 and many tentative arrangements made with players and artists.

Leon Gluckman, one of the foremost men of South Africa's developing theatre, was invited to produce the play. Leon had spent much time studying, producing and acting abroad but had always been certain, in the midst even of his successes there—as Assistant

Director of the Nottingham Playhouse and in seasons acting with the Old Vic in Australia and England—that he would ultimately work in South Africa. ‘To be born in South Africa is a boon’, he has said, ‘because to work here is to be in a position to express whatever talent you have—however big or small—to the fullest. This is not to say that conditions are ideal, that there is much hope of finding well-equipped stages or a choice of experienced actors or technicians.’

Leon can, and often does, devise his own sets and plot his own lighting script. Theatrical ‘business’ is at his fingertips and he has been in turn actor, manager and producer. In England his successes would be personal ones; in the South African setting he can create taste and if he has also to create the circumstances in which to realize his aims it is only one more challenge to face.

For Leon the most interesting straight play does not offer the challenge of a work which has a coherent lyric-theatre form; which goes back to the classical Greek synthesis of words, music and movement and which embodies dancing, costumes, setting, lighting. ‘In a musical’, Leon feels, ‘one can go for the big effect. The emphasis is on the visual concept rather than on the interpretation of a single line.’ His talents could be fully expressed in a production such as *King Kong* for he has the ability to manipulate large forces and a flair for spectacle, for a wide canvas made richer by attention to the smallest detail, for movement across a broad stage of many people.

The invitation to produce this musical was a step towards the realization of his creative ideals, and he immediately indicated that he would need the assistance of a musical director and a choreographer. He suggested people with whom he had worked before, Stanley ‘Spike’ Glasser, the South African composer who was in his final year at Cambridge, and Arnold Dover who had been teaching ballet in Johannesburg for many years.

Spike Glasser had spent some years studying composition in Europe and, like Leon, had always felt that South Africa was home and Johannesburg his backyard. His love for the bright, hard quality of the city could find no permanent satisfaction in the gentler English scene and he was excited by the invitation to direct the music of *King Kong*. A few years previously he had followed up an ever-present interest in the indigenous music of Africa by working with Hugh Tracey at Msaho, the centre of the African Music Society. On a hilltop outside Johannesburg, Msaho nestled among red rocks typical of the Transvaal scenery. Here, during lunch-hour discussions with a colleague, he had decided to return to England to read for the Music Tripos at King's College, Cambridge.

Arnold Dover, who was to be the choreographer, has been connected with the theatre for as long as he can remember. He was born in Sheffield in 1914 and came out from England for the 1936 Empire Exhibition—before that he had been a principal dancer for Espinosa's British Ballet—and decided to remain in South Africa. Arnold established a dancing-school in Johannesburg and before long was one of the leading choreographers and teachers in the country. Over the years he has been connected with more than forty shows, apart from the choreography and direction of about twenty-five ballet seasons. Arnold's stage experience goes beyond choreography and dancing. Lighting, curtains, props, and the endless 'back-stage' complications are within his province. He was also to be the stage director of *King Kong*.

The ever-calm appearance of Arnold, with his curious dancer's walk, belied the vitality and enthusiasm which he brought to any undertaking. Leon Gluckman had worked with Arnold Dover and Spike Glasser before on an intimate revue called *Xmas Box*, the first production of its kind in South Africa; which they had staged in 1949. They knew each other's work and the three felt a warmth in the promise of an association in yet another first production of its kind.

Yet the raw material for the production was nowhere near working shape and it was not until September 1958 when Spike Glasser returned to South Africa that he first heard the music that had been written.

At the home of Clive and Irene Menell he met a small, dapper man with a wonderfully bright smile that wrinkled his entire face. This was the composer Todd Matshikiza and with him was Mackay Davashe whose Newgate fringe framed a large head set on a lithe body. Mackay was leader of the Township Jazz band, the Jazz Dazzlers. His wide-apart eyes were topped by a broad brow which gave him a look of constant expectancy.

Spike was impressed by Todd's music, and thought that the various numbers showed a wide range of musical emotion and imagination. There was a variety of idioms, all of them, however, natural to the South African scene.

'The title song *King Kong*', said Spike, 'is an excellent mutation of the African idiom and the American musical song. Very often, as in "The Earth Turns Over", there is a natural and original construction of form. "The Death Song" has proportions of magic opera greatness, while "Back o' the Moon" has undertones of a leading South African urban dance rhythm. "Sad Times, Bad Times" is an instrumental piece of the most sad and serious nature, and could have been written nowhere but in South Africa.'

Spike was given a rather muddled account of the story and saw that there was still a great deal of work to be done on it as well as on the music.

That same evening Spike and I were part of a large audience watching the newest in a series of fund-raising Township Jazz

concerts in the Bantu Men's Social Centre at the bottom of Eloff Street. Eloff Street is a synthesis of Johannesburg life, disgorging at one end streams of people from the main station. People who come into the city in trains marked with separate signs for Blacks Only and for Whites Only, descend on to platforms for Blacks Only and Whites Only, and leave through exits for Blacks Only and Whites Only. In the main shopping street of the city with its highly decorative shop-window displays, are good which gangsters siphon into the flourishing Black Market of the townships—a Black Market in reverse, since numbers of brand-name articles can be obtained for as little as a third of their normal price. The restaurants, hotels and cinemas all 'Reserve the right of admission' which is another way of saying 'for whites only'. But the southern end of Eloff Street descends into 'motor-town' and beyond this are the factories and mine-dumps, and here the black man comes into his own again. Between motor-town and the railway line is the Bantu Men's Social Centre—where Ezekiel Dhlamini had his first taste of fighting with cushions—a dingy brick building which plays a vital part in catering for the social needs of the half-million blacks who live in and around Johannesburg.

On the same side of the street and a few yards up is Dorkay House, a once-smart office building on the top floor of which are the offices of the Union of Southern African Artists. Here, at almost any time, one can meet some of its 600 members. Rehearsing in groups, singing, playing or lounging about, gathering warmth and companionship from having a place where they belong. Through the dingy windows, cracked and stuffed in places with newspaper or cardboard, can be seen the large display windows of a car dealer. Revolving perpetually on a platform is an opulent, gleaming car with a neat tag announcing the price--£4,500.

The concert was Spike Glasser's reintroduction to the world of African jazz which had in presentation, content and originality

evolved amazingly in the four years he had been away. There were more good players, a new freedom of improvisation. The command of style, harmony and tone was greater and the technique of the instrumentalists had benefited from lessons and experience. A hall crowded to a capacity with Africans, interspersed with a handful of whites, enjoyed a varied programme. There was a constant interplay between audience and performers. The audience responded not in decorous applause at the end of the items, but by yells of encouragement, 'Go, Go', throughout the number. An eight-piece band, the Jazz Dazzlers were the mainstay of the programme, whether backing vocalists or giving spirited orchestral versions of their own, or of popular American numbers.

Spike realized that the music for *King Kong* would have to be orchestrated and arranged not only for the instruments available but for a jazz group whose main activity was pure improvisation. A few could barely read music, and the parts would have to be graded to suite the talents of the players. Some of them like Mackay Davashe (tenor-sax), Kiepie Moeketsi (alto-sax and clarinet) and Sol Klaaste (piano), were accomplished musicians who could hold their own in any jazz ensemble in the world. Others would have much to learn before their home-grown talent could emerge in a professional ensemble such as the *King Kong* band was to become.

In October Leon Gluckman, who was doing a season in Cape Town, received the script and asked Harry Bloom to work on it once more. Time was the most vital factor. Rehearsals were due to begin at the end of November, and in October Harry flew up to Johannesburg to meet Spike. For two nights they sat up deciding the musical layout of the show. Todd's numbers were roughly divided into 'types' and, on paper, a fair balance of slow-to-fast, choral-to-solo or ensemble, orchestral-to-vocal numbers was arranged. The revised plan necessitated additional work for Pat Williams who had already

completed many of the lyrics, working in close collaboration with the composer.

Harry left for Cape Town with an almost impossible task to perform in an impossibly short time. All that actually existed of the eventual musical drama *King Kong* were the songs, the lyrics and some dramatic ideas and scenes which, in spite of numerous attempts, had not yet been fused into a theatrically coherent script. The play had now to be written around an established musical framework, the right characters had to appear at the right time to sing words already set down, and the right action had to lead into predecided musical numbers. In Cape Town Leon and Harry spent hours late at night working together. Leon was in the midst of a season of taxing plays including *Inherit the Wind* and *Long Day's Journey into Night*, and Harry's legal practice was most demanding.

Leon, knowing theatre and the difficulties of casting, articulation and projection with which he would be faced, emphasized the need for simplicity. Knowing too that in South Africa there were fine actors and fine singers, but very few actors who can sing or singers who can act, it was necessary that the bulk of the story should be told 'extra-musically'. Many of the people were not articulate in the English language and to develop more than a few big speaking parts was impossible. They fell back on the simplest stage convention of all, the reminiscences of a 'narrator', in this instance three washerwomen and an old man, Dan Kuswayo. The singers spoke little but enacted what had already been explained. Again, the limitations imposed by the inexperience of all but a handful of the future cast, recruited from all walks of life, led to an emphasis not so much on the development of a continuous dramatic line, but on the use of a thick line which would reach a number of theatrical 'moments' which Leon knew would work. Thus some of the most moving and exciting moments of the play were those whose basis was simplicity, a minimum of words and a maximum of effect.

Writing in the *New Statesman and Nation* in 1930, Sir Desmond McCarthy says of modern drama: 'Scenic representation has implanted in us a demand that the people should seem as real as the setting. . .modern self-consciousness has screwed up the standard of consistency in character drawing. . . . But, above all, external life has in modern days become less violent, exciting and picturesque. The drama which stands therefore for reality in our times as the Greek drama stood for Greek life, and the drama of the Renaissance for the life of the Renaissance, is of necessity less demonstrative.' In this the South African dramatist is fortunate, for reality in urban African life is, if not 'violent, exciting and picturesque', violent, vital and highly dramatic. The translation of reality to the stage is the translation of humour, colour, movement, dance and music as well as of violence and vitality. The times are turbulent and, for all their hopelessness, hopeful.

Drama must be founded on living speech and the playwright can be much hampered by the dingy, threadbare speech in which the characters of realistic drama are made, if they are to be realistic, to express themselves today. To know urban Africans today is to have discovered an idiom in which to express the drama. J.M. Synge, in the preface to his *Playboy of the Western World*, writes:

'All art is a collaboration; and there is little doubt that in the happy ages of literature, striking and beautiful phrases were as ready to the story-teller's or the playwright's hand as the rich cloaks and cresses of his time. It is probably that when the Elizabethan dramatist took his ink-horn and sat down to his work he used many phrases that he had just heard, as he sat at dinner, from his mother or his children. In Ireland, those of us who know the people have the same privilege. When I was writing *The Shadow of the Glen* some years ago, I got more aid than any learning could have given me from a chink in the floor

of the old Wicklow house where I was staying, that let me hear what was being said by the servant girls in the kitchen.'

And for Harry Bloom, writing *King Kong*, there are two parallels to be drawn. The device of the washerwomen is, if not 'a chink in the floor', an open window on any South African backyard. The problems of diction are overcome by the opportunity of the audience gradually to attune their ears to the speech. Synge goes on to say: 'In countries where the imagination of the people, and the language they use, is rich and living, it is possible for a writer to be rich and copious in his words, and at the same time to give the reality, which is the root of all poetry, in a comprehensive and natural form.'

Harry Bloom's knowledge of the township talk, the slang which is the only picturesque talk left today, a living idiom in which to write imaginatively, was the solution to the problem of language.

Chapter 41

Short Story Writing in Black South Africa

by

Bloke Modisane

The short story by black South Africans is the literary record of the system of apartheid. It mirrors the total impact of that system upon the Africans, the Coloureds (mixed-bloods) and the Indians, caught in the complex mass of regulations and controls, restrictions and prohibitions. The principal feature of these stories is the analytical study of the African character, the psychological adjustment, the accommodation to the system. This character is conceived as a hero far removed from the standard code of morality – the anti-hero concept. The heroes of these short stories are pickpockets, hijackers, payroll robbers, beggars, and other generous assortments of social mal-adjusts; acts of heroism are marked by games at beating the law, stealing from whites – a calculated defiance against law and order. The police, and whites in general, are the villains or the victims.

This short story hero is invested with a bird-of-passage morality; concentrates into every minute or every hour the feverishness of intense living. Our hero abandons himself to the lower freedoms – the freedom from morality and the freedom of vice. And because of the dichotomy of the social structure of South Africa, the hero functions on the fringe of a culture which is rejecting him; in a society which has labeled him, pedigreed him and then discriminates against him

To understand this character – the motives behind the seemingly irrational behaviour – it is necessary to understand the psychological mores of the kind of society which produces this state of mind. Nadine Gordimer – South Africa's most perceptive writer – is illuminating in her analysis of it:

“The greatest single factor in the making of our mores in South Africa was and is and will be the colour question. It is far more than a question or matter of prejudice or discrimination or conflict or loyalties – we have built a morality on it. We have gone even deeper; we have built our own sense of sin, and our own form of tragedy. We

have added hazards of our own to man's fate, and to save his soul he must wrestle not only with the usual lust, greed and pride, but also with a set of demons marked made in South Africa."

A colour-caste society, like South Africa, must establish definite identifiable groups with consistent group attitudes. In a society like Britain's, where the visibility of the social groups has been lowered by the commercialization of the uniformity of dress and the democratization of social institutions, it is still the Establishment which is surrounded by the symbols of opulence; they dominate the economy and therefore the social structure. But in South Africa, where the different social groups have high visibility, the whites – a numerical minority – have arrogated to themselves all the symbols of wealth and authority, and have arranged themselves as a political majority. The non-white groups – Africans, Coloureds, Indians – form the numerical majority which is invested with symbols of inferiority and are a minority politically.

Against the background of this social dichotomy, the short story highlights attitudes between blacks and whites – extra-group relations – and the attitudes among the blacks themselves – intra-group relations. The problems of race; the attitudes and the relations that go with it are present in all life in South Africa.

We are born into race prejudice; we live with it; we die with it, and are buried with it.

With all these groups arranged against each other – the one dedicated to maintaining it, the other committed to smashing it – force becomes implicit. Conflicts arise. And since race prejudice is written into the law, there is no common arbiter; the parties must decide for themselves. The arbitrament of the sword becomes, if not the moral, but the real arbiter; and thus force becomes the expression, and violence the clarification of the society.

The tone of the short story is primarily that of protest; the African character must arrange himself – survive – under the system with

some personal dignity. His reaction is implicit in his behaviour to the white man, and this behaviour will be determined by the circumstance and the situation in which he finds himself. His behaviour is changeable, and his pattern of behaviour may be analyzed into these three forms: submission and accommodation; aggression, and escape or flight.

In the first category the attitude of the African to the white man is that of servility. He observes the proper forms of address, using the appropriate terms of reference. He exploits these "proper forms" of address when in trouble, or when seeking to extract favours from his overlords. The African's whole existence, his personal safety, depends on depth studies of the South African white; thus the African understands – he has to – the white man more than the white man will ever know the African. The white man mourns with lyricism the passing from the scene of "the good Native," thus the African in trouble will obsequiously resurrect the image of that noble savage. This character merely accommodates the system without in any way beginning to accept it.

The African character differs from the other non-white characters I that he accepts – rather than regrets – the blackness of his face. In my own short stories, the characters accept the physical reality of their colour and then proceed to exploit it, in exactly the same way that a beggar needs to be horribly deformed to be able to milk people's sympathy. In the short story, "The Professional Beggar," to the disability of being black is added physical deformity – a kind of double indemnity. Nathan Sczurubele is educated to high-school level, but is condemned to being a beggar for a living, not that he is unable to earn a living, but because he is crippled.

He submits to their construction that to be disabled is to be necessarily dependent upon the charity of a society which will destroy a man's pride rather than set aside the charity mentality. Nathan Sczurubele's pride is too humiliated by the degradation, and it is this humiliation which sustains him. He becomes a professional beggar, organizing himself into a commercial enterprise. He is

arrested, and the scene before the magistrate is a cynical exploitation of people's sympathy; the disability is used mercilessly as a weapon to assault the sensibilities of the whites:

"Your Lordship – my Honour – most of us beg because we have been ostracized by our parents. . .by everybody. People treat us like lepers. They have trained us, conditioned us, to look up to them for all the things we need. No one wants to employ us – people are more willing to offer us charity rather than give us jobs. All they ever do is show us pity. We want to be given a chance to prove we're as good as anybody."

This character has realized that ability is rejected inclusively with the colour of his skin; that being black is analogous to being deformed – a physical handicap in the athletics of earning a living. His personal philosophy becomes thus: If anything is worth doing, it's worth doing well. Nathan Serurubele accepts this condition and the commitment to it.

In South Africa, privilege is white, and non-whites are placed on different levels of underprivileged. The Indians and the Coloureds are situated on a higher level of privilege than the Africans. Psychologically, the Indians and the Coloureds tend to gravitate further and further from black, nearer to white. To them, it is a misfortune not to have been born white, and they emphasize this by their own brand of rejection of, and discrimination against, the Africans. These two groups are obsessed by a white complex. This is, perhaps, understandable in a society where white is the positive standard, and black the negative; as it is implicit in the label, non-white.

In the short story, "The Bench," by Richard Rives (whose story "The Strike," appeared in the April NEGRO DIGEST), an Indian school teacher living in Cape Town, the indignation at being non-white instead of white is shown as the motivation behind the social protest. It is not white domination which is being protested against, but its singling out of those who were not born white. It is the effect it has

and not the condition itself which is under fire. Being white and being privileged are confused to mean the same thing. Richard Rives captures the essential tone of the ambivalence to the colour white. The scene is a political meeting and a speaker says:

“We form an integral part of a complex society in which a vast proportion of the population is denied the very basic right of existence, a society that condemns a man to an inferior position because he has the *misfortune* to be born black, a society that can only retain its precarious social and economic position at the expense of an enormous oppressed mass.”

The Coloureds and the Indians are a lighter skin colour than the Africans; a pigmentorial quality which places them closer to white. The Coloureds, in particular, since they are publicly described as the “appendages of the whites,” request – by commensurate approximation – proportional privileges, improved conditions in their social status and gradual integration.

Acceptance and accommodation, as a reaction to social prejudice, is determined by the situation – as illustrated in the short stories themselves – the individual finds himself in. Thus, the African policeman, the teacher in Bantu Education schools, the people who serve on tribal councils, school boards, etc., have to accommodate the system; even if it is implied that they are the instruments of their own oppression.

The next pattern of behaviour analyzed by the short stories is that of aggression directed against the system.

Like America, South Africa has a frontier or *voortrekker* mentalist; a savage throw-back to the days when the law dangled in the holster or the shot gun, and justice was swift, informal and prejudice. Lynchings and gorse whippings are deep in the traditions of these countries. Both are compulsive addicts to horse operas. Under stress, the average man in America and in South Africa will resort to violence.

In South Africa, violence exists as the expression of the public conscience; this violence is contained in the law, it is the instrument of maintaining law and order. The African character lives in the screaming wake of this violence, and unlike most South African attitudes, violence is truly colour blind. Compulsively driven by frustration, the African directs his aggression against himself. This in-group aggression is directed against the more successful. Africans, who are, by and large, resented for being successful, because success is seen as the quality of being white. On the surface, the motives for this aggression may be for material gain or just lawless rebellion against form and cohesion, where form and cohesion are symbols of authority, which is white.

This African character lives on so close to death that death becomes the reflection of the empty gestures of the living; a defiance against his life. Death revenges the African character against life; it is both sides of a single reality. Death is the master who must be paid. And although this character may fear death he is fascinated by it; because he is familiar with it. He courts it, he jokes about it, he dares it, he surrenders himself to it, and then death becomes a refuge from the burden of being black in white South Africa.

In the short stories of Arthur Maimane, a journalist on a London news agency, death purges his characters from being black. His characters defy death; they run from the police; ignore the order to stop, and defy the warning shots; compulsively running – running away from South Africa into death. Arthur Maimane's stories "Just A Tsotsi" and "A Manner of Speaking," probes the depths of desperation which his characters have reached. In the story, "Just A Tsotsi," his character is arrested for a Pass offence, and during the assault upon him by the police, he breaks from them and starts running. He is ordered to stop, but he continues running:

"'Now he's asking for trouble,' Hannes said, seeing a chance to vindicate himself. With one fluid motion he grabbed his rifle from where it was leaning against the wall and fell down on one knee. 'He

won't be cheeky any more after this.' He fired deliberately low, the bullet hitting the ground between the running boy's legs and ricocheting at angle with a whine. The boy yelped and ran faster.

'Don't kill him, Hannes!' the corporal said, in a low, tight voice.

Hannes laughed, 'This is what I've been waiting for!'

His next shot whined close by the boy's ear. With another frightened yelp the boy crouched down and started running zig-zag fashion. He had almost reached the gate now. He straightened up to grab at the post and swing round it. Hannes grinned and fluidly shifted his rifle to the hand holding the post. He fired two quick shots, smashing the hand with the first and hitting the boy's head with the second as it came round and above the post."

The violence strikes out against everybody, and perhaps with more eroticism against ourselves. The incidence of drunkenness, crime and violence in urban black communities is alarmingly high. The anger of the African character is always a going to extremes. We love parties, nice times, noise and people; we are sweating in a world where death is all around us, a world in which only death has value. In our attempts to obliterate time – the minutes of our lives – we intoxicate ourselves with orgiastic pleasures, noise and people; and then when we are dizzy we annihilate ourselves. We kill each other for pleasure, for revenge, for caprice.

Aggression directed against the whites – the out-groups – is more complex and variable; it may be physical as demonstrated in the high incidents of crime and violence; or more overt, as on the personal level, where insolence against the white man is common. There is always some sort of rebellion against the race attitudes. In the story, "A Manner of Speaking," by Arthur Maimane, the character is aggressively insistent on maintaining his dignity; by being courteous but refusing to conform to the stereotype of the African. Being *insolent* or cheeky – by South African standards – becomes a game, which at the end of the story is to cost him his life:

“After a minute he coughed. The young woman turned her head slowly. Her eyes narrowed as she recognized him. She looked out of the window again. He coughed louder.

“Ja! What do you want?’ she asked, without looking at him. . .

‘Two tuppence stamps, please.’

She took the four steps towards the counter slowly, hands on broad hips and head stuck out ahead of the body. She stood across the counter from him, her grey eyes boring into his.

‘Say *Missis*,’ she said quietly.

The middle-aged woman looked up from her novel and studied the two.

He remained silent.

‘If you don’t say *Missis*, you’re not getting your stamps!’

‘Look, *mevrouw*, all I want is two tuppence stamps. I’ve said *Please*, and that should be enough.’

‘Say *Missis* – or get out.’

He stared back for a moment, shrugged his shoulders, and walked out.”

Physical violence strikes out against everybody.

The African character is always reacting, scratching at the wall of colour prejudice; accommodating it, being aggressive to it or looking around for escape – in compensation – or taking flight from it; going to other parts of Africa or running away to Europe in search of a

gentler political climate. Escape from the colour bar is the subtlest of the reactions of the African character, the Coloured and the Indian.

The South African public image is white; the values of that society are white, and all the sex symbols are white; and consequently the Africans and the Coloureds have to arrange themselves under the code of this standard. Since to be white is to be privileged, the Coloureds with low visibility – fair enough to pass for white – escape into the domain of the whites, and the Africans of lighter skin – the less clearly visible Africans – steal into the structure of the Coloured group.

For the Coloureds it means the end of living in social igloos, the end of discrimination. It means sliding into white society, access into white restaurants, cinemas, theaters, bars, and other symbols of white privilege. It is freedom. To the light-skinned African it is an end to the regulations and the strangulations of the document called the Pass. Passing himself off as a Coloured will give the African freedom of movement, the opportunity to select and accept the job of his own choice and the relief from being at the black bottom of the colour scale.

This escape into another colour, the rationalizations for it are illustrated in my own short story, “The Have-Nots”:

“Why go all sentimental? This is a battle between the Haves and the Have-Nots. The Haves have made being black too much of a burden and the only way to survive is to fool them by playing their own game. They made white a symbol of privilege and comfort; so I decided to be as near white as I can bleach. It’s not my fault I’m light-skinned – nothing like enough to pass for lily white that is – but sufficiently to masquerade as a Coloured.

‘Okay, okay,’ I said, raising my hand as a sign of peace. ‘What’s in being a Native, anyway? Black. Devil black. Pitch-forking devil black. That’s all – just black, black, black! Well, I don’t wanna be black – not any more.’

'You'll never be a white man,' Steve said, contemptuously.

'I don't wanna be a white man,' I shouted. 'I just want to be white – just white.'"

Of particular interest is the way in which the non-white groups – particularly the Africans – will live with this situation, and even retain their sense of humour, without in any way beginning to accept it. The non-white groups have been educated into an acceptance of their own inferiority; and in some insidious way this educating has had some effect. For this doctrine to be accepted – or even suspected – the education into this accommodation, or even acceptance, will be directed towards elevating whiteness as some unattainable ideal, some unobtainable standard. All ambition will be directed physically towards, or to an association with it.

The Coloureds, especially the ones with a darker skin have a psychosis about marrying Coloured girls with a much fairer complexion. This woman becomes the substitute for white. Alternately, the African man seeks to marry a light-skinned African girl – preferably a Coloured girl. This pre-occupation with skin colour is a feature in the story, "Forbidden Love," by D. Can Themba. The African character falls in love with a Coloured girl – his personal substitute for white. His psychological rejection of black. The question of colour foreshadows the conflict:

"She turned her head and placed her chin on his chest. 'Somehow, Mike,' she tried to explain, softened again now. 'I feel trapped by a doubly guilty shame. I'm ashamed that it's my people who are in the foreground of every move against your people – ashamed of my father whom I love, but who's violent in his hatred of Africans; ashamed of my sister, Louisa, who ought to feel nearer your people, but hates them so unreasonably; ashamed of my brother's shame for having been re-classified as the African; ashamed of my mother's silence when I suspect (I know it!) that she disapproves of their attitudes. And then, Sweetie, sometimes when I listen to them all, I –

I—I am ashamed, in a queer way, that I hate myself, in a queer way, that I hate myself for this secret love of ours.’”

Another form taken by escape behaviour is one expressed by means of compensation. The African character is obsessed with easing his condition. He surrounds himself with the symbols of the society which is rejecting him. He wants to be accepted, he wants to qualify, to be civilized, so he develops a love for academic trappings and the related trinkets of opulence. He flaunts his wealth; he drives in big cars, prefers public-library-sized houses filled with enormous pieces of furniture. He erects these monuments both as a symbol of success and to his own sense of insecurity.

In South Africa, where opportunity and wealth are white, such an African reasons that if to be white is to be wealthy, then conversely, to be wealthy should be to be white. Thus, the African buys not a car, but a status symbol. The car must be big and flashy – preferably a Cadillac – for success has to have a high visibility. This reaction is also manifest in the vulgarity of the make-up African women wear. If to be white is to be painted with make-up, the African woman in her search of this ideal adds on the paint with generous vulgarity; straightens the tropic curl from her hair by burning the hair with a hot comb; and she bleaches her face with lotions. It is necessary that this should be done with vulgarity; whatever she does must be better than the best.

In a tedious succession of escapist short stories, published in “Drum,” “Zonk,” and other South African popular magazines, the African, Indian and the Coloured characters are paraded as gaudily successful boxing promoters, tough private detectives and other cardboard images of romanticism. Yet even against this background the escapist short story hero is seldom – if ever – on the side of formal law and order. His efforts are directed at flaunting the law.

But in the short stories of Ezekiel Mphahlele, famous educator and writer, the characters do not easily fall into the categories defined in this analysis; primarily because the author believes

that the African character should be portrayed as a purely fictional character, and not as a mould cast in racial tensions. In his stories the African exists on a level far removed from the tensions of the colour bar, which is not necessarily a hazard in his life. Author Mphahlele insists upon the African portrayed as a human character wrestling with the basic hazards of man: greed, lust and pride. In the story, "The Suitcase," Ezekiel Mphahlele emphasizes the motive of greed behind Timi's action of claiming the suitcase abandoned in a bus.

But behind every motive is cause and effect. The position of the individual in any society – in particular that of South Africa, and to a lesser extent that of Britain – is determined by the colour or social caste into which that character is born.

That Timi is black is implicit in the young white typist's impersonal attitude towards him. The same attitude is seen in the foreman. They are not addressing themselves to Timi, the individual, but to a black mask. Timi reacts by smiling knowingly. This reaction is particularly interesting in that Timi accommodates the de-personalization:

"The grim reality of his situation returned to him with all its cold and aching pain. Today he had been led on something of a wild goose chase. He had been to three places where the chances of getting work were promising. He had failed. At one firm he was told: 'We've already got a boy, John.' At the second firm a tiny typist told him: 'You're too big Jim. The boss wants a small boy – about eighteen, you know' Then she had gone on with her typing, clouding her white face with cigarette smoke. At the third place a short, pudgy white man put down his price in a squeaky voice: 'Two pounds ten a week.' Three pounds ten a week, Timi had said. 'Take it or leave it, my boy,' was the proprietor's final word. Timi chuckled to himself as he thought of the man's face, his fat white cheeks and small blinking eyes,"

Ezekiel Mphahlele's white characters in "The Suitcase" are not just human characters; they are South African *white*. The human character

in any fiction has to function within the society which produces that character.

In the story, "Down the Quiet Street," also by Ezekiel Mphahlele, there is no mention of the white figure, nor is the colour question implied. The characters come to life, vividly, with all the humour that is African. The orchestration of the characters is flawless. It is a recount of the story of the endless funeral processions which trailed down Nadia Street week after week: "short ones, long ones, poor insignificant ones; rich, snobbish ones."

There is a kind of escapist romanticism in the setting of this short story; and but for the smuggling of liquor the story might be set outside South Africa. The reasons behind the liquor smuggling is not because prohibition is general, but that it operates against Africans only. The African must drink, and to do this he must be one jump ahead of the law. No device is left unexplored, even the sanctity of the funeral ritual is violated. During one of those inevitable human accidents, an incident reveals the secret of those funeral processions. One of the coffins cracks and "a miniature avalanche of bottles came down to the ground."

In his more angry moods, Ezekiel Mphahlele's characters protest against the colour bar and against white attitudes.

All life in South Africa is dominated by the impact of one colour upon the other. The colour bar motivates all our actions, all our reactions and all our attitudes. The whites act in a manner determined by the roles they have to play in a dominant society. The Africans, the Indians and the Coloureds react to one another and towards the white man in the various forms outlined in this analysis. They may accept or accommodate the colour bar, in accordance to the situation they are in. They may be aggressive in their rejection of the situation or find a way of escape or take flight from it.

But there is always the physical presence of the colour bar. Examined in this essay are the social conditions and group attitudes which

shape the pattern of the South African black short story. All nuances of life, of human relationships, are contained in it. Perhaps in time other influences will insinuate different attitudes, order a new society which will have a more fluid social mobility with a new set of relationships. The short story will be there to interpret the new society.

Meantime, for so long as the social structure in present day south Africa persists, for so long will the African – rather the South African – character “wrestle with a set of demons marked: made in South Africa.”

Chapter 42

Writing in South Africa

by

Nat Nakasa

(Based on a talk given at the University of Witwatersrand under the auspices of the English Academy of South Africa)

As I was getting ready for tonight, a friend of mine gave me what was, undoubtedly, a piece of genuine, brotherly advice. "See that you represent us well," he said, "you must not give a bad impression. Remember, you have a responsibility to the African people."

I wish to say to you what I said in reply to my friend. I am not speaking tonight as a representative of anybody at all. My intention is to let out a number of broad generalizations in human terms, based on my impressions of various things. Admittedly, some of the sentiments I express will be drawn from ideas that I share with some of my friends and contemporaries. But the rest of my fellow tribesmen and all the millions of my kinsmen are not committed in any way to the thoughts I am soon to discuss here. This is simply a personal statement from me to you.

That the English language is used widely and increasingly in the African community today, is a matter which I believe to be well known to all of us here. Without much persuasion from outsiders, black men have chosen English as a means for the expression of their national aspirations; they have chosen English as the most powerful single instrument of communication with the world and with themselves.

In their joint use of English, Africans reach with greater ease the various levels of common ground which are of importance in the process of eliminating tribal division with all its unwelcome consequences. To the African, English has become a symbol of success, the vehicle of his painful protest against social injustice and spiritual domination by those who rule him.

The newspapers we have held in high esteem are in English: mass political organizations which sought to rally Africans against white rule have always conducted their business in English; in our tribal languages which continue to be in use, most of the borrowed words area from English.

One would, therefore, expect the African to take much interest in all English writing, especially as much of that writing is likely to concern himself, his ways and his personality. This, however, is not the case.

The Africans I know, who have taken any interest in writing, spent more of their time reflecting on the work of people other than South African writers. There are, obviously, exceptions like Alan Paton, Nadine Gordimer and others in whose work the African is represented as something larger than a functional being, something more than a lesser being lacking in some of the dimensions that go to make a whole man.

During the last days of Sophiatown, nearly ten years ago, you were more likely to walk into a conversation centered around James Joyce or John Osborne or Langston Hughes instead of local names like Gertrude Millin or Olive Schreiner. To me, the trends which developed in Sophiatown are important because Sophiatown is the only place I know where African writers and aspirant writers ever lived in close proximity, almost as a community.

I have in mind people like Alfred Hutchinson (*Road to Ghana*), Arthur Maimane, now a journalist and short story writer in London, Todd Matshikiza (*Chocolates for My Wife*), Ezekiel Mphahlele (*The African Image*), Lewis Nkosi and Bloke Modisane. If anybody was ever going to examine South African writing from an African's point of view and pass honourable judgment, these were the likely candidates. All of them are now exiled in Europe and England, a state of affairs forced upon them by political developments in South Africa.

Before these men left, Sophiatown had a heart like Greenwich Village or Harlem. Writers wrote, yes, very little and when they talked, as I have suggested, less and less was said about South African writing. With the possible exception of Mphahlele, who made a thorough investigation of South African writing for a university thesis, most or all of us were content to spew out observations on the basis of often embarrassingly scanty research.

I like to think that this was because with us, virtually everything South African was always synonymous with mediocrity. This blinding prejudice on our part was the direct result of a sense of grievance, a feeling of rejection by the powerful hierarchy of the country's culture. We were barred and still are from the white theatres where important plays are put on. They wouldn't even let us sit in the lights room once when Lewis Nkosi and I pleaded to see a play in one of Johannesburg's white theatres. The South African

white writers, save for the exceptions, belonged to another camp, as it were, to a closed, hostile world.

Thus when I first came across the writings of Peter Abrahams, I swallowed them up in rapid succession, permitting no criticism to take shape within me. He was a black writer, one of us. Even his *most* glaringly naïve and parochial assertions went unopposed. Peter Abrahams had lifted our squalor from the gutter and placed it on a higher level where it looked different, something of literary value.

This was obviously not good enough as I have since painfully realized. However disagreeable some of the writing being done by whites may be, their contribution represents an important factor in the long process of shaping the image of South Africa and its nation.

And that brings me to the central burden of this talk. One of the few black writers who have bothered to discuss South African writing was an Indian journalist, Bennie Bunsee, who lived in Johannesburg more than four years ago. On Harry Bloom's *Episode*, the journalist wrote:

"Perhaps if the author had lived among his characters and seen their conduct with his own eyes, he would have been able to portray them more powerfully. . . This is the cause of the failing of our white writers in general."

Bunsee went on to say Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* was a success because of Paton's first hand acquaintance with African life in the Diepkloof Reformatory, where he worked for ten years.

Then Mr. Bunsee made a tricky observation. "Dostoyevsky," he wrote, "once said that if a writer wants to write about pimps and prostitutes, he must live with them, sleep with them. That is a statement our white writers should heed."

The general merits of this argument would be conceded, I presume, anywhere in the world except in South Africa. We are all fully aware of the legal implications as well as the social crisis that would ensue if white writers elected to heed Dostoyevsky's advice in a country which legislates against black-white sex, black-white boxing and black-white tea drinking. There is no need to go into that.

It is the general idea of a shared nationhood, the idea of a common experience which I want to focus attention upon. I believe it is important for our writers to illuminate all aspects of our life from a central point in the social structure. That is, whatever their colour or views may be, they must accept their presence in the country as members of one community, the South African community. After that they can choose to be what they wish. Without this view of life, the writer will continue to lack closeness to his subject, his work will suffer from the inadequacy of his own insight into the human situations he handles. For how else will he achieve a consciousness of his black fellows as human beings like himself, if he sees them as a mysterious mass, a labour force or nothing more than semi-human creatures?

One of Sophiatown's prodigies put it in different words, "We ought to have an integrated view of our culture," he wrote. "For instance, the African township is wasteful of much of its energy because of its lack of the Houghton kind of discipline. The enthusiasm for life and abounding energy is fine, but it achieves nothing until it is disciplined and directed into creative channels. . . I think the township is going to add an important dimension of vitality and an arresting sense of the world to our culture. But it will need the techniques of Houghton."

The question that arises from this argument is a complicated one. How does the white writer come close enough to his black

fellowman? Much of the African's life is lived outside the law. His moral values are those of an outlaw. Human decency tells him it is right to give shelter to a friend overnight. The law says it is criminal. The visitor from Johannesburg is committing a criminal offence if he sleeps in Benoni Location without a permit from officialdom. The result is that many people have the experience of regular imprisonment and lose the status of law abiding citizens' without much choice.

How is the white writer to penetrate such circumstances in order to gain a greater insight into the people he writes about? I will try to answer that question later on. Meanwhile, let us look at the likely results of this alienation between the white writer and the black section of the community.

Sarah Gertrude Millin, in her novel *God's Step Children*, gives us a tale of the coloured people. The Rev. Andrew Flood arrives in South Africa burning with enthusiasm to spread the word of God among the Hottentots. When the Hottentots resist his efforts and continue to worship their gods, Andrew Flood decides to marry one of them. His feeling is that the union will enhance the success of his ministry to the Hottentots.

He is, however, soon proved wrong. As a result, all he has achieved is to bring into being a coloured offspring. It is Flood's offspring that Mrs. Millin throws into situations of bitter frustration in order to make her point, which runs through the story like a sermon decrying the evils of mixed blood unions.

"Deborah was," writes Mrs. Millin, "as her father had said, not unintelligent. She had, as most half-caste children have, a capacity for imitation. She copied the manners and habits—and even the gestures and intonations—of Mrs. Burtwell."

Another of Mrs. Millin's characters goes down saying, "It is better for people like us not to be born."

Kleinhans, a Coloured man, meets a Boer. Then, Mrs. Millin writes, "They looked not so different as they stood there beside one another, the Boer and the Kleinhans. But the blood of savages and sin ran in Kleinhans' veins. He backed a little."

Then there is the pathetic note on which Mrs. Millin approaches the end of her story. Barry, who is one of the Rev. Andrew Flood's offspring, has studied in England and brought back a white wife. Barry's wife is pregnant and Barry says to her: "For my sin in begetting him, I am not to see my child. And, for the sorrow I share with them, I am to go among my brown people and help them. . ."

This is the sort of thing which, I think, only estrangement can make possible. Nobody who has known well those of our community who are Coloured could be responsible for such a misleading portrayal. Having read Mrs. Millin's book I was left with a feeling that, if she has been close to Coloureds at all, then she failed to see the human beings beneath the skin. To her, every coloured person is a problem, a tragic mistake—or just a unit of sin. What is worse is that she attempts to leave the reader with the feeling that this is the Coloured man's view of himself. Not just her own caricature.

Alan Paton's *Cry the Beloved Country* comes more than twenty years after Mrs. Millin's *God's Step Children*; it comes as a landmark in the development of South African writing. Here the African is seen by the author at much closer range. There is not the barrier of racial prejudice which appears to stand between Mrs. Millin and her characters. Here the African is less of the deformed social entity in which some dimensions are conspicuously absent.

Yet even Paton collapses over the values which he makes his characters live by. His characters have faith in human nature, a naïve confidence in the potential goodness of the next man and his religion. When there is trouble in the family, Rev. Kumalo turns to his God and prays. His prayers are answered. His meek nature and his humility before the white man pay off.

As Mphahlele wrote: "Paton's characters are adapted to a story that carries the message: Be patient, Christlike suffering on the part of the black man can move the adamant heart of a white man to philanthropic deeds that will bring the black man hope."

I agree with Mphahlele. The black man's life is far too rugged to allow for such a smooth flow of life where problems are overcome by appeals to the heavens. It is by sharpening his wits instead of resigning himself to dumb humility that the African has learned to live with his predicament.

It is in Nadine Gordimer's *World of Strangers* that the African character is left alone to move about without confinement to a tight rope based on a stereotype image of the black man.

Here the African acts as a man in a human situation, also not as a curious phenomenon sticking out rather crudely from the general social structure of South African life.

This book may very well be part of the beginning of a vital mutual recognition of the reality of our time in South Africa. That although conflict exists on many levels between black and white, we are a single community with a common destiny and, therefore, requiring common ideals, moral values, and common national aspirations.

A young African writer produced a short story which I should mention at this point. This is the story of two young men with a

Bohemian bent. The one is white and the other black. Both roam the streets of Johannesburg, squandering their youth and generally enjoying the business of flouting the city's social conventions.

The black character is a bold, reckless youth with voracious reading habits and a passion for the city's looks by night. So the two often go out on long walks by night from the suburbs to the city and back. It is during one of these walks that there is trouble.

The police catch up with the couple. Largely curious over the combination, the police stop the African and ask him for a pass. It is late and the police want to know why the black man is not in his location among his own people. Dramatically, the black man asks: "Who are my people?"

This is a crucial question which I want to relate to the whole matter of writing in South Africa. I have spent some time speaking of Africans, yet the identity of this mass of people is largely hazy in my own mind. A few weeks ago, it became my task to frame a circular letter to prospective readers of this magazine. A friend of mine, who is a librarian in New York, wrote to say that she would help find me an agent to handle distribution in the United States. "Almost anything African sells like hot cakes here," she assured me. It seemed a hot idea in itself that our magazine could go like hot cakes. But then it had been written by Africans. I knew that some of the white writers who have offered their contributions already regard themselves as Africans, white Africans. Would I then write to New York and say the magazine is to carry the work of the black and white Africans? How would that affect their image of the African? What assurance could I have that white Africans would also sell like hot cakes?

To this day my mind remains unclear on this.

I cannot claim to know the answer to it.

Finally, I wish to go back a little. I promised to try and answer the question "How can the white writer penetrate the African's life, which is one of an outlaw, in order to gain greater insight into his situation?"

This is a simple matter which, I believe, calls for personal treatment by each individual. It concerns one's personal and private experience. The writer can take his choice. Bow to the social conventions and the letter of the law and keep within the confines of the white world, or refuse to let officialdom regulate his personal life, face the consequences and be damned.

Chapter 43

The Fabulous Decade: The Fifties

by

Lewis Nkosi

It is the indescribable vanity of every generation to believe that its young men and women are somewhat more beautiful, more plausible, certainly more perceptive and courageous than their elders, who are always assumed to have failed their young. Similarly for the older generation there is always the feeling that the young are only slightly less vivid and interesting than these elders imagine themselves to have been during their heyday.

In South Africa this mutual antipathy and the mutual denigration between the generations are made more painful by the greatly varied nature of the challenges presented by each era, so that when the

responses are seen to be different the war between the young and the old is afforded extra emotion.

My generation came to maturity just before or soon after the Second World War, at about the same time that Dr. Malan was taking over the country on a mandate to apply more rigidly apartheid than the smuts Government before him had seemed prepared to do. It could not therefore without some superhuman effort understand the naïve credulity of its elders. Though we doubted we could have done any better in the circumstances, we were nonetheless bitter that our great grandfathers had lost a country to the whites. It was therefore with genuine pain that we were prepared to forgive them their ignoble defeat.

What we were not, by any means, prepared to forgive was the indecent readiness with which our immediate elders were prepared to believe that after this history of war and pillage white people meant well by us, and that given time they would soon accord us equal say in the running of the country's affairs. Not only had our elders apparently believed this patent hoax but during the Second World War they had allowed themselves to be pressed into service under the impression that they were helping win freedom and democracy for *us*! This seemed to us incredible stupidity.

We argued that before they left for the theatres of war in North Africa and Europe they must have realized that there was no democracy at home. Not only was there no democracy at home but the very war effort in which they were enjoined to participate was run on segregated lines. From South Africa there were white companies and coloured companies and General Smuts had seen to it that black soldiers were suitably armed with spears and kerries against the might of the German army. In most cases black soldiers were mere stretcher-bearers. Perhaps very unkindly but with the tough, judging coolness of the young, we concluded that for their naïveté and enthusiasm to participate in such a war our elders deserved the shabby treatment they received. The evidence of their writing was not the least encouraging. When we turned to their literature our

sense of outrage was sharpened. A great deal of this writing, stimulated as it was by missionary endeavour, was purposefully Christian and aggressively crusading: the rest was simply eccentric or unacceptably romantic.

We, the young, were blamed, of course, not only for having defected from the time-tested morality of the tribe, but were also sharply reprimanded for refusing *at least* to substitute a Christian morality in its place. Often enough – I think with some truth – we were accused of being irresponsible, cynical, pleasure-loving, world-weary and old before our time had arrived to be truly old. Most vernacular novels, as well as those written in English, novels upon which we were nourished in our boyhood, worked and reworked the theme of *Jim Comes to Jo-burg*¹ in which it was implied that Jim's loss of place in the tightly woven tribal structure and the corresponding attenuation of the elders' authority over him was the main cause rather than the result of the nation's tragedy. Jim's disaffiliation from the tribe in favour of the self-seeking individualistic ethos of urban life, we were made to understand, was tantamount to Jim's loss of manhood. As a matter of fact, this was the subservient theme in Alan Paton's *Cry, The Beloved Country*.

If we rejected Stephen Kumalo, Paton's hero, it was partly because we, the young, suspected that the priest was a cunning expression of white liberal sentiment. Paton's generosity of spirit, his courageous plea for racial justice, and all those qualities which have earned him the undying respect of many Africans, were not of course in question. What was in question was Paton's method, his fictional control of African character which produced an ultimate absurdity like Stephen Kumalo: an embodiment of all the pieties, trepidations and humiliations we the young had begun to despise with such a consuming passion.

We thought we discerned in Stephen Kumalo's naïveté and simple-minded goodwill, white South Africa's subconscious desire to

¹ A film of the same title was produced in Johannesburg in the early fifties, portraying a tribal innocent who succumbs to the temptations of city life.

survive the blind tragedy which was bound to engulf the country sooner or later; for if the African (anybody else for that matter) was as fundamentally good and forgiving as Stephen Kumalo was conceived by Paton to be, then the white South Africans might yet escape the immense penalty which they would be required to pay.

You will remember that Kumalo, the priest who goes to Johannesburg in search of his son, is afforded ample opportunity to witness the moral decay of the society for which the major responsibility must surely lie with the racist exploiters. But strangely enough, if somewhat unconvincingly, this is the kind of Gethsemane from which Kumalo emerges without moral profit to return once more to Indotsheni, his innocence still intact, as convinced as ever that there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the society which cannot be set right by love and prayer. Caught as he is in the Christian liberal's dilemma of how to persuade an unwilling people to change for the good without a recourse to revolution or a certain amount of force, Paton's novel can only end with a distorted, sentimental, if ameliorative vision, in which reconciliation consists of liberals supplying mild and helping build a dam in a Bantustan. However, this optimism, then as now, was false, infantile. We had to wait for the publication of Paton's *Tales from a Troubled Land*, a record, I would say, of Paton's actual experience and therefore an unsentimentalised encounter with the dark and iron reality of the life of the urban African, to witness, finally, Paton's earnest confrontation of the central issue of Evil and the meagerness of the liberal vision before so challenging a reality. In *Death of a Tsotsi* Paton ends his story with the appropriate recognition:

We were all of us, white and black, rich and poor, learned and untutored, bowed down by a knowledge that we lived in the shadow of a great danger, and were powerless against it. It was no place for a white person to pose in any mantle of power or authority; for this death gave the lie to both of them.

And this death would go on too, for nothing less than the reform of a society would bring it to an end. It was the menace of this socially frustrated, strangers to mercy, striking like

adders for the dark reasons of the ancient minds, at any who crossed their paths.

It is still an optimistic vision, but less fanciful, and one which, had Stephen Kumalo been permitted to achieve it, would have brought about a grudging reconciliation between him and ourselves. Perhaps it was not Paton's fault that at times Stephen Kumalo sounded like a good-natured liberal pleading for moderation, for less vehemence on both sides of the colour-line; pleading, in fact, for a return to the Christian virtues of love for neighbour as well as for enemy. The novel, it seems to me, was committed beforehand not to the revelation of the workings of the human heart but to a powerful, if sentimental, plea for racial justice and peace.

In Stephen Kumalo we thought we saw, then, another Uncle Tom secretly finding his way into our midst by rural train via Ixopo and Carisbrooke, covered with the dust of the humble and the lowly, speaking in the measured cadences of a Biblical tongue, which was scarcely recognizable to us. No doubt a case can be made here against our judgment as being intemperate and biased; it can be argued that Stephen Kumalo would not tax the credulity of any objective person; that, in fact, his nobility is well comprehended; after all there are many Stephen Kumalos in South Africa, even today, speaking to us in a familiarity indigenous tongue and accent. Nevertheless, Stephen Kumalo seems to me quite incredible and I would say he is quite easy to repudiate, for as a character he is no more than a figment of a white liberal's imagination. Where so many white South African writers fall flat on their faces in their effort to portray the so-called simple African is in their inability to see and underline the fantastic ambiguity, the deliberate self-deception, the ever-present irony beneath the mock humility and moderation of speech. It is this irony of the subtle persecution of a white man by a so-called simple African which is the supreme achievement of Dan Jacobson's *The Trap*.

We, the young, also despised Stephen Kumalo, of course, for his failure to come to terms with the city; we despised him even more heartily when he 'copped out', retreating finally to Indotsheni; and

we despised him right up to the moment he climbed the mountain to offer that extraordinary prayer to God, which was really the prayer to man in a deep panic, a man, nonetheless, who is not permitted even the dignity of a minimum awareness and comprehension of his situation.

I write so much at length about the hero of Alan Paton's novel not in any effort to give a full critique of the novel as a work of art, but in order to show that when we entered the decade of the fifties we had no literary heroes, like generations in other parts of the world. We had to improvise because there were no models who would serve as moral examples for us in our private and public preoccupations. On the other hand by the time we were through living in the fifties we had given white writers a milieu and characters who were recognizably modeled upon our lives. Several associates working for DRUM magazine individually and collectively made up the characters and provided the social milieu of stories like Paton's *Drink in the Passage*, or Nadine Gordimer's *A World of Strangers* and *Occasion for Loving*. Paton's story is, in fact, a report of what actually happened in real life to one of us.

I know that for those who not believe in the power of literature to mould life and manners the need for literary heroes must seem not only silly but self-indulgent; nevertheless it seems to me that as a generation we longed desperately for literary heroes we could respect and with whom we could identify. In the moral chaos through which we were living we longed to find a work of literature, a drama or film, home-grown and about us, which would contain a significant amount of our experience and in which we could find our own attitudes and feelings. For a generation reaching maturity, it was an intolerable strain not to have our own Holden Caulfield against whom to measure our own feelings and test our vision of reality. I suppose, in a sense, the war between us and Stephen Kumalo was therefore a war between two generations – the older generation which looked forward to fruitful changes under the Smuts Government and the young who saw themselves beginning their adult life under a more brutal apartheid regime.

The fifties were important to us as a decade because finally they spelled out the end of one kind of South Africa and foreshadowed the beginning of another. Sharpeville was the culmination of a political turmoil during a decade in which it was still possible in South Africa to pretend to the viability of extra-parliamentary opposition. While there was a fantastic array of laws controlling our lives it was still possible to organize marches to police stations, to parliament, to the very prisons holding our political leaders. It was possible to go to the same universities as white students; there were racially mixed parties enjoyed with the gusto of a drowning people; it seemed at the least obligatory to assume an air of defiance against Government and authority and though the penalty was high even then, there was nothing as vicious as the 90-Day Detention Law; no torture on the scale which it now assumes in the Government's deliberate programme of suppressing all effective opposition.

Sharpeville and the brutal massacre of unarmed Africans marching to a local police station brought us bang into 1960 and into a different era altogether. Henceforth the times will be troubled indeed! There will be violence, murder and suffering such as is difficult to imagine unless we are saved by an unusually timed miracle. In March 1960, on the eve of the Sharpeville shootings, I gave a lecture to the students of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg which later proved frighteningly prophetic:

I believe that the first crisis will be political and it is going to occur within the next few weeks – possibly on Monday – and the people who may be creating the first crisis for 1960 are members of the Pan Africanist Congress. . . . Whether the campaign² they are about to launch will be successful or not

² The Pan Africanist Congress, which broke away from the parent body, the African National Congress, decided to challenge the South African Government, first by asking its members to refuse to carry identity documents called 'passes' and asking them instead to volunteer to march to the nearest police station where they would surrender the most hated documents to officials, thereby courting arrest. In Sharpeville, about thirty miles outside Johannesburg, when

doesn't matter. Some action is going to be taken and this will bring us all closer to a crisis.

The decade of the fifties was the most shaping influence of our young adulthood and Johannesburg, at the time I went to work for DRUM Publications, seemed to be the buzzing centre of all national activity. It seemed to be the place to be in for any young man trying to write. In the following pages I can only try to recall some of the amusing times we lived through in that hectic decade.

That year I went to Johannesburg to work for DRUM under editor Sylvester Stein, then later for POST under Cecil Eprile, I neither drank nor smoked, though, then as now, I had a sharp eye for young women with smooth cheeks and supple knees; that is, if they were not too tough and daunting in manner. On the whole I was very sober, very young and fiercely ambitious. I was reading an incredible amount; reading always badly without discipline; reading sometimes for the sheer beauty of the language. It seemed to me in those years incredible that there could be people in the world who didn't love words as much as I did, or people who did not find the appearance of a new book a magical and awesomely exciting phenomenon. I walked about the streets of the bustling noisy city with new English words clicking like coins in the pockets of my mind; I tried them out on each passing scene, relishing their power to describe and apprehend experience; I used words to delineate faces I saw in the streets and through them I evoked the luminous figures from the closed world of the imagination.

In those days I had two sets of reality; one was the ugly world in which I lived my trapped life and the other, more powerful one, was the world of the books I read. My sense of honour was propounded

they saw the mob gather outside the police station armed police panicked and opened fire, killing sixty-nine people and injuring at least 180. For the first time in the history of South Africa a national state of emergency was declared soon thereafter.

out of the romantic novels of Dumas, Kingsley and Marryat, and the love I knew best was the love of knights and ladies in the drawing rooms of fifteenth-century Europe. What was happening under my eye was filtered through the moral sieve provided by this foreign literature. It was clear I was using literature as a form of escape; I was using it as a shield against a life of grime and social deprivation. Those days all I needed to go galloping down the highway in search of a 'white' dragon was a high horse and a shining armour. As can be expected these were not exactly the kind of qualities which can be considered an asset in a profession which in South Africa more than anywhere else does its best to rub the nose of those who follow it in the mud of ugly reality.

In those days when I went to join the paper, DRUM was a curious institution. It wasn't so much a magazine as it was a symbol of the new African cut adrift from the tribal reserve – urbanized, eager, fast-talking and brash. Anthony Sampson, a young Englishman who had come out to edit DRUM in the beginning of the fifties, had gathered around him an exciting bunch of young writers who considered it, or at least gave the impression of considering it, a mark of great honour to get into trouble with the authorities as often as possible while in pursuit of fact and photograph. In their work they were alive, go-getting, full of nervous energy, very wry, ironic and they brought to South Africa journalism a new vitality which none of the white writers had seemed capable of achieving. Naturally, in their eagerness to record the event DRUM writers were frequently in trouble with the police, their heads were clubbed more often than any group of people I know. Back in the office they wrote up these grim stories of farm labour brutalities, police torture and township riots in a cool sober prose in which they permitted themselves the luxury of a laugh.

For instance in 1955 DRUM had detailed its reporters to attend white churches in order to test the white Christians adherence to the principle of 'brotherhood in Christ' – an interesting, if extremely hazardous idea to execute. Predictably several things happened to reporters, including a hot chase of a photographer down a street by a

group of irate churchmen. Simultaneously the Johannesburg Security Police were called out to defend besieged Christendom. They rounded up Can Themba, DRUM's wiliest, most mischievous reporter, bundled him into a police car and drove him to the nearest police station where he was charged with 'vagrancy and trespassing.' In the following issue of DRUM Can Themba compiled a report which was as remarkable for the facts it revealed as for its detached unemotional tone of recounting them. In one unforgettable paragraph, Themba complained that he had been manhandled, sworn at, prosecuted, reviled; all because an African wanted to *pray!*

DRUM Publications, which had begun putting out a Sunday newspaper, POST, as well as the magazine itself, had an interesting gallery of personalities those days: from Jim Bailey, its rather eccentric proprietor, down to the tea boys, who whiled away time by hunting for interesting subjects to photograph. There was Casey Motsisi, a small, bright young African who wrote the most satirical paragraphs in the paper. He called DRUM's monthly salary a 'monthly mockery.' There was Bloke Modisane, dark-suited, bow-tied, the dandiest writer on the paper, to the delight of other members of the staff he signed his articles Bloke 'Debonair' Modisane. Then there was Arthur Maime, unable gladly to suffer any fools and slightly autocratic as News Editor for the Sunday newspaper. Ezekiel Mphahlele, the Fiction Editor, magisterial and 'concerned' more with the profounder issues of life and literature than with DRUM's sleazier prose, one imagined. Henry Nxumalo – 'Mr. DRUM' – who could go down to hell to bring back a story. Todd Matshikiza, small, breezy and musical, turning language into metaphors for the jazz figures about which he delighted writing. Finally, Can Themba, the romantic nihilist of the house.

My first day with the paper became an occasion for some form of initiation rites. It soon became apparent that being a DRUM man did not consist merely in fulfilling one's obligation to the paper professionally but carried other extra responsibilities. For instance, even in one's personal life one was supposed to exhibit a unique intellectual style; usually urbane, ironic, morally tough and detached:

one's dedication was to be a pure form of realism which would eliminate the thinnest traces of self-pity, especially in reporting the uncertainties of urban African life in the face of rigorous apartheid laws, as well as in reporting the wanton gaiety, lust and bravery of this life. Above all, in DRUM it was generally assumed that one couldn't deal professionally with urban African life unless one had descended to its very depths as well as climbed to its heights. A DRUM man took sex and alcohol in his stride, or was supposed to, and stayed in the front line of danger so long as there was danger to be endured. Of course, the DRUM style was more implicit than prescribed, but no less paramount in one's life for all that.

When I arrived at the newspaper offices that morning a group of DRUM writers were already assembled in a small room adjoining the editor's equally small office, generally pretending to be hard at work though it was quite obvious that the greater part of the morning would be taken up by an exchange of gossip about Sunday events in the black townships. Every Sunday in Johannesburg someone was murdered, someone was arrested, someone robbed; friends got married, got divorced, committed adultery, went to gay parties, loved and fought; and there was nothing to do on Monday morning but catch up on the latest news and gossip.

If I remember correctly, that morning Ezekiel Mphahlele, the noted South African author, was working on a bus boycott story; fares had gone up in the Evaton buses and political organizations had used the issue to whip up agitation against the entire apartheid regime. Terrorism was rampant in the Johannesburg townships as political factions warred against one another, bringing us close to a state of civil war. In the middle of punching his typewriter, Zeke Mphahlele could be heard solemnly muttering abuse at everyone connected with the story, including the editor who had just blue-penciled some strong paragraphs out of the piece for fear of provoking prosecution under South Africa's strict incitement laws.

Presently Zeke paused long enough to inquire with a deadpan face: 'Has anyone ever thought what a wonderful idea it would be to call a

conference of expecting mothers in which they could consider common problems of pregnancy?' Zeke leaned back in his chair, considering it: 'They could just sit back', he said, 'and talk.' A wild appreciative laughter greeted this idea. Work stopped altogether while everyone pondered the possibility for its execution.

Just then a lanky young man with a round, closely shaven head walked into the office, moving in quick, darting footsteps, thumbs stuck inside the waistline of his pants, cowboy style, chewing a pin between his broken lips. His green tweed suite was covered with mud, and on top of this suite he wore a dark overcoat which gave him the conspiratorial air of a thug. He seemed charged with a rare inordinate enthusiasm which affected everyone in the office. 'Tell us about it, Can!' they all yelled.

From the conversation I gathered that Can Themba, then DRUM's associate editor, had recently come back from the interior of the country where he had investigated the plight of political leaders restricted to security camps by the South African Government on the grounds that they constituted a threat to peace and security. During the writing of the story, Can Themba, being in his most melodramatic mood, dubbed the restriction areas 'South Africa's concentration camps'. From then on what had seemed a mildly interesting story assumed a scandal of international proportions. Top-notch Fleet Street correspondents flew into the country in search of what they supposed were Nazi-type 'concentration camps' and it can only be imagined how embarrassed and angry the South African Government became. There were stern official statements repudiating the story and rebuking DRUM for distortions, fabrication and sensationalism. Can Themba, as I recall, was unrepentant.

Can and I were introduced that morning: 'Jim's a new find from Durban,' Casey said sardonically, the sharp edge of his satire barely concealed beneath his smoother manner. While we shook hands DRUM's associate editor looked me up and down doubtfully, then enquired from those present: 'Does he drink?'

Bloke Modisane volunteered all the information without so much as consulting my views: 'He doesn't drink. He doesn't do anything, Can.' Themba was visibly horrified.

'Does he smoke?'

'He neither smokes nor goes out with women.'

A great wave of protest swept through the office at the reception of this grim information. 'My God,' Themba protested, 'what has Jim brought us from Durban!' To me he said: 'Son, you're going to corrupt our morals.' He then reassured the august company that nothing was lost yet; he vowed to break me in before the month was over. This was to consist generally of taking me on the rounds of Johannesburg 'shebeens' or speakeasies, that twilight underground world of urban African life where all classes met, united only by the need for European alcohol, the consumption of which they were prohibited. In the shebeens one met teachers, businessmen, clerks, showgirls, payroll robbers, 'nice-time' girls and occasionally, even renegade priests. The liquor 'runners' were white people who bought large stocks from bottle stores and resold to *shebeen queens* at a profit. What they called a *shebeen queen* was that tough, resourceful, archetypal 'black mama' of the Negro world, a sort of variation on the Jewish mother, but more likely to carry her resourcefulness right into the heart of the fierce business world. Under her proud arm the shebeen thrived outrageously against all legal restraints.

The hold which shebeens have on the mind of the black South African can only be compared to the similar hold the English club has on the mind of the Englishman. This explains why shebeens are so widely celebrated in the fiction and non-fiction of black South Africans. Shebeens, like the London pub, provided the focal point of city life. Interminable talk went on there about politics, business, love, literature. Anything. When a new generation of white South Africans grew up which was prepared to rebel against the narrow confines of the colour-bar society, the only place, outside the suburbs, where they could meet young Africans was in the 'shebeens'. Under

the cloak of darkness, groups of us, without obtaining police permits for white members of our convoys, drove into the sealed-off African townships, dodging police patrols, assisting young white girls over fences in badly lit township alleyways, outraging, in the process, the happy calm of black citizens who were most astonished to see pink faces suddenly materialize, unbesought, in the protected centre of their unstable lives. They were shocked and scandalized; they worried about the danger and enmity they were going to earn from the disapproving authorities. Most of all, I suppose, they worried about having to rearrange their emotions about white people who had been neatly pigeonholed as bosses and white devils. How as a mother to address a white girl whom her son brought home after dark, under the cover of darkness, from the university, from a Liberal Party meeting, from COD, or the jazz club? The danger in the situation was both external and internal.

A favourite shebeen for DRUM writers was within a stone's throw of Marshall Square, Johannesburg's biggest police station. It was raided regularly, but though it was often too late to conceal glasses beneath sofas and settees before the police marched in, no one was ever arrested there in my presence. With the glasses clearly visible behind chairs it then became necessary for the raiding police squad to pretend it did not notice the glasses and for the drinkers to pretend they did not realize that the police were pretending not to notice the glasses. It was a role which both groups enjoyed immensely.

The police would then take Aunt Suzie, the 'shebeen queen', into the kitchen for a brief business chat after which they soon emerged, surreptitiously stuffing their pockets with something – perhaps with money. On the other hand in Fordsburg one was always in danger of being interrupted by fierce Boer policemen in the middle of a drink. A 'crier' shouted the warning of their raid advance and there was then an awful stampede for various concealed exits. Once I was having a drink with Nat Nakasa, a young DRUM writer, later editor of the Johannesburg quarterly, *The Classic*, when the warning of the imminent arrival of the police was issued to customers. Loaded with books I had just borrowed from the Wits University Library I tore

away through a back passage which, at the critical moment, proved too narrow for quick exit. My jacket got caught on a steel hook of the gate and I dangled there helplessly, awaiting the frightful fracas to abate.

Sylvester Stein, then DRUM editor, prematurely grey and bespectacled, called me into his office that first morning to give me one of those cynical pep talks for which all DRUM editors were notorious. He conjured up a vast DRUM empire spreading over the entire continent of Africa over which, with sufficient energy and cunning, I would yet rise to preside. The opportunities were vast and the resources limitless. 'One day,' he said with emotion, 'you will be sitting in this very chair – this very editor's chair.' When I repeated these proceedings to the assembled group of DRUM writers guffaws of unrestrained delight went forth to greet the news.

That evening a group of us led by Can Themba, who walked about six paces ahead of us, careering like an unwound dummy, left the office on what proved to be my first excursion into the shebeen circuit. I was determined not to let anyone browbeat me into taking alcohol, which proved, of course, that I did not know how contagious sin was. Little did I know that after three months of getting about the shebeens with drinkers and refusing offers of alcohol, perhaps the highest form of insult to Johannesburg drinkers, my resistance was going to be corroded, my will was finally going to crack. Nonetheless, whatever happened I was determined that it was not going to be Can Themba who was going to force a drink down my throat, someone I presumed to be waging a war against my morals.

It was winter, I remember, and Johannesburg can be extremely cold in winter. For me the city was nevertheless warm and exciting, vibrant with an undiscovered life. Though I was a child of the city, Durban had been only a port, a resort town, casual and luxurious; blessed with warm sunny beaches but hardly what could be sensibly described as an exciting cit. In Johannesburg I loved the city noises, the home bound crowds, the chaotic traffic. No doubt it was an ugly city. There were brash vulgar buildings springing up everywhere,

skyscraper canyons and scarcely any parks or water in sight. This city seemed to have sprung out of the desert; the discovery of gold was its sole rationale for being there; and sometimes there was the same appalling loneliness and desolation about it which must have been the peculiar feature of the desert. It was this aspect of Johannesburg which made it so desperately important and frightfully necessary for its citizens to move fast, to live very intensely, to live harshly and vividly, for this was the sole reason for their being there: to make money, to spend it and make more money. While doing so they had to get drunk, sleep with one another's wives, go to the movies, and like sensible citizens of a big city, resist all attempts to humanize them through art and literature. Drinking, violence and sex bound people together as nothing else did, for even murder was a form of affirmation of one's presence and vitality: the desperate *tsotsi* finally striking and attempting to feel or assert his own sense of being in a cruel, unthinking environment. In Johannesburg most murders, usually stabbings, were unprovoked, almost totally irrational and motiveless, for every so often there was not even the desire to rob the victim. Only the American Negro slang word '*flip*' accurately describes the personality disturbance which preceded these stabbings. In Sophiatown I once saw a boy walking up a street, then for some inexplicable reason he suddenly '*flipped*', pulled out a knife and began stabbing away at anyone who was in his way.

Johannesburg, unlike Durban, was also dense, rhythmic: it was swaggering and wastefully, totally without an inner life. People loved quickly, they lived fitfully; so profligate were they with emotion, so wasteful with their vitality, that it was very often difficult for them to pause and reflect on the passing scene. This I think partly explains why so many black South African writers have concentrated on the journalistic prose, more often on the short story but rarely on the long reflective novel. It is not so much the intense suffering (though this helped a great deal) which makes it impossible for black writers to produce long and complex works of literary genius as it is the very absorbing, violent and immediate nature of experience which impinges upon individual life. Unless literature is assumed to be important in itself, for its own sake, unless it is assumed to be its

own justification, there was no reason whatever why anyone in our generation should have wanted to write. It seems to me that literature begins where life fails; in Johannesburg there was much too much of this direct experience to be had; there was no privacy in which to reflect, people called on you early in the morning bringing bottles or asking you out to a shebeen, police raided you at night for permits and identity documents, parties were too numerous and sprang up too arbitrarily in the middle of some important work; and if one wasn't sure which jail one was going to be in on the morrow, or even whether one was going to be alive or cut down by a police bullet or perhaps by the knife of a thug, there was no reason not to grab at this life, at this gift, eagerly, without waiting even for the mediating intervention of art and literature. That did not mean, as it might be taken to mean, that we did not need literary heroes those of us who could read wanted to test this vitality against someone else's vitality; what it merely meant was that we had not the time or the driving necessity to create a literature ourselves. Thus when we attacked white authors like Alan Paton for distorting African reality, when we repudiated the heroes they provided for us, we were rightly accused of having failed to provide South Africa with alternative heroes of our own. Where, it was scornfully asked, was the great Elizabethan England which gave us the closest parallel to our own mode of existence; the cloak and dagger stories of Shakespeare; the marvelously gay and dangerous time of change in Great Britain, came closest to reflecting our own condition. Thus it was possible for an African musician returning home at night to inspire awe in a group of thugs surrounding him by declaiming in an impossibly archaic English. 'Unhand me, rogues!' Indeed, they did unhand him. The same thugs who were to be seen chewing on apples in the streets of Johannesburg after the manner of the gangsters they had seen in Richard Widmark's motion picture, *Street With No Name*, also delighted in the violent colour, the rolling rhetoric of Shakespearean theatre. Their favourite form persecuting middle-class Africans was forcing them to stand at street corners, reciting some passage from Shakespeare, for which they would be showered with sincere applause.

However, Johannesburg had also the sense to have a large Jewish population, which besides making money, also did a great deal to temper this crude urban landscape with what surely must be the innate Jewish gift for marshalling residual energy toward a life of contemplative culture. If Johannesburg is a cultural desert (indeed the whole of South Africa is) it would have been a worse desert without the mitigating Jewish presence. For instance, if one was foolhardy enough to have girl friends across the colour-line they were likely to be Jewish (as guilt-ridden as hell, naturally, and fixated on their fathers to boot); if one had white friends of any sort they were most likely Jewish; almost eighty per cent white south Africans who belonged to left wing and liberal organizations were Jewish; whatever cultural vitality Johannesburg enjoyed was contributed by this Jewish community, middle-class and moneyed; one community which can be counted on to produce a Helen Suzman. It is not very much, I admit, but in South Africa it staggers the imagination.

This was the city then conquered by big business and by Boer philistines, run by a gun-crazy police force and knife-happy African thugs, a city immune to all the graces of African tribal life and to the contemplative pleasures of European cultural life; finally it had to depend upon this Jewish community, upon its dogged sense of identity and the Jewish nostalgia for things of the heart and spirit.

The moment one understands the great South African poverty so far as tradition is concerned, the lack of any coherence in whatever intellectual life there is to be found there, the lack finally of any common assumptions or sense of shared nationhood, the sooner will the importance of this Jewish identity become apparent, however threadbare and shopsoiled – and it is threadbare and shopsoiled, for it buttressed the rather aimless drifting existence of Johannesburg urban life. It was the Jews who tempered this harsh social order of apartheid with a tenuous liberalism and human values for the liberals and the left wing were drawn mostly from this community; and it was they who provided whatever fusion there was between African native talent and European discipline and technique. They

and the Africans made Johannesburg alive and absorbent in a way no other city of the Republic was.

Along Main Street we followed Can Themba. He weaved his supple body between white people and black people, from time to time gaily waving his arms at the city in a gesture that included astonished crowds of white people traveling home in the soft twilit evening. 'Ah, to rub my black jowl against the white cheek of Johannesburg!' Can Themba declaimed.

In one hand he carried a huge volume consisting of *The Complete Works of Oscar Wilde*. He dodged the traffic deftly, meandering through cars and crowds, hurrying, as I would see him hurry many times thereafter, to his beloved shebeen. Especially he loved the one called 'The Church', to which he introduced most of the strangers visiting Johannesburg for the first time. Once a young DRUM recruit, when told by Can Themba that we would all meet at the church on a Monday, was so impressed by what he considered the profound piety of the DRUM staff that he doubted the paper was the right place for him to be employed. When evening finally came he was escorted to 'Church' during a triumphant march of the Faithful. The surroundings struck the new man as being somewhat decrepit and disreputable, to say the very least; but he was even more surprised when the brisk walk into the 'church' revealed a room crowded with dark 'saints' huddled over glasses of Mellowood brandy. Anyway, our progress up Main Street that evening was rather like the odyssey of Stephen Daedalus and his friends through the city of Dublin in *Ulysses*.

The first stop was at the home of DRUM photographer Bob Gosani, whose mother then ran a shebeen under the very nose of the Johannesburg's Magistrates' courts. Every Monday crowds of Africans charged with being in possession of European liquor were tied there, fined or jailed, and within a stone's throw of these magisterial courts a number of shebeens thrived in the shadow of the law. Can Themba stood in the middle of the room, hand on one hip, taking the orders for drinks from the gathered company, then

energetically he announced to the coloured woman: 'Half a jack, mother!' Naturally we called in at the Church that evening, then at Aunt Suzie's near Marshall Square. I suppose part of the attraction for Aunt Suzie's shebeen was the danger of police raids which gave every drinking session there its supreme tension. It was one of the many shebeens in Johannesburg to which we took visiting American and European writers, or overseas correspondents of international repute, in the roguish hope that an unexpected police raid would result in their being taken into custody, an experience which we fondly hoped would be quite illuminating. It was the same shebeen to which I too Peter Ritner, a young writer who was then on the staff of the *Saturday Review for Literature*, when he visited the country.

An overseas visitor never ceased to delight Aunt Suzie; she became so moved by Ritner's presence that evening that she attempted to prove that she and Ritner were long-lost relatives descended from the same family tree. Any logic failed to dislodge her from this fantastic illusion. I had noticed that at Aunt Suzie's very rarely were drinks paid for in cash; there was always credit for old and tried customers. Aunt Suzie, a large, frazzle-headed coloured woman, complained bitterly that DRUM and POST reporters never came to her except when they were broke, which was only partly true. Still, it was true enough for the charge to stick: Casey Motsisi, for instance, would come into the room, order a bottle of brandy, and when asked about money he would cry out 'Put it on the tick, Auntie!' This enraged Aunt Suzie and argument would ensue, the enormous coloured woman calling Casey every abusive name in the book; but the climax was always unfailingly the production of the bottle, so that in time, after witnessing many other similar proceedings, the end became a sort of anticlimax.

In the shebeen it was always talk, talk, talk. Monstrously large tales delivered in exaggerated metaphors. Kidding politics. 'All I want,' Can challenged, 'all I am suing Strijdom³ for is a chance to sit down with him over a glass of brandy and talk to him man to man. I reckon

³ A former South African Prime Minister.

I have a few things to tell him. It may very well be that after the umpteenth drink, even with the lowest intelligence, a man may see reason!’

Jeers of scornful disbelief greeted this offer: ‘Wait a minute! You guys are too impatient, you were raised in a tradition which believed in grabbing everything, returning even for the wives left behind after the kill. Remember: we’re no longer primitive; now we believe in civilized talk. I want to show the Prime Minister how large a man I am; I want to show him how magnanimous I can be. I tell you man, I don’t want to govern. I just want to live and let live. . . . Perhaps from time to time maneuver the Prime Minister’s daughter from under his all too protective arm. Who knows, with a little bit of luck I may yet be able to show her God’s face!’ Can grinned happily, arms lifted to silence the hubbub.

‘Anyway, I say to hell with politics and bottoms up to glasses!’ He tossed the entire contents of a large glass of brandy down his throat, smote his chest and grimaced while the alcohol burned its way down his ulcerous stomach.

The day before the South African Government swooped down on over 156 political leaders around the country, flying them by army planes to Johannesburg where they were to stand trial on charges of a treasonable conspiracy, some top members of the African National Congress, including Robert Resha, now in charge of the Algeria office, were drinking in a Johannesburg shebeen, also playing, though they did not know it at the time, a very prophetic game. In the role of a prosecutor Robert Resha was arraigning colleagues on various nefarious crimes against the State. Taking the mock trial very seriously Resha marshaled evidence to prove ‘incontestably’ that the accused had shown ‘a common intent to overthrow the Government by violent means’. Before dawn that morning, Robert Resha and other political leaders were rounded up in a nationwide mop-up operation.

The Crown would attempt to prove, the prosecutor later told the court, that the accused had conspired to overthrow the State by violent means and in its place were preparing to substitute a dictatorship of the proletariat. In South Africa there was often a very thin margin between fantasy and reality. I have often thought many times afterwards how difficult it must be to try and reclaim some of this bitter reality for imaginative literature. Words seem to break under the strain.

I have written elsewhere that the mood in the South Africa of the fifties was not exactly one of impending doom. While it seemed that the white Nationalist Party Government was going from strength to strength the opposition camp was also gathering in a bumper harvest of new recruits to the cause of racial justice and intellectual freedom.

It was a time of infinite hope and possibility; it seemed not extravagant in the least to predict then that the Nationalist Government would soon collapse, if not from the pressure of the extra-parliamentary opposition, certainly from the growing volume of unenforceable laws. It was a time when people of all races – through the bulk came from the black community – joined together in a massive Defiance Campaign conducted along Gandhian lines, which resulted in hundreds of unresisted arrests but managed, in its own way, to frighten the Government out of its wits. It was a time which saw the birth of Alan Paton's Liberal Party dedicated to non-racial policies and individual freedom. For the ANC, PAC and Congress of Democrats, it was the finest hour. It was a time of mass student rallies at the universities, the storming of prison barricades by students demanding the release of political leaders; and in the avenues leading to the Universities of Johannesburg and Cape Town there were mile-long marches in favour of more academic freedom at a time when the Government was threatening to bar coloured students from all 'open' universities. It was a time of thrust, never of withdrawal.

In the arts it was a time of great ferment. It was a time when the Eoun Group, a coloured opera company in Cape Town, was reaping far more laurels than any white company had ever done in South Africa. It was a time when in Johannesburg black and white artists were co-operating to form music and theatre groups such as the Union of South African Artists – a magnificent example of racial co-operation which resulted in the staging of Todd Matshikiza's jazz opera, *King Kong*; the finished product did not – could not have succeeded in mirroring half the conspiratorial excitement, the tremendous amount of underground planning, the rehearsals in a large Johannesburg warehouse for lack of non-segregated theatres, and finally the physical hazards to musicians and actors nightly traveling home from the city to the crime-infested African townships – an easy prey to both thugs and the police. The Johannesburg police lay in wait for them at bus stops and roadsides, demanding to see curfew 'passes' which all Africans were compelled to carry after eleven at night. Once, in a gruesome turn of humour, the police seized a group of musicians after rehearsal, and in order to earn a reprieve the musicians were asked to entertain the sergeants at the police station.

The somewhat tepid reception given to the musical on its London opening night contrasted curiously with the harsh convivial atmosphere of the Johannesburg opening night, for the resounding welcome accorded the musical at the University Great Hall that night was not so much for the jazz opera as a finished artistic product as it was applause for an Idea which had been achieved by pooling together resources from both black and white artists in the face of impossible odds. For so long black and white artists had worked in watertight compartments, in complete isolation, with very little contact or cross-fertilization of ideas. Johannesburg seemed at the time to be on the verge of creating a new and exciting Bohemia.

An underground jazz music was simultaneously bursting the seams of apartheid. The New Jazz went to the universities, seminars were held to discuss in respectful academic tones where the new music was going. A well-dressed mildly progressive academic community assembled at the University auditorium was shattered to hear a

visiting American jazz critic, John Mehegan, who was then championing this underground African jazz, remarking in accusatory tones: 'I fail to understand how anyone professing to love modern literature – James Joyce, Dylan Thomas – can remain unreceptive to modern jazz!'

On Sundays moneyed Jewish hostesses in the suburbs of Houghton and Park Town gave young African musicians a place and an opportunity for displaying their superb skills for small avant-garde audiences willing to listen to something new. It was a time when it seemed that the sound of police gunfire and jackboot would ultimately become ineffectual against resolute opposition and defiance from the new 'fringe society' coming together in a spirit of tolerance and occupying a 'no-man's-land' between the two warring camps. Alas, we didn't realize how small and powerless we were.

That winter of '56 *Township Jazz* went to City Hall and caused a minor sensation in the racially divided city. Whites, some of them upholders of the apartheid philosophy, flocked down to City Hall to be entertained by the African artistes. In the African political circles there were rumblings about the need to boycott segregated performances. Zeke Mphahlele was one of those who regarded the idea of providing separate shows for black and white audiences with absolute hostility. There were others, also admirably motivated, who argued the opposite, who thought it a good idea to let black artists make an impact on white Johannesburg. There was a surge of optimism, very difficult to prove founded or unfounded, that art might yet crack the wall of apartheid. I think shows like the *Township Jazz '56* series achieved a fair amount in this direction, but could not, naturally, bring down the Verwoerd Government. Anyway the inter-racial Union of South African Artists which was promoting the series was making vast sums of money and the show had to go on.

On the opening night there was a mixed party⁴ to celebrate the event held in an Indian Club on the western fringes of the city. Present were Africans, whites, mixed-bloods and Indians, and because of the free admixture of the races the party assumed against the proportions of a vast conspiracy against the state. It might as well have been, for many of those present were the same people who were later to be arrested for treason. Nevertheless I doubt if anything sinister was planned that night.

Besides attending an all-race carol singing organized by the Durban Institute of Race Relations at Christmastime, moreover attending for the most professional of reasons, or besides being asked to tea parties at the houses of liberal homes in the interests of better racial understanding, I had never been to a politically disinterested mixed party where white men danced with black women and black men danced with white women, where the South African 'underground' was visible, no longer a fanatical dream conjured up in some daring novel.

I had just finished assisting Bob Gosani in taking photographs for the magazine and was standing at the close of the show, on the steps of the City Hall, transported by the lyrical beauty of the city at night, my senses opened to that keen dry Johannesburg night air that was so exhilarating. I was fascinated by the garish lights, by the colour and the rumble of the city. Suddenly out of the shadows, black and glistening, an enormous Cadillac swung round, floated by and came to a standstill on the kerb some few paces ahead of me. There was a middle-aged Jewish man behind the wheel and a pretty girl with a long angular face and shining black hair. The girl waved and spoke through the lowered window: 'Does anyone want a lift to the party?' I accepted this offer, edged myself into the open door and came to rest in the plushy depths of the automobile.

⁴ In South Africa a 'mixed party' refers to an informal party where members of different races are present.

The girl introduced herself as Molly Seftel. She was an actress who had recently returned from a long sojourn in London. I was not in a position to hear anything further she was saying, so enchanted was I by the face, yet she was too tall really, but I suppose I have always been too hung up on tall girls; also her face and nose were too long; nevertheless she seemed to me utterly rhapsodic, so harshly beautiful and mysteriously present. I think I was also too flattered fro words that she prepared to listen to all my dreams about what I wanted to achieve. I was young enough and really too eager not to be flattered by any woman who had the time to listen to my dreams. I was also vain in the most secretive manner; I actually thought that the world ought to care what I wanted to do; and as far as I was concerned the world consisted mainly of beautiful women.

At the club we shared a table and Molly and I talked some more. Finally she wondered if I would like to come to the house and see her there sometimes. She also had some books she wanted to get rid of, perhaps she could give them to me if I would find better use for them. This invitation proved, in the circumstances, her unwise course of that evening, for later I was to call her almost every week, under the most stupid of pretexts possible; and once having called her I was completely awed and left speechless for what to say. Considering that I was nineteen at the time it must have taken immense courage and an extraordinary amount of vanity and recklessness to make these calls on someone much older than I; someone moreover from whom I was separated by an immovable apartheid wall. Much later when I was a little older and audacious enough to consider myself mature, I used to meet Molly, now married, walking about the streets of Johannesburg in the most absent-minded manner, looking for her enormous car which she described as 'lost', by which she meant she no longer remembered where she had parked it. For an African, owning a car was such a remote possibility that the idea of actually 'losing' one in the streets seemed fantastic. For sheer amusement I would assist Molly to look for it. 'Does it look like this one in front of us?' She looked as though I was being irredeemably childish.

Regina Brooks, a poor but extremely pretty white girl, raised in the midst of a small Zulu community by relatives, grew up with Zulu children, speaking very little of the European languages as a result, but using Zulu fluently.

In 1954 she attended a Zulu wedding during which she met and was courted by a Zulu police sergeant in the approved Zulu fashion. Though the sergeant was already married to a pretty Zulu girl he returned to Johannesburg to live with Miss Brooks in one of the black townships. The couple were arrested soon thereafter and charged under South Africa's Immorality Act, which does not mean what it might be supposed to mean, but means only a proscription by law of any interracial affairs – that is, between 'white and non-white'.

A white person may be legally defined as such if he or she is white 'by common acceptance or by general repute. It was under this rather ambiguous clause in the law that the defense team successfully appealed against the couple's conviction on the grounds that though white Miss Brooks was a Zulu by 'general repute'. Apparently genes had not been potent enough to ensure her European status against the social environment in which she was brought up. Social Welfare officers giving evidence in support of the appeal testified to the effect that for all practical purposes Miss Brooks was a Zulu and that she became generally embarrassed and quite uneasy in the presence of white people.

In due course Miss Brooks parted from her Zulu lover and went to live with a boxing promoter, a well-known man-about-town in the Johannesburg African community. It was during this phase of her eventful career that Henry Nxumalo, the man who could go to hell to bring back a story, conceived of this smashing idea which was to feature Regina Brooks in the columns of POST. She would be allowed to give a general discourse on life and her love career. Among three or four reporters whom Henry selected to act more as a supporting cast, I suppose, than to assist him in getting the story, he asked me to come along. We had already heard disturbing rumours that the

boxing promoter was vowing to beat the life out of any reporter who came to his house prying into his private life – an attitude which seemed to me commendable, even at the time, since I wasn't good at prying.

It would have seemed more prudent therefore to go to the couple's home quite early during the day and in a state of unimpeachable sobriety in order the better to assess the amount of physical risk we were running, and if a quick escape should be necessary not to be encumbered by alcohol; but alas this was not to be. Henry took us on a general tour of the shebeens first, perhaps in order to fortify himself. Then after midnight he ordered the Volkswagen and the driver to convey us to our triumphant destiny. Henry, who was very drunk by now, was singing a very tuneful song which must have been of great cheer to him: 'I've got a story in my pocket which nobody knows about.'

The couple then lived in a Sophiatown backyard and we had to leave the car in the street and, led by Henry, file into the small passage Indian style. By this time Henry's singing was very muted. At the door he knocked once or twice before a man's gruff voice asked who it was. Henry shouted through the keyhole: 'POST!' Without putting on the light the voice said: 'Come in!' Henry walked in first. I was coming in closely behind him when I heard a fist crashing about, waiting; Henry pirouetted crazily and his face floated toward us under the starlight. He was bleeding. In a terribly still voice Henry said: 'Let's go boys!' I never heard a man's voice so calm, so still.

Regina Brooks' story appeared in POST that Sunday while Henry was in bandages. He had gone back to Sophiatown alone.

Can Themba was leaning against the jamb of the door, a glass of brandy in one hand and a volume of Oscar Wilde in the other; but the book was closed since Can was quoting from memory lines from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam:

O Thou who didst with Pitfall and with Gin

Beset the Road I was to wander in,
Thou wilt not with Predestination round
Enmesh me, and impute my Fall to Sin?

Can and Bob Gosani had sworn to drink each other 'under the table' before the small hours of morning and we were to be witnesses of Can's triumph. I must admit I had never quite understood Can's taste for Oscar Wilde until that morning at three o'clock when, with the bottle of alcohol tilted and the alcohol flowing down into his throbbing throat, madly quoting some arcane poetry in between, he suddenly, but quietly, slid down against the door-jamb until he was flat out across the door.

Casey and I were thereupon dispatched to find a taxi in the dangerous Germiston location streets. After a great deal of fruitless search we found one and brought it back to the shebeen with us where Can was still lying splendidly across the door.

At the time I had very little knowledge of Can's behaviour when drunk. Five of us were to carry him out to the waiting cab; when we reached the taxi I was then urged to hold Can by the legs and shove him inside since he was too tall to get into the back and his knees would not bend. I had just taken hold Can's legs when he flexed the knees, brought back his legs and kicked out like a wild horse trying to break loose from its fetters. To the delight of everyone I was knocked out flat on my back. Much later I was to learn that in Johannesburg parties *tsotsi* were in the habit of removing shoes from the feet of any of the guests who seemed to have been rendered helpless by drink. Apparently it was Can's pride that however drunk he was no one was ever able to remove his shoes.

By the end of the fifties DRUM and POST had become so widely accepted as the most authoritative newspapers on the life of black South Africans that visiting writers and journalists would almost inevitably call at the DRUM offices on their way across the country. On such days the editors would arrange for a sandwich lunch during

which the staff writers and the distinguished visitors would have a hearty exchange. Visitors included famous authors, foreign legislators, businessmen and peripatetic scholars. Some of these callers wished to be taken into the heavily patrolled African townships without the knowledge of the authorities, thus dispensing with the need to acquire permits and official guides.

One such visitor was the poet, the late Louis Macneice, who had come to Johannesburg to give a series of lectures at the University of Witwatersrand. Frances Suzman and Margot Schwatzman, two white students with whom Nat Nakasa and I were very friendly, wished to drive Louis Macneice into the African townships in order to show him where and how Africans lived; and they wanted us to come along as guides.

By this time we were so accustomed to chaperoning visitors around the townships that we knew exactly where to take them, through which appalling slums to drive, in order to wring the last drop of pity out of them – in case they should ever want to write about apartheid on their return to their home countries.

Louis Macneice, however, proved the most disconcerting visitor we had ever had the opportunity of exposing to the running sores of the township life. In the first place he was discouragingly quiet, totally uncommunicative; nor did he seem to notice the horrible hovels we were so busy indicating to him. His eyes were blurred, he seemed to stare without seeing, and his long face settled into a comfortable mask in which nothing could be read. Finally we abandoned all effort to rouse his moral indignation and instead enjoyed the drive.

On our way back to the city it so happened that we passed Sophiatown. Almost out of reflex we enquired from Louis Macneice and the girls whether they would not like to stop at a shebeen for a 'quickie'. It struck me then that the South African word 'shebeen' is Irish in origin. I cannot say definitely whether this was the reason Louis Macneice suddenly brightened up. Seemed really to come to life; anyway he proved the most enthusiastic supporter of the idea.

After a brief reconnaissance for the ubiquitous police we jumped out of the car, hopped quickly into an alleyway, stepping gingerly over children's faeces, until we reached the small shack which served as the shebeen. In this cluttered squalor, suitably ensconced behind shuttered windows, our tongues finally loosed by alcohol, we were able, for the first time that afternoon, to reach Macneice. Talk poured forth from him; he spoke interestingly of his ideas to create a listening audience for poetry through radio which he considered a far more intimate medium than was generally supposed and felt it to have been insufficiently exploited.

In time the novelty of meeting whites on intimate terms at gay mixed parties or on the job, even having whites as lovers, wore off. Now the affairs simply became nightmares of worry and effort to have some privacy where we could meet as friends or lovers without the interference of the over-zealous police. English and European girls who had no clear conception of the legal restraints and the risk of such affairs entailed, arrived in the country, made impossible demands, assuming for the most commendable reasons that if you liked one another that was all that counted.

An English actress with whom I was having an affair at this time insisted on coming out shopping with me in the streets of Johannesburg, thereby imperiling both our lives and the precarious sanity of white South Africans. When the spirit moved her, she lost all control and linked her arm into mine. In order to see her I had to climb into her flat under the cloak of darkness, taking great care not to arouse the suspicions of the flat-dwellers who were largely reactionary working-class Boers.

The free mixing of races also began to have unforeseen consequences: the whites who had seemed too distant and with this distance to be invested with a strange mystique of fierce strength and power; lost all of I once we were going out with their daughters and listening to family secrets; to the wars they were having with mean parents with

insane parents, with defeated parents. These same whites whom we had looked upon as poised on a great height, untouchable and slightly larger than life, became suddenly embarrassingly ordinary, even hopelessly undersized. Improbably we discovered some disconcerting, if banal, truths about white South Africans: certainly a great number of them were no more intelligent, a great many were less talented, and no more deserving of the wealth and privilege they were enjoying than a vast number of the people they had deprived of them.

It became a matter of the greater surprise to us to realize that some of these people were leading appallingly empty lives even in the midst of plenty, and perhaps because of this undeserved plenty, they were desperately impoverished; their lives had reaches such a point of incoherence and fatuity that listening to their conversation was like listening to a cacophony of voices echoing other empty voices. We had thought their lives immensely beautiful, imagining them to be enriched by adequately filled libraries, to be enthused by numerous glittering concerts and plays we could not enjoy; what we had not imagined was that the majority of these people had no way of dealing with the variety of cultural events which came their way, because they had neither a tradition nor personal courage which would enable them to come to terms with the best theatre of our times. It was perfectly understandable that they should only like third-rate comedies and old-fashioned musicals rumoured to be 'the rage' in the London West Eng.

Yet they would do everything to deny us good theatre. When the cast of Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* offered to put on a show for Africans the manager of the Non-European Affairs Department would not allow the council halls under his control to be used for such a performance, and when I went to interview him for POST he gave as his reasons the scene in which the hero of the play cohabits with a young woman while his wife has gone home to her parents. Mr. W.P. Carr thought this scene would corrupt immature Africans. Most Africans I knew – perhaps half the Africans living in the urban areas,

some of them migrant labourers who were not allowed wives in the compounds – lived with unmarried women.

I think we began about this time subtly to despise white South Africans. Whereas we had feared, envied or in some cases had even hoped to achieve the same standards by which we imagined the white community to live, we now began to adopt a patronizing attitude toward the white suburb. Lower Houghton could have taught us discipline, of course, where we were profligate with our creative energies. They could have taught us restraint where we burned ourselves too fast, living mainly for the great moment of Mailer's orgasm; but I doubt if white South Africans were the right people to teach us discipline; for if the South African middle class were capable of discipline the content of the lives they led was not worthy of any discipline. If everywhere in Europe the virtues of the bourgeois life were visible, South Africa had nothing to show for it except the Johannesburg skyscrapers, the mine dumps and the Cape blue train. Considering the gratuitous wealth which had dropped like a windfall into the hands of South Africans, it would have been surprising if the country had not achieved as much.

The private lives of the whites with whom we came into contact or read about in the newspapers did not prove that white South Africans wished for lives of restraint. They were simply prisoners of a myth.

For instance, white men who voted for apartheid in public sent their wives away on holidays in order to take up with their dark vivacious maids from Sophiatown. A Boer predikant who preaches fiery apartheid sermons in the small country church on Sundays was simultaneously keeping liaison with the housemaid in the garage at precisely the same time his wife was cooking him dinner. In Cape Town a white constable arrested an innocent coloured man and woman and took them down to the beach where he told them he would set them free if they performed the sexual act while he watched. The record was bleak indeed.

In no time we learned what we had not suspected, that many white South Africans, despite their wealth and privilege, envied us the township for what they supposed to be its vivid colour, its extravagant, if precarious, life. We, on the other hand, had envied them the white suburb for what we considered its discipline and control, its sense of orderliness and thrift. This was the supremest irony of South African life. For this reason the lines of the American poet, John Peale Bishop, retain a great emotional force for me:

The ceremony must be found
That will wed Desdemona to the huge Moor.
For thought Othello had his blood from kings
His ancestry was barbarous, his ways African,
His speech uncouth. It must be remembered
That though he valued an embroidery –
Three mulberries proper on a silk like silver –
It was not for the subtlety of the stitches,
But for the magic in it. Whereas Desdemona
Once contrived to imitate in needlework
Her father's shield, and plucked it out
Three times, to begin again, each time
With diminished colours. This is a small point
But indicative.

Passion and craft, instinct for life and passion for technology, Europe and Africa; how these things would have found a perfect wedding in South Africa!

I met Rebecca West at Miss Nadine Gordimer's house one rainy evening before I left South Africa. I arrive late, somewhat drunk, but there were too many people already there, too many people having already had much too much to drink, just about ready to disperse. I had time only to accept one glass of brandy and to say a few words to Miss West; then we were outside, standing in the lawn. A soft rain was falling still, and Miss West lifted her upturned face and let the rain splash on her ecstatic features.

'How lovely, oh how lovely!' she moaned softly like someone in the agony of the most intense pleasure imaginable.

Chapter 43

Southern Africa: The Big Question Mark for the O. A. U.

by

Matthew Nkoana

This challenging statement on the question of territorial and organizational unity in Southern Africa is printed here as a contribution to a long-overdue public debate on this subject. We shall be glad to receive comments and criticism.

South Africa, where people of diverse colours live cheek by jowl is a microcosm of the whole of the Southern African region, and are in Africa where the problem of decolonization is bedeviled by the

thorny question of race. As such, it is an appropriate starting-point in an analysis of the problems of disunity that plague the liberation movement in every unliberated territory.

In the second part of this article, a proposed plan for the liberation of Southern Africa is discussed in conjunction with a programme of principles. Ere we are more concerned with the political differences that have splintered the liberation movement in South Africa, with a view to exploring all possibilities for forging unity.

However real most political differences in South Africa have been, ultimately they all boiled down to one question, the question of race. The most convulsive event to rock the liberation movement in recent years – a split in the African National Congress – had its root cause in the issue of race.

The basic question has always been that of racialism. Because the superstructure of oppression in South Africa took a racist form, the politics of South Africa became riddled with the question of race. The most destructive factor in otherwise progressive thinking was *fear* – fear that there would develop among Africans a form of racialism in reverse.

This fear persists to this day. In this respect, the best radicals among whites, as a group, have always been whites first and radicals second. For a long time they, having the means to do so, set the tone and pace of the liberation movement, and became a kind of prototype leadership, to be emulated by Africans operating through the African National Congress.

Either as liberals or communists, they were always white first, preoccupied with ways and means of safeguarding their kith and kin against the wrath of African Nationalism on the day of reckoning. This brought them into direct conflict with those Africans who believed African Nationalism was the most powerful force in the struggle for liberation.

An indication of the early stages of the conflict is contained in a 1949 declaration of the African National Congress Youth League. The following is an extract:

“. . . African Nationalism, besides being the consummation of years of spiritual development among the African people. . . is the spontaneous reaction of the African people against foreign domination; it is the uncompromising condemnation by the African people of the spiritual and political corruption of the South African Government.

“It is the legitimate demand put forward by the African people for their land. It is the Africans’ legitimate claim to every inch of land in this Continent. It is the revolt of the majority against domination by a foreign minority. It is the rise of THE GOVERNMENT (the people) against a clique of *usurpers and rebels*. It is the rallying call for the forces of liberty.

“AFRICAN NATIONALISM is the crystallization of Ntsikana’s injunction: ‘Be ye an indivisible whole’; of Chaka’s vision of a United Africa. It is the very antithesis of tribalism. . .

“AFRICAN NATIONALISM is the FAITH of the Youth League of Congress. It is the galvanizing force of Youth who as individuals hate tyranny and oppression, and as a group are pledged to fight unceasingly and relentlessly until oppression is swept off the face of the earth.

“It is only through AFRICAN NATIONALISM that the African people can be freed from the complex of inferiority which makes them accept their present humiliation with equanimity, and be given a new spirit, a new hope, a wider vision. . .”

“AFRICAN NATIONALISM is a dynamic force, because it is not a foreign importation. It has its roots deep down in the heart of *every African*. It is an insuppressible urge towards self-realization, self-determination, independence, freedom. . .”

This was to become part of the main platform of those who broke away from the ANC in 1958 and founded the Pan-Africanist Congress in 1959. The decision to take that course has been amply vindicated by events, as I shall presently show.

I shall show that they were right in assessing African Nationalism as the most powerful force in the struggle for liberation. It was not for nothing that the PAC at its emergence was lambasted not only by the undisguised White supremacists but also by those white wolves in sheep's clothing who controlled the mass media of the struggle for liberation.

The latter have not yet repented. It was because of its potency that they tar-brushed African Nationalism, calling it racialism. Now they call it Sectarianism, witness a letter in a recent issue of *Africa on the World* from the unrepentant pen of Michael Harmel.

For two decades especially (1940-1960) the issues in South Africa have been blurred, and our thinking befuddled, by extreme obsession with what may be called anti-racialism. The inability to see the issues other than through racial blinkers had spread to alarming dimensions, and still bestrides even some of our most learned rostrums.

When Franz J. T. Lee, writing elsewhere recently, says of PAC policies, "All this sounds very good – but one should just avoid speaking about the 'Class Struggle,' then you have full support in the 'racial struggle'," he is merely echoing the words of white multi-racialists who had better reason than himself to *fear* African Nationalism.

But the damage to the liberation struggle is even greater because, not knowing what he is talking about, Lee would have the less informed world public believe in the fallacy that there is such a thing as "black racialism" among the oppressed of South Africa.

But the damage to the liberation struggle is even greater because, not knowing what he is talking about, Lee would have the less informed world public believe in the fallacy that there is such a thing as “black racialism” among the oppressed of South Africa.

A major offensive against African Nationalists was launched in 1955 through the ANC-led Congress Alliance (now almost completely disintegrated), which adopted a “Freedom Charter” unleashing the anti-revolutionary creed of multi-racialism.

In its preamble the charter counter blasted the slogan “Africa for the Africans” by formulating a new slogan, “South African belongs to all who live in it”, that is, the dispossessed and their dispossessors.

The charter advocated a policy which, while not expressly envisaging the balkanization of the country on national or racial lines, yet closely approximated Dr. Verwoerd’s plan for the separate development of the races.

This policy, pandering to racial bigotry, envisaged the development of different cultures in the same country, with equal rights for “all national groups or races to use their own languages, and to develop their own folk culture and customs.” On political arrangements it said:

“There shall be equal status in the bodies of state, in the courts and in the schools for all national groups and races. All national groups shall be protected by law against insults to their race and national pride.” This was also how the Congress Alliance was organized, and with equal representation at high level for political parties based on racial lines, and irrespective of the size of the racial group which each party represented in the predominantly African population.

Multi-racialism became a buffer between the apartheid regime and the dynamic force of African Nationalism, which the multi-racialists dubbed as black racialism. And so for a long time the struggle for liberation in South Africa was retarded, diverted and blockaded.

It must be said for them that they hated the Verwoerd regime. But this was mainly because they feared it intransigence would lead to a revolution and so to what they described as “black intransigence equally demented.” Thus the white and black leadership of the Congress Alliance expended their energies in futile attempts to stem the tide of African Nationalism.

To this end, in 1958 they attempted to stage nation-wide demonstrations at the time of White-only elections, with the avowed aim of influencing the White electorate to remove Verwoerd’s Nationalist Party and put in its place the equally reactionary United Party, which is only the other side of the same coin.

Because in many fields they rightly exposed the evils of apartheid through the newspapers they controlled, they won just enough confidence among the people to ensure the success of their policy of containment on the liberation front.

This policy was successful until the breakaway of the PAC in 1959 to usher in the post-Sharpeville era of militant positive action. But old habits and traditions die hard. Attitudes formed during the long period of containment persist to this day among many former leaders of the Congress Alliance, inside and outside the ANC.

The fashion is to take up an attitude against the evil of racialism because it makes one appear progressive and superior to others. All attitudes, as such, are blind things, unthinking. They are a poor substitute for ideas and well-thought-out views.

Reaction to the racialism of the whites because obsessive anti-racialism among our would-be liberators, who totally failed to give the people a sense of purpose and direction in the struggle for liberation. Failing to see the real issues involved, they saw the South African problem purely in terms of race and, encouraged by their white mentors, concluded that since there were white racialists, there must necessarily also be black racialists – rather like the German

professor who, on seeing a bicycle for the first time, is reputed to have demonstrated conclusively that it could not be ridden – for the simple reason that if you did not fall off to the right, you must necessarily fall off to the left.

Thus in a concerted, continuous anti-racialist campaign, the Africans, the dispossessed people of Southern Africa, were exhorted virtually to forgive their dispossessioners, and never to show racial animosity. Of course, it was merely the animosity which anybody robbed of his land would show against the robber, whether the latter was white, black or yellow, or – indeed – of the same colour or race.

The point I want to make here is that racialism is not the real problem in South Africa. This point has to be made sharply. But as we have to bring it out clearly, we will now go straight on to the historical background.

During the first contacts between the African people and white settlers in South Africa, there was a lot of mixing between the races, and inter-marriages were common, in spite of a wide gap between their cultural backgrounds. But the settlers, who brought along with them knowledge of commerce and diversified economic organization, started off at a great advantage over the simple mode of life of the indigenous people, who were mainly pastoralists.

It was only natural that the settlers, who came from a survival-of-the-fittest type of civilization, sooner or later took advantage of their position. Once they had thus turned the indigenous people into an economic asset as a source of cheap labour, the latter's freedom had to be curtailed to ensure continuity. Since one does not in this way interfere with the lives of one's equals, those thus treated must be looked upon as of a different order in society. And so certain relationships developed between the settlers and the indigenous people as befit relations between the settlers and the indigenous people as befit relations between, at first, master and serf, then master and slave and finally master and servant.

De Kiewiet, in *A History of South Africa*, says: "From the very beginning there was woven the double strand of South African history: The servile worker and the free colonist, cheap and land. These combined to create the habits and institutions of South African society. The white settlers began to look upon labour as the function of a servile race, and became a privileged caste depending upon an excessive number of slaves and servants whose labour was wastefully employed."

When slavery was outlawed, it became necessary to develop new techniques for the purpose of attaining the same ends: the amassing of wealth by the few which entails the degradation of the many. In South Africa we have a classic example of how these techniques have been perfected. We have there a refined system of slavery in a modern cast. No longer are men seized and sold as a straightforward commercial deal, but they are still seized and compelled to sell their labour at any price that the buyer chooses. The two different worlds still exist: the one a world of privilege and plenty, created and maintained through the iron fist of tyranny; the other a world of misery and grinding poverty, of apartheid restrictions and humiliations.

The "habits and institutions" are today what they were then. These habits and institutions are racist in orientation, but racism is the effect rather than the cause of a system of crass economic exploitation.

This is not to underrate the scourge that is racism in South Africa. It is a terrible mental disease once it takes hold of the victim, but it is not in the blood; it is not congenital. True, there are many – tragically to many – among white South Africans in whom racism has become a kind of second nature. But this is not a natural phenomenon. It is fostered and nurtured in the European homes and schools, and in public life. The books the children read are littered with the grand myth of the black man's inferiority. But it remains an artificial growth; so artificial, indeed, that it has become necessary to enact legislation to bolster it up and patch yawning cracks in the

racialist wall. Thus we have laws preventing inter-marriage between the races, banning multi-racial worship or social mixing in entertainment, sports and other vulnerable spheres. Without this elaborate intervention from the cradle to the grave, those Whites who do not know which side their bread is buttered might multiply enough to disturb the structure of White supremacy and so bring about the end of economic privilege.

It must be clear now that racialism is not the real problem, not the root of all evil in our land. There is a song that knows what the root of all evil in our land, as in other lands, is!

Having made this and other studies of the South African situation, the Pan-Africanist Congress at its inception in 1959 laid down a grand strategy and combat policies which insisted that the utmost pressure for change could only come from the most underprivileged section of the community, the Africans.

In an article published in that year, the PAC President, Mangaliso Robert Sobukwe pronounced its position as follows: "It is our contention that the vast illiterate and semi-illiterate masses of the Africans are the cornerstone, the key and very life of the struggle for democracy. From this we draw the logical conclusion that the rousing and consolidation of the masses is the primary task of liberation. . . . We have made our stand clear on this point. Our contention is that the Africans are the only people who, because of their material position, can be interested in the complete overhaul of the present structure of society. We have admitted that there are Europeans who are intellectual converts to the African's cause, but because they benefit materially from the present set-up, they cannot completely identify themselves with the cause. . ."

The foregoing is the very genesis of Socialist analysis, and cannot be substituted by mere talk of "class struggle." Even those to whom this approach is incomprehensible, concede its success, as does Lee in writing about "full support in the 'racial struggle'." It was conceded even by the South African Institute of Race Relations, a multi-racialist

research organization dominated by whites and enjoying membership of some of the prominent leaders of the African National Congress, such as Chief Albert Luthuli, who was one of the Institute's Vice-Presidents. The Institute carried out the only research work every done in South Africa into the relative influence and prestige of political parties in that country, with the help of the University of the Witwatersrand.

The PAC was barely three years when this work was done, yet this scientific analysis brought it out by as far the most popular political organization in the country.

In a fact-paper *African Attitudes* published by the Institute in 1963 the levels of popularity were determined on a numerical scale and the percentages given as follows:--

PARTY	%FOR	%AGAINST	%UNDECIDED
PAC	57	29	14
ANC	39	41	20
Liberal Party	31	47	22
Progressive Party	30	43	47
COD	18	12	40
UP	10	75	15

There are two other political groupings: The South African Coloured People's Congress, a mass movement for the country's 1 million people of mixed white and black stock, and the Non-European Unity Movement, for many years no more than a study group of intellectuals.

The CPC has been associated in a Congress Alliance with the ANC. Recently, however, a big split between ANC and CPC leaders abroad, the result of a few years of smoldering friction, ushered in a new process of political alignment in South Africa.

The CPC had for years sought to merge into the ANC, which preferred a multi-racial (indeed racialist) confederation.

The Non-European Unity Movement (a regrettably negative name), led by Isaac B. Tabata, sprang from an *ad hoc* body, the All-African Convention.

Its policy of non-collaboration is probably the most significant contribution to South African political theory to have come from the AAC complex of sects, measured purely in terms of theory as distinct from practice. For just on 30 years this group has done little other than theorizing, content with the armchair criticism of the actions of others. They have been waiting. . . waiting – for the people to be *educated*.

APDUSA represents an effort to transform the study group into a mass organization. Its overt political activity has so far been virtually

nil, and what impact it may have made on the South African situation, if any, has been undetectable.

In the quest for unity, one would like to see greater honesty of purpose among those who would liberate us. It is disconcerting that some among this group continue to do abroad what long ago became discredited in South Africa: to take a stance that depicts everybody as wrong except themselves.

Tabata must call a halt to this. There is room for honest disagreement, but it is equally the duty of honest men to admit their own failures and weaknesses. If they do not hold the mass of the people in contempt, as I suspect some of these people do, then they have got to accept the verdict of the oppressed multitudes as determined in the meteoric rise of the PAC. The theoretical suppositions of those who founded the PAC have been tested in action and found to be more than a match for anything so far known in South Africa.

As far as other oppressed groups are concerned, I have no doubt that the upsurge of enthusiasm which could be touched off by the developments purviewed in the programme outlined in the next pages, would rouse the toiling masses of Indian origin in the sugar plantations of Natal and elsewhere. They have already thrown up some up-and-coming leaders of caliber in the non-racialist tradition, such as Ahmed Gora Ebrahim, the PAC Representative in Cairo.

By and large, the plantation workers have yet to break with a past of political lethargy. Through minimal working-class consciousness and solidarity with the black African workers they could be an asset to the liberation struggle as a part and parcel of the oppressed nation. Their leaders have a tremendous responsibility to reshape their habits and thinking along non-racial lines. As long ago as 1959, in his PAC inaugural address, Sobukwe extended the hand of unity to these oppressed Indian masses: He referred to South African people of Indian origin and said:

“This group came to this country not as imperialist or colonialists, but as indentured labourers. In the South African set-up of today, this group, the merchant class in particular, who have become tainted with the virus of cultural supremacy and national arrogance. This class identifies itself by and large with the oppressor but, significantly, this is the group which provides the political leadership of the Indian people in South Africa.

“And all that the politics of this class have meant up to now is preservation and defence of the sectional interests of the Indian merchant class. The down-trodden, poor ‘stinking coolies (so-called) of Natal who, alone, as the result of the pressure of material conditions, can identify themselves with the indigenous African majority in the struggle to overthrow White supremacy, have not yet produced their leadership. We hope they will do so soon.”

What is there to quarrel with in the proposition that we are oppressed not only as workers and peasants but as a nation? When we look for differences to find targets for attack, we can almost always find them. An example is the criticism that the PAC and the ANC have neglected the peasants. This talk of “peasants” betrays political ignorance at best or, worse still, political dishonesty. The concept of a peasantry is, in fact, a misconception. It shows how hopelessly one can get entangled in one’s own tracks through uncritical importation. In South Africa or anywhere else in Southern Africa we don’t have concentrations of feudal lords in homogeneous communities with a conflict of interests requiring special efforts to cultivate peasant class consciousness. The issues are clear-cut:

Here we have the total subjugation of a whole people, certainly for economic reasons, on a basis of racial stratification; a clear line of demarcation between the dispossessed and their dispossessors. The chiefs in the reserves cannot by any stretch of the imagination be regarded as the equivalent of feudal lords, nor as an oppressor class themselves. They are merely the tools of oppression, the instruments through which the machinery of oppression is kept in motion. The rest of the oppressed are workers on farms or in the cities. Even the

so-called middle class, a tiny fraction of the population, chafes under a host of restrictions and apartheid humiliations. The land question is one of the main platforms of the PAC, not so much in its agrarian as in its nationalist sense, and features importantly in the party's slogans, such as "*Izwe lethu*" (the land is ours). Most of the more than 50 members of the PAC who have been hanged for political offenses were men from the countryside who were prepared to lay down their lives in battle for their fatherland. Far from neglecting the "peasants", the PAC is *the* organization of the masses.

Ours is not to make antagonistic the latent contradictions among the oppressed but to reach the people, one and all, with a powerful gospel of liberation. Yes, reach them in the churches, the schools, in the farm and mine compounds, in the factories and backyards, in the locations and the villages. Those who persist in being willing agents and tools of the oppressors will meet their deserved fate in the course of struggle, but as the heat mounts, many will mend their ways and become an asset to the cause of liberation.

This is the message of National Liberation.

The deserters from among the oppressors have a role to play. But they must not be allowed to have a commanding influence in the struggle. Experience has showed that, in South Africa at any rate, such influence can only be divisive, at best. It has showed how they can impede the struggle, consciously, or unconsciously, because of incapacity for total commitment. We have seen how, through their control of the mass media of the struggle for liberation, they dictated the pace and gave a colouring to the struggle and an atmosphere in which many patriots were suffocated. But there are vital fields in which they can be useful.

A realistic plan for the liberation of Southern Africa rests on four pillars:

- (a) The whole of Southern Africa should be regarded as a single unit for political and military purposes in the present phase of the struggle for liberation.
- (b) Recognition of the necessity of an inter-territorial strategy with or without a completely unified liberation movement, but certainly cohesion and coordinated action.
- (c) The setting-up as soon as possible of a supreme political authority to coordinate the activities of the liberation movements in the various territories, with the possibility that this may evolve into an inter-territorial Government-in-Exile.
- (d) A crash programme for training guerillas from Southern Africa and volunteers from the rest of Africa and elsewhere, with the possibility that this may evolve into an inter-territorial army of liberation under a joint high command.

The area under focus includes Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa, Rhodesia, the British High Commission Territories of Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland, and South Africa.

Certain basic assumptions underlie the plan outlined above, which is presented here as a possible basis for discussion.

First, it is assumed that once given an acceptable programme of principles, leaders in each territory will be big enough to subordinate their other and less important differences to the impelling cause of liberation.

They should be politically mature enough to banish any bitterness that may have arisen from their past squabbles, and to lift the whole question of liberation out of the mire of personality feuds.

One also assumes that even if the rest of Africa is united on nothing else, she can speak with one voice and act corporately in her abhorrence of the continued subjugation and oppression of millions of her fellows in Southern Africa, and so the better pool her resources to more effectively help the liberation movements in their new and more effectively organized formation.

This development should have an immediate impact on the rest of the world, making it possible for people of goodwill everywhere to give material and financial aid where they can see something tangible being done.

A corresponding effect will be a weakening of White supremacist resistance to change and a whipping up of morale and enthusiasm among the people of the unliberated territories.

If our reading of history is correct, inter-territorial unity for Southern Africa, even if only for the purpose of victory, is realizable, given the right leadership. For here are to be found all the dynamics that go to mould diverse people into single nations, great and small.

Nations have been moulded out of small communities which merged in the crucible of struggle for survival against common threats to their lives and well-being. These external forces may be in the form of invasion on common frontiers, economic pressures or other dangers which could not be resisted effectively by the small communities in isolation from one another.

On the surface, the position in Southern Africa appears to be different from that in the historical outline given above, for in each of these territories the enemy is within. But, fundamentally, the region is up against the same pressures, and the struggle for survival is just as crucial as those known to history.

Local conditions may differ from territory to territory, so that tactics would have to be varied in respect of each area. But it is of the greatest importance that we grasp the essence of the common character of the problems facing us.

If for no other reason, it is sufficient that Verwoerd, Smith and Salazar are thinking and planning corporately, that we should think and plan inter-territorially. It is a practical necessity that must be

faced, a challenge to us to de-colonize ourselves mentally. Basic to such a strategy is the concept of pan-Africanism.

It has become increasingly clear that the Labor Government in Britain is either unwilling or incapable (probably both) to do anything to influence the course of events in Rhodesia. It has made it clear that it will not intervene militarily in that country in the event of a unilateral declaration of independence by Smith's White minority government.

Thus the threat by the British Government to impose economic sanction on Rhodesia in the event of UDI is exposed as a manifest humbug. For such action, to be effective, would involve a naval blockade which can only be enforced by military action.

Whatever false hopes may have existed that Britain would deliver freedom on a platter in Rhodesia have now faded. The same shock awaits those who pin hopes on the International Court of Justice in respect of South West Africa. For whatever the outcome of this case it is unthinkable that a just settlement can be negotiated.

The situation in Angola and Mozambique is long past the stage where it was possible to indulge in debates as to whether a peaceful solution could be found. In different degrees, a violent struggle is now going on in both Angola and Mozambique. But there have been such serious set-backs there, especially in Angola, that there is a clear case for new blood to be injected into the liberation forces.

A hard struggle must be expected in all the unliberated territories. These include Basutoland, Bechaunaland and Swaziland which, in spite of the formal trappings of Independence soon to be granted, are too economically dependent on and intertwined with South Africa to be anything other than the worst type of client states.

Some who have expressed views on the question of unity in each of these territories have rightly emphasized the cardinal point that unity must be based on an acceptable programme of principles. Men who will change society must change it for the better, and they can do so

only within the framework of a set of ideals which guide their actions.

In *A History of Political Theory*, Prof George H. Sabine (Cornell University) deals in the preface with “the hypothesis that theories of politics are themselves a part of politics,” and continues:

“In other words, they (the theories) do not refer to external reality but are produced as a normal part of the social *milieu* in reality but are produced as a normal part of the social *milieu* in which politics itself has its being. Reflection upon the ends of political action, upon the means of achieving them, upon the possibilities and necessities of political situations, and upon the obligations that political purposes impose is an intrinsic element of the whole political process. . . .”

A notable feature in the thinking of would-be political pundits in South Africa is the emphasis they place on the development of working-class consciousness and peasant awareness, in their assessment of “the possibilities and necessities” of the struggle for liberation in that country.

That is, of course, a complete lift from Marx’s Europe. “Lifts” are not bad in themselves, depending on the situation to which they are to be applied, and certainly there are elements in the Southern African situation which call for working-class consciousness and peasant awareness. But this is only half the answer.

There is an obvious defect in this particular lift which make one suspect that the revolutionary slogans of Marx’s Europe are mouthed not so much because of a mistaken faith in their complete effectiveness in our situation, as merely because it is fashionable to do so.

Whereas Marx thought in terms of the whole of Europe and its American extension in his concept of working-class solidarity, my contemporaries think in terms of South Africa south of the Limpopo. They think of Angola, Mozambique, South West Africa, etc., as

separate entities, much in the same way as did the Colonialists who partitioned these areas.

Through *The Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx and Frederick Engels launched what was the most effective movement for social change in the context of the social conditions prevailing in Europe at the time. Its effectiveness is not to be judged in terms of revolutions, of which there have been few and far between, but by the concessions which have been made to workers in every European country with a strong socialist movement.

It was not merely because they had recently discovered the theory of economic determinism (the 19th century's most important addition to political theory), but mainly because the rousing of the working class and peasantry who constituted the vast majority was most appropriate to the ethos of the homogeneous societies in which these men put their theories into operation.

Economic determinism notwithstanding, it is a safe bet that the authors of the Communist Manifesto would have found other means more appropriate and effective for rousing a people against invasion by another nation, even if the invasion was for economic reasons. They would have appealed to a people's patriotism rather than rely solely on working-class consciousness and peasant awareness.

The social condition of Southern Africa is the condition of a land under foreign occupation, the condition of territorial dispossession and subjugation, known as White or foreign domination.

This reality of White domination is embedded in the consciousness of the African people, and it does not require the tongue of an agitator or the pen of a writer-historian to make them alive to the phenomenon.

They are alive to it because everywhere in the entire region they have fought against the invaders, and have since been continuously oppressed by them. If only for consolation from the grim

circumstance of their defeat and subjugation, they retell with relish tales of battles long past, tales which have become part of the region's folklore.

There is a proud history of struggle in defense of the fatherland. They have wistful memories both of valor in battle and the good things of life which they fought to maintain: a social order in which man was in truth his brother's keeper, which knew not of want – free of the exploitation of man by man.

Accentuated by today's circumstances of oppression, the past projects itself into – and lives on in – the people's consciousness like a lost paradise. From Cape to Luanda, they share a common historical experience as a dispossessed people, handing down from generation to generation an acute sense of grievance.

Those are the things, in addition to our circumstance as a despised race, which combine to make the ethos of Southern Africa, a region virtually under siege.

It is extremely important that we do not get mixed up in a maze of political theories which, no matter how attractive and intellectually satisfying on paper, may not be exactly relevant to our own conditions. There must be a thorough understanding of our situations, and the solutions we work out must flow from the logic of that situation.

The first thing to grasp is that the intrinsic element in our situation is national oppression. By way of illustration, we may point out that our labour conditions are more those of slaves than of workers, and that those who work do so just to live rather than to live well.

Those who do not work are confined under irksome regulations to labour reserves to breed more labourers for the mines and the farms, or are herded into the prisons from which they can be distributed as convict labour. The condition of all is the condition of chattel slaves,

made possible through political subjugation. But a little more background is necessary here.

As already pointed out, political action has to be guided by a set of ideals (or ideology), the formulation of which is in turn determined by the prevailing social conditions. No ideology develops in a vacuum, but evolves in a particular social milieu.

Sometimes an ideology develops into an identifiable pattern without the conscious aid or intervention of man, and manifests itself in the unwritten laws, the norms, superstitions and taboos of a society.

At other times it is aided into taking shape and form by the intervention of the articulate or wise members of the society who (and this is as true of medieval societies everywhere as it is of Africa's tribal form of society) become the conscious interpreters of law and custom.

In either case, however, it owes its existence in whatever shape or form to the concrete conditions obtaining in a given society. This is as true of the old as of the modern society in which law-making and the regulation of men's lives has become a specialized undertaking.

Whether by revolution or evolution, transformation of a society has its base, its roots, in the old order. It is in the old order that the social forces necessary for change build up. It is there that the motive force is to be found, and such a motive force is neither importable or exportable.

In our case, thanks to our isolation of ages, uncorrupted as a society by the evil influences of feudalist and capitalist Europe, the prevailing social ethic remains that which characterized all primaeval societies, a philosophy by which men live and let live..

The European survival-of-the-fittest type of civilization is alien to our society, an affront to the African character which retains the attribute of *humaneness* from humanity's past, untouched and unspoilt by the

ravages of the age of feudalism and the upheavals of the Industrial Revolution.

It is at this point that the conscious ideology of liberation begins. It has to take into account our history and traditions, in order to interpret correctly the deepest aspirations of our people, and to speak their language.

“The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles,” says the *Communist Manifesto*. However, in the intervening period since its first publication in 1848, Engels gained enough knowledge to make a correction of this assertion in his Note to the 1888 English edition.

Not all the history of *all hitherto existing society was the history of class struggles*, Engels had learnt. It was a grudging correction, but an important correction at the same time. The history referred to in the Manifesto was, according to the correction, *all written history*.

With reference to the later works of others, Engels goes on to show that, for instance, common ownership of land existed in Russia and was “the social foundation from which all Teutonic races started in history,” and that this was the case with the primitive form of society everywhere from India to Ireland.”

Conceding the existence of “the inner organization of this primitive communistic society,” he then observes: “With the dissolution of these primaeval communities, society begins to be differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes.”

The 1959 *Pan-Africanist Manifesto*, one of the basic documents of the Pan-Africanist Congress of South Africa, postulates:

“Man moves and as his being in a social environment. In the absence of social life the social question would fall away Man’s relation to his fellow man is determined by his primary needs The social question,

whose structural foundations are found in economic determinism, arises within the framework of social relations.

Man is, therefore, a social being and not an economic animal. To live in harmony with his fellow man, man must recognize the primacy of the material and spiritual interests of his fellow man, and must eliminate the tendency on his part to uphold his own interests at the expense of those of his fellow man.

“It is only within such a set-up that the human personality can be developed and that respect for it can be fostered.”

The stage at which society begins to be “differentiated into separate and finally antagonistic classes” has not been reached in Southern Africa. What there is of it is foreign to all the indigenous societies, super-imposed by foreign elements. By all accounts, and from all points of view relating to things material and things spiritual, European occupation of the region constitutes aggression.

The advent of European imperialism and colonialism to Africa brought in its wake the phenomenon of white domination, whether visible or invisible, which is characterized by the political oppression, economic exploitation and social degradation of the indigenous African masses,” declares the Pan-Africanist Manifesto.

Throughout this historical epoch, the age of white domination, whenever the spokesmen or representatives of white domination have sprouted a conscience, they have referred to the phenomenon as the ‘spread of Western civilisation’ or ‘the extension of Christian trusteeship.

“The undisguised truth is that White domination has grounded down the status of man and stunted the normal growth of the human personality on a scale unprecedented in history. White domination was established by the sword and is maintained by the sword.”

Having thus become conscious of the historical position we occupy, we have won half the battle. In Rhodesia ZAPU puts out the slogan, "*Ilizwe ngelethu*," whose abbreviated form is the PAC cry in South Africa, "*Izwe lethu*." It means "the land is ours." And that is that.

It is the spiritual elevation of an oppressed people, a yearning to re-assert their human dignity. African Nationalism is the most powerful social force that can be harnessed for revolutionary change in Southern Africa, the overthrow of foreign domination.

The consciousness of Southern Africa's working class is the consciousness of an oppressed nation in revolt. Their language is the language of African Nationalism. Alongside the revolutionary slogans of Marx's Europe are the war cries and ululating of Shaka's or Lbengla's kingdom. The one complements the other.

From the foregoing pages the future – the post-independence era – emerges clearly. All modern movements for national liberation contain within them the stuff that makes a Socialist Revolution, and this one is no exception. But there must be a clear direction, which is all the more necessary because of the confusion that has come to be associated with Socialist thinking in Africa.

Once upon a time the term "African Socialism" was perfectly respectable, and rightly so. For it denoted nothing more – or less – than an approach to socialist development in Africa dictated by conditions in industrially backward societies. Then it was presumed that the African road was to lead to complete socialization.

Since then, however, some misconceptions have appeared on the scene under the general label of African Socialism. Perhaps the worst feature of this incidence is the substitution of an over-paid indigenous bureaucracy for the expatriates of Colonial days I fervently hope that this is no more than a passing phase.

No one should quarrel with an industrially backward country which, to stimulate industrial development, was compelled to encourage

private enterprise in a mixed economy. In the nature of things, most African countries have no alternative but to follow this road. But it is quite a different matter to set it up as the ultimate in socialism, African or otherwise.

This has understandably – though not rightly – provoked condemnation of the very concept of African Socialism. There can be nothing but sympathy with the new rulers of Africa if it is appreciated that their economies are almost inextricably interlocked with those of their former masters in a network of international finance capital. Under the circumstances it would be imprudent for those who aim at ultimate socialism to announce their intentions and thereby scare away the capital needed for industrial development.

Socialists rightly point out that socialism is a science with universal application. The fundamental principles of Socialist theory cannot be bent at will to conform to a variety of temperatures.

However, like all good science, Socialism must thrive and expand through experimentation. No one would deny that agricultural science, for instance, is of universal application. But everyone knows that, to risk a confused metaphor, not all plants that flourish in Europe do necessarily thrive in the African climate!

To understand that is not to deny the universality of Socialist principles, but rather to recognize that in every other country there may exist different concrete conditions of which good Socialists will take cognizance in laying out the basis for socialist development.

Socialism – defined as “A society based on the common ownership of the means of production, distribution and exchange in which the nation’s resources are planned to meet the ever-rising material and cultural needs of the people” – is by definition essentially an economic system.

As Kwame Nkrumah puts it, “the duty of Africa is to embrace these universal principles of socialism while giving the institutional forms that take into account our African background and heritage.”

In the creation and evolution of these institutional forms, which embody our political arrangements, cultural foundations and spiritual values, I am all for drawing heavily on our background and heritage, without necessarily shunning anything that is non-African merely for the sake of being different

The philosophy of Africanism, which first found articulation in South Africa in the '40's, seeks to fortify and improve upon the virtues of Africa's traditional way of life and fit it into modern social organization. It is a new branch of philosophical thought embedded in humanism.

It covers a whole range of political, economic, cultural and racial questions, and its outstanding expression is the 1959 Pan-Africanist Manifesto. It is to most post-Marx European Socialist theory and practice what Panaetius's philosophy was to Roman Stoicism. Jacques Denis captures the influence left by Panaetius on the roman Stoices in the following passage:

“The unity of the human race, the equality of man and therefore justice in the state, the equal worth of men and women. . .benevolence, love. . .tolerance and charity toward our fellows, humanist in all cases, even in the terrible necessity of punishing criminals with death. . .”

Thus Africanism places emphasis on the spiritual as much as it does on the material needs of man. This is in keeping with the African traditional way of life. Africa retains the characteristics of what cynics call the noble savage: man in a near-state of nature.

What Europe lost through the cold-bloodedness of feudalism and the Capitalist system African retains, if not in the structure, at least in the spirit of Communalism.

In this Africanism fulfills the void which was so keenly felt by Engels at the turn of the last century when he wrote as follows to J. Block (22nd September, 1890):

“According to the materialist conception of history, the *ultimately* determining element in history is the production and reproduction of real life. More than this neither Marx nor I ever asserted. Hence if somebody twists this into saying that the economic element is the *only* determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, senseless phrase. . .

“Marx and I are ourselves partly to blame for the fact that the younger people sometimes lay more stress on the economic side than is due to it. We had to emphasize the main principle vis-à-vis our adversaries, who denied it, and we had not always the time, the place or the opportunity to allow the other elements involved in the interaction to come into their rights.

“But when it was a case of presenting a section of history, that is, of a practical application, it was a different matter and there no error was possible.

“Unfortunately, however, it happens only too often that people think they have fully understood a new theory and can apply it without more ado from the moment they have mastered its main principles, and even those not always correctly. And I cannot exempt many of the more recent ‘Marxists’ from this reproach, for the most amazing rubbish has been produced in this quarter, too.”

Every society develops certain spiritual values which become an integral part of its life no less than the material things that sustain life itself. *Man does not live by bread alone*, said the man from Nazareth.

But, of course, man *does* live by bread. This is truth, undeniable truth. Yet it might be expedient in certain circumstances to deny truth.

In the long run, however, a denial of truth would be deleterious to man's spiritual well-being, leading to the development of a stunted personality. Truth, justice and freedom (all of which are not material things) are but a few of man's spiritual needs necessary for the development of a healthy human personality.

Lack of bread is a physical hazard, but *fear* of the possibility of starvation is a spiritual demon, setting men against each other disturbing the peace. As social beings, men have to live together, and to do so in harmony and peace. As social beings, men have to live together and their living together in harmony and peace are for their spiritual good.

Since bread is the first essential, it becomes clear that a pre-requisite for living together is for men to evolve a morality whereby the acquisition and distribution of bread does not become a source of conflict between them. The freedom and contentment of each is the condition for a just, free society.

In summary, there are four principles on which there should be general agreement in considering the future development of Southern Africa:

1. *All the means of production, distribution and exchange must pass into the common ownership of the people. In some areas, as in South Africa, this can be achieved at once.*
The industrial backwardness of some territories may make it necessary, as in some already independent African states, to hasten slowly. But the ultimate aim must be complete socialization.
2. *There must be complete expropriation of the usurped land from Cape to Luanda, with or without compensation depending on circumstances, but always under a policy that is informed with humanism, justice and fairplay.*
3. *A new process of naturalization of foreigners who swear allegiance to the new order. Nobody with authority to do so has ever conferred African citizenship should not be by reason of birth alone.*

If the former oppressors were to acquire citizenship automatically in the New Southern Africa we would have to reckon with the danger of the existence of a vast fifth column in these territories with large concentrations of willfully unassimilable elements. This would make the function of orderly government impossible without the creation of concentration camps, a prospect that cannot be contemplated.

4. *The creation of a competent authority, in the pre-independence period, to confer citizenship on all deserters from the enemy camp, based on the principle of non-racialism. No man should be denied citizenship on the basis of race or colour alone, before or after liberation.*

Chapter 44

The Role of the Bard in a Contemporary African Community

by

Archie Mafeje

Systematic studies on the institution of bards amongst South African Bantu-speakers have been carried out by various linguists since the late twenties.⁵ The tendency in these studies has been to present the traditional African bard as a 'praise-poet' or 'poet laureate', whose special function was to praise the chief. Grant, writing in 1928, says: 'Attached to the court of the chief was an important official whose profession was the recording of the praise names, victories, and laudable characteristics of his master. These "praises" were recited on any occasion which seemed to call for public adulation of the chief, such as defeat of his enemies, the approach of distinguished visitors, the distribution of royal bounty, and so forth.'⁶ Though the term 'bard' occurs in the literature, it does not seem to have been used

⁵ See bibliography.

⁶ E.W. Grant: 'The Izibongo of the Zulu Chiefs.' *Bantu Studies*, Vol. III, No. 3, July, 1928, p. 202.

with any amount of consistency. In most cases it has been used as synonymous with 'praise-poet'. In all probability 'praise-poet' is the nearest one could get to the African term '*mbongi*' or '*mmoki*', but the translation itself is misleading in that it over-emphasizes the wrong aspect of the institution.

As Jordan has clearly pointed out, the institution of '*mbongi*' was not limited to the 'praising' or 'adulation' of the chief; it went further than that: 'But what it must not be thought that these bards were mere flatterers. While they drew attention mainly to the good and praiseworthy, they also had the license to make sharp criticism of the habits of their subjects. It is here that the bard found the greatest scope for his wit' (Jordan, 1957).⁷ He illustrates his point by quoting cases of chiefs such as Dingane, Luhadi and Ngangelizwe who were criticized for their harsh policies. In a later publication, after reiterating the point that the showering of 'flattering epithets' was not the main function of the bard, he declares: 'The "praises" of the chiefs deal *primarily* (my italics) with happenings in and around the tribe during the reign of a given chief, praising what is worthy and decrying what is unworthy, and even forecasting what is going to happen; rivalries for the chieftainship within the tribe; the ordinary social life; alliances and conflicts with neighboring tribes; military and political triumphs and reverses, etc.'⁸ He also shows how under modern conditions the original inter-tribal interest has spread out to national issues: 'This means that the vision of the tribal bards themselves was broadening, and their tribes had begun to regard themselves as units of a much bigger whole than hitherto' (Jordan, October, 1959, p. 120).

Social anthropologists, as shown by Schapera's recent publication, *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs*, do not seem to have as yet grasped fully the significance of the institution of bards both in traditional and

⁷ A.C. Jordan: 'Towards an African Literature.' *Africa South*, Vol. 2, No. 1, Oct.-Dec., 195, pp. 104-5.

⁸ A.C. Jordan: op. cit., Vol. 3, No. 2, Jan.-March, 1959, p. 74.

modern society. Schapera, agreeing with Lestrade's interpretation,⁹ says, ' . . . there are (also) in every tribe some men who specialize in composing and reciting praises of the chiefs and other notables.' He does not seem to be aware of any functional difference, except in status, between this category of poets and those individuals in society who compose 'praise poems' for themselves. Again quoting Lestrade, he declares that: Persons of but modest rank in Bantu society usually compose their own praise poems and praise poems of their cattle, while those of higher status have theirs composed by professional bards, the praise-poets and reciters. . . .'¹⁰ It seems to me that poems composed for self-entertainment, amusement, and for cattle and horses do not belong to the same class as poems composed for chiefs and notables. I would suggest that the latter category is a more serious type of undertaking and has great political significance.

Professor Schapera's own material confirms this; there is a recurrent political theme in most of the poems he discusses. It is also implied in his statement that: 'Whatever there is a mass meeting of tribesmen, for example, for the discussion of public affairs, it is still very common for someone to stand up in the crowd, before the actual business starts or after it has ended, and to recite praise poems at the top of his voice.' Elsewhere he says: 'On such occasions as the installation of a new chief, a chief's wedding-feast, or the reception of other chiefs or important visitors, several men may recite one after the other; and although few can understand all they say, they are listened to attentively and applauded with enthusiastic shouts of *pula!*'¹¹ He also tells us about how Tshekedi's severity is described in a passage that begins with an allusion to his grandfather. He concludes by saying: 'In general, we may say, the poems deal mainly with events in which the chief was personally involved, or, failing all else, with what is expected of him.'

⁹ G.P. Lestrade, a linguist, published an article entitled 'Traditional Literature' in *The Bantu-Speaking Tribes of South Africa* (ed. Schapera), George Routledge and Sons, London, 1937.

¹⁰ I. Schapera: *Praise Poems of Tswana Chiefs*. Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1965, p. 2.

¹¹ I. Schapera, op. cit., p. 6.

It then becomes apparent that it is not everybody that can stand up in important political meetings and recite verses, either for himself, the chief, or his cow. Secondly, those who do stand up cannot be described as 'not doing it merely out of patriotic enthusiasm or to establish (or sustain) a personal reputation as praise-poet (*mmoki*), but also in the hope of reward' (Schapera, p. 5). Thought there may be a desire for material gains in this type of occupation, such desires or motives are by no means the central thing. While it is true that the traditional bard, amongst other things, praises the chief and gets rewards, this does not appear to have been his major function or role. Therefore, my main objective in this paper will be to demonstrate that his role went further than just praise of the chief. The English term 'bard' has been used here to translate the Xhosa word '*mbongi*', a name that was given to a poet who frequented the chief's main residence (*komkhulu*) and traveled with him in traditional Nguni society. The reason for this is the similarity between this institution and the institution of bards and their role in certain ancient and medieval European societies.¹² Though often loosely used as synonymous with 'poet', 'bard' is a term of Celtic origin that was applied to ancient Celtic poets who had peculiar privileges and functions. The later Latin writers such as Lucan (A.D. 39-65) and Ammianus Marcellinus (A.D. 296-304) used the term '*bardi*' as the title for national poets or minstrels among the people of Gaul and Britain. In Gaul the institution seems to have disappeared early, but there is clear evidence of its continued existence in Wales, Ireland, Brittany and Northern Scotland, where Celtic people survived the Latin and Teutonic conquests.

In Wales the bards formed an organized society with hereditary rights and privileges, e.g., exemption from tax and military service. Their special duty was to celebrate the victories of their people and to sing hymns of praise. In other words, they celebrate the victories of their people and to sing hymns of praise. In other words, they gave poetic expression to the national and religious sentiments of their

¹² For details, see bibliography at the end of this article.

people. They were highly respected for this and, consequently, exercised a tremendous influence on their society. At intervals great festivals were held, at which famous bards from the various districts met and competed in poetry. Princes and nobles were the usual umpires in these competitions. In modern Wales the institution still exists in the form of Eisteddfodau, and the bard is the poet whose vocation has been recognized in these contests. In Ireland, too, bards were a distinct social category with hereditary privileges. They appear to have been divided into three types: (i) those who celebrated victories and sang hymns of praise; (ii) those who chanted the laws of the nations; and (iii) those who gave poetic genealogies and family histories. Though in Lowland Scotland it is said that 'bard' degenerated to a term of contempt and abuse, John Prebble (see Bibliography) shows clearly that in the Highlands the bard continued to be an important figure as late as the time of the Highland clearances during the 18th century. His function seems to have been to compose verses and sing them in celebration of the achievements of the chiefs and warriors; he also criticized the leaders for neglect of their duties and responsibilities (Prebble, p. 26).

I am here suggesting a similarity between the role of the Celtic bards and that of the South African bard, despite the fact that some linguists such as Jordan believe that the South African traditional bards are a *genre* 'for which no exact parallel is to be found either in classical or in modern Western poetry'.¹³ I think *institutionally* there are parallels and this can be seen from the way the South African bard arose. He was self-appointed, and his success was determined by the response of the people to what he had to say. If the people felt that what he said was representative or reflective of their interests and aspirations, then he was generally accepted as the 'national poet', *imbongi yakomkhulu* (the poet of the main residence), or, more recently, *imbongi yesizwe* (the poet of the nation). It is, therefore, apparent that the main function of the South African bard is to interpret public opinion and to organize it (once he has been firmly established), failing that, he does not achieve the status of 'national

¹³ Jordan, 1957, op. cit., p. 97.

poet'. I have heard elders in the Transkei in South Africa, impressed by the words of the bard, remark, '*Iyathetha le mbongi, madoda*' meaning 'Men, this bard is saying worthwhile things'.

The method of the South African bard, in carrying out his duties, is not unlike that of the European bards. Like them, he celebrates the victories of the nation, he sings songs of praise, chants the laws and customs of the nation, he recites the genealogies of the royal families; and, in addition, he criticizes the chiefs for perverting the laws and the customs of the nation and laments their abuse of power and neglect of their responsibilities and obligations to the people. The only important difference between the European and the South African bard is that the position of the latter, unlike that of his European counterpart, is *not* hereditary and whatever privileges¹⁴ he enjoys, in view of his services at the main residence, are not heritable. Secondly, there is no evidence that the South African bards ever organized themselves into special societies; the vocation has always been one followed by lone individuals.

In summary it may be stated that (i) both the European and the South African bards came from the commoner rank; (ii) their positions depended on their general acceptance by the people; (iii) the roles of both types are characterized by some measure of freedom to criticize, whether subtly or openly, those in authority, i.e. Kings¹⁵ and Chiefs.

¹⁴ The particular bard discussed in this paper is exempted from tribal levies and uses local buses free of charge.

¹⁵ The medieval court jester, though a step removed from the bard and an employee of the kind, also seems to have fulfilled the same function, as shown by Shakespeare:

'This fellow's wise enough to play the fool;
And, to do that well, craves a kind of wit;
He must observe their mood on whom he jests,
The quality of the persons, and the time;
And like the haggard, check at every feather
That comes before his eyes. This is a practice
As full of labour as a wise man's art'

Viola, *Twelfth Night*; Act III, Scene i.

In contemporary western societies this role seems to have been taken over by the newspaper cartoonist. The significance of all these public 'critics' (the European bard, the medieval court jester, the South African bard, and the newspaper cartoonist) is considerable, since they serve as a check against abuse of power by those in authority; they represent the opinions of the ruled.

The specific example used to illustrate the role of the South African bard in this paper is drawn from the Transkei in South Africa, where I did field work in 1963. The man whose poems are analysed is Melikhaya Mbutuma, *mbongi* to the Thembu paramount chief, Sabata Dalindyabo. He has had at least four years schooling after Standard VI and his main occupation is to accompany the chief, wherever he goes, and to recite poems at all the public meetings the chief attends. Though a literate man, Mr. Mbutuma does not write his poems on paper before he appears in public. As he explained to me, his recitation in public gatherings is spontaneous but based on pre-considered ideas which are suitable for the occasion. It is only afterwards that he writes down some of the poems for preservation or publication in the local newspapers. To a person who is not familiar with the history of the various groups in the Transkei and the current political conflict there, the meaning of some of the poems is very obscure. However, I was fortunate not only in being able to spend an appreciable amount of time going through the poems with the author himself, but also in having the opportunity of doing field work in his area. I also grew up in the same region (Thembuland). So though there may be some clumsiness and inelegance in the translation from Xhosa into English, there are not likely to be inaccuracies in the interpretation.

The sample of poems used for analysis covers the period between 1959 and 1963. This is a very important period in the history of the Transkei, as it coincides with the full implementation of the Bantu Authorities Act,¹⁶ with the first open revolt by the people against the

¹⁶ The Bantu Authorities Act, an Act passed by the South African Government in 1951, virtually gives the chiefs absolute power over the people.

chiefs, and with the first attempt to establish a Bantustan¹⁷ in the Transkei. The poems were collected from the author in written form, except some of the shorter ones which I wrote down as he recited them in public gatherings. In this article the original text of each poem is followed by a translation and a brief commentary.

SEPTEMBER, 1959

O-o-o hayi baThembu ndixoleleni,
Ndokha nditsibe bunkawu kuMphathiswa,
Inqeberu endibilili ude Wet Nel.
Ndithi kuye Aa! Zanelanga!!!
5 Nguzanelanga kumbhlaba wembla.
Phumani madoda nigcakamele;
Yombathani mzi kaNtu hlezeliyabule.
Ndive ngelizwi ndathi ixelegu alifunwa.
Aa! Zanelanga!!!

Oh! Thmebu, pardon me for a while;
I wish to fly over like a monkey to the Minister,
The Formidable Honourable Mr. de Wet Nel.
To him I wish to say, 'Hail! Bringer of barrenness!'.
5 He is a bringer of drought in a land of rain.
Come out men and watch the scorching sun;
Be careful to protect yourselves descendants of Ntu,¹⁸ lest you
get sun-burnt.
I heard a protesting voice, and I concluded that a despot is not
wanted amongst the people.
Hail! Bringer of barrenness!

This short poem recited during a visit by the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, Mr. de Wet Nel, to discuss the importance of Bantu Authorities in the Transkei, has an obvious

¹⁷ Theoretically, a Bantustan is an 'independent' state in South Africa, specially reserved for Africans only.

¹⁸ Ntu is a fictitious founder of the Xhosa-speaking peoples.

political implication that Mr. de Wet Nel, as a representative of the Nationalist Government, is not seen as a protector of the interests of the people in the Transkei, but rather as one who takes bread out of their mouths.

JULY, 1961

Le nto yobubonda bukaGcanga inzima,
Iwatsho aziziyilata amandoda, adideka.
Ndidibene nokaXundu emana embombozela.
Myekeni uMagxina kaSotyato aye eMjanyane.
5 Ndifike beyixhoma inkosi kihlathi loSampu.
Ndimxelele uMxakeki daSigdi eSentubi,
Ndimxelele uNkosi Dalasile ngokwakhe,
Ndimxelele uNkosi uMayeza ngokwakhe,
Ndathi liyoyikeka ihlathi oxhonywe kulo;
10 Kuloko inkosi yam ayothukanga lutho.

Bizani amaciko ooNdumiso bathethe,
Bizani amachule ooBungane bachethe,
Bizani iingqondi ooZwelihle balawule,
Bizani uDaliwonga anifundele.
15 Umntwan' enkosi akafundanga ufundisive.
Isijajane uhlazathi lwezixhobo zoMnqhanga,
Islosi endifike linesipha seencwadi,
Isahlwahlwane igqira lomthetho neengcinga,
UGambushe ifolosi yamaHala eluxeni.
20 Neithi ke mna umtaka Mlilo nimxhomile!

This Gcanga headmanship is pervasive;
It has made men irresolute and confused.
I met Xundu mumbling to himself.
Let Mangxina Sotayto go back to Mjanyane.
5 I found them pitting the chief¹⁹ against Sampu's fortress,²⁰

¹⁹ Refers to the then Qwati chief, a sub-chiefdom in Thembuland.

²⁰ Refers to Chief Sabata Dalindyabo, Sampu's heir.

- I communicated this to Mxakeki Sigidi at Sentubi,
 I informed Chief Dalasile in person,
 I specifically told chief Myeza too
 That a fearful dilemma faces him.
- 10 But only my chief was unconcerned.
- Invite orators like Ndumiso to come and speak,
 Invite strtegists like Bungane to come and sift,
 Invite wise men like Zwelihle²¹ to come and arbitrate,
 Call Matanzima to come and decipher for you.
- 15 He is not educated but indoctrinated –
 The greenish wiry animal of the Mnqhanghi Mountains,²²
 The dragon I found with a pile of books,
 An expert on law and speculation,
 The black and white leading ox of the Northern Hala.²³
- 20 But you have sacrificed Mlilo's son,²⁴ I still maintain!

In one of the villages in the Engcobo district in Thembuland a headmanship had fallen vacant, and two contenders for the post were a member of the Gcanga family and a member of the Xundu family. The struggle continued for over two years. Xundu was the less popular candidate and he had as one of his strongest supporters Sotyato, a mn who originally came from a different village, Mjanyane. Xundu also had a strong backing from the pro-Government chiefs, e.g. Mxakeki Sigidi and Mayeza Dalasile.

This immediately put him into disfavour with Chief Sabata (Sampu's fortress), who is generally opposed to the Government policies in the Transkei. The bard sees this local conflict as an expression of the bigger struggle between Chief Sabata and his supporters and the pro-

²¹ Zwelihle was a salutation for Chief Sabata's parallel cousin, Chief Mtikrakra, who was the second senior chief in thembuland after Sabata. He was attacked and killed by an unknown group in 1965.

²² Mountains overlooking Chief Matanzima's place.

²³ A section of the Thembu under Chief Matanzima.

²⁴ Refers to Chief Mayeza, a grandson of Mlilo.

Government chiefs under the leadership of the head of Emigrant Thembuland, Chief Kaizer Matanzima (now the Chief Minister of the Transkei). According to the bard, Chief Matanzima has been 'thoroughly indoctrinated or brain-washed'. He sees the 'pitting of Chief Mayeza (who, theoretically, is in Sabata's land) against Sabata' as an attempt to sacrifice him for Matanzima's benefit. The Qwati (a sub-chiefdom in Thembuland), who felt betrayed in this issue and many others, were not likely to attack Chief Matanzima who lives far away, but Mayeza who lives with them. This proved to be the case, for on the 8th December 1962, Mayeza was attacked and his house burnt. He narrowly escaped death, and early in 1963 he left Thembuland and went to settle in Natal.

JULY, 1962

Le nto izayo nincede niyhloniphe.
 Ukuba ayihombanga ze niyicekise.
 Nditsho kuwe ke macekis' ukunchola,
 Nto ndini emehlo aneenyembezi,
 5 Nto ndini entliziyo inesinqhala,,
 Nto ndini emzimba unamathidala,
 Nto ndini egazi linamahlwili.
 Awu! Hayi ixesha lamagwala.

Nikoyika nganina ukufa madoda
 10 Kuba intlungu niziqhelile ngesiko?
 Nioyika ngani na inyaniso
 Kuba ubuxoki bunengcikido kamva?
 Ubundekekeke notyhafo ma bukhwelele.

15 Gaqa lengonyama yakwaDalindyebo!
 Krum tshekele akusuze mna ngabakuloNibe.
 Ndixakiwe kukumtyhola uMatanzima usebungeni.
 Se ndiya kutyhola uZwelihle kaBusobengwe.
 Ndithi akuzange kwenziwe unomgogwana wesiko.

20 Uthini na wean Bangilanga, phendula?

Le nto inkosi asinko ngamali.
Ndithi mna inkosi yinkosi ngegazi.
Undikhathazile ngamasondo eengubo zikayihlo,
Ngeqhayiya lomzi kaNtu uphela.
25 Ikakade lomzi lobonakala mhla wachithwa.
Inzonzobila yesiziba yaziwa lichanti kuuphela.

Treat the coming scheme with seriousness and respect,²⁵
If it be unworthy of your dignity and respect, reject it.
I am saying this to you detester²⁶ of foul play,
To you, tearful eyes,
5 To you, bloody heart,
To you, fearful and hesitant one,
To you, whose spirit is broken.
Shame on you, you generation of cowards!

Why must you dread death?
10 Weren't you taught to bear pain with fortitude in
circumcision rites?
Why must you be afraid of dying for the truth?
Is it unknown to you that lies are followed by tribulation?
Be courageous and determined!

Lukewarmness and lack of enthusiasm must be far from
you.
15 Formidable lion of Dalindyebo's household,²⁷
Pardon me, I am not to blame but the whites.
I fear to accuse Matanzima because he is under their
protection.
I will rather accuse Zwelihle, the son of Busobengwe.
I maintain, a dummy institution is unknown to the black
nation.

²⁵ Refers to the Transkei Constitution for 'Independence'.

²⁶ Addressing himself to Chief Sabata Dalindyebo.

²⁷ Dalindyebo was Chief Sabata's grandfather.

- 20 What is your view Bangilanga?²⁸ Please answer me.
A chief is not a chief because of money;
A chief is a chief by virtue of his birth.
Your action to your father's child is upsetting.
You have wronged us about the pride of the black
nation.²⁹
- 25 Cleavages in a household are seen in times of dissensions.
The inner state of a man is known only to himself.

This poem refers to the first announcement of the South African Government's intention to create a Bantustan in the Transkei. It was already known in Thembuland that Sabata was going to be the central figure in the Bantustan drama, as he did not agree with the scheme. He was not only worried about the objective situation but also about his own personal position as the protector of his people's rights and a Government employee. It was this contradiction that made him 'fearful and hesitant'.

In the second verse the bard exhorts the people to face the battle against Bantustans with 'courage and determination'. In the third verse he indicts the South African Government and Matanzima for the worsening situation in the Transkei. He points out that modern chiefs are not chiefs by virtue of their birth but by virtue of their birth but by virtue of the salaries they draw from the South African Government. Bangilanga, who is believed to have betrayed Sabata during the banishment of his personal secretary (Nkosiyanane) and other supporters in 1959, also comes under fire. The bard sees the conflict between Sabata and his younger brother, Bangilanga, as an expression of the cleavages in the Thembu royal house.

DECEMBER, 1962

Zindiphambile izazi ngamandla oluntu,
Zinditsibile iingqondo ngolonyulo lomntu.

²⁸ Bangilanga is Chief Sabata's younger brother.

²⁹ Refers to Chief Sabata.

Fundani madoda kuyekeni ukufundiswa,
Hleze nilandele iimfundiso zolahlekiso,
5 Baqumbe ooihlo iminyanya noThixo wenu.
Zolule iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!
Yehova inceba yakho ingunaphakade.

Thandazani zizwe abantwana beenkosi balusizi,
Khe ndatyelela iintaba zoMnqhanghi ndihola.
10 Ithi iminyanya apho ayisebenzi ngexa layo.
Yayekela kooNonqhayi nooNozikhaklana.
KwaMhlobo ukulalwa kwayekwa, kulalwa indoda
Ijongile, kuse ijongile; kugadwa untwan' egazi
Kwabegazi lakowabo.
15 Zoluli iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!
Yehova inceba yakho ingunaphakade.

Andothuke nto kolwamandla ulawulo.
Andothuke lutho kubukhosi bamandla.
Kunongalakambu ndibulindele ubibi.
20 Tshotsho bantwana beenkosi nizenyelise,
Bendingasayi kusibona amndla isizwe.
Zingelosi nomoya wamazulu ndincedeni,
Yibani ngooNonqhayi nooNozikhakhana kuSabata.
Zolule iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!
25 Yehova inceba yakho ingunaphakade.

Ndibone usizi kwincopho zaMabel'entombi.
Ndifke inkokheli yomhlambi ifile;
Ndafika umhlambi ububusaza uyilata,
Ndafika umhlambi weebhokhwe.
30 Wadlonga oweegusha wabubhokhwe.
Wathi inkokeli inyuke ngokunxhama iribela,
Kanti ebutsolweni aisakuze ibuye.
Kungoku oodyaki namaxhwili banekroba.
Zolule iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!
35 Yehova inceba yakho ingunaphakade.

Phezu komthombo weNdlunkulu sisimanga.
Ndifke kuncokola iqaqa noxam.
Uthi uxam, 'Kuyolile emanzini phantsi kwelitye.'
Anth' uqaqa, 'Kuyolili phezu komhlaba elangeni.'
40 Acelana amadodana ngokuvavanya indawo,
Waph' uxam wagcakamela ilanga wonela,
Laziphosa iqaqa esizbeni kwabandayo amanzi.
Kumhla laphuma libolile umva walo.
Zolule iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!
45 Yehova inceba yakho ingunaphakade.

Thandazani zizwe musani ukutyhafa,
Zimdaka ezidulileyo zilusizi ezizayo.
Ugqwetho masiko luzal' inganga neenyembezi.
Ke thina bangoyiki kufa sithi, 'Kuf' ayayo'.
50 Niyawurexeza umthetho ngokuphikisa isizwe.
Zolule iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!

Bizan' amaxhego kubathembu asondele.
Le ngqakaqa niydyubayo asint' iqalayo.
55 Yaqalwa nguNgangelizwe noMatanzima ubuqu;
Kuloko uJoyi wayephila walamla.
Kunamhala uBangilizwe ukwelingaziwayo.
Zingwevu, bizani uBabgilizwe Joyi alamle.
Nguye onengalo yokunqwanqwada kulunge;
60 Kungenjalo lo mhlaba uya kuzala iimpethu.
Isizwe siyalila ngesenzo senu kuBangilizwe.
Zolule iingalo zakho zoxolo zikhusele!
Yehova inceba yakho ingunaphakade.

The rulers amaze in their understanding of man,
The genii have confounded me in their conception of the
sanctity of man.
Men, be critical and reject indoctrination; learn and avoid
being indoctrinated,
Lest you follow mistaken ideas and practices.

5 And, thus, invite the wrath of your fathers, your
ancestors, and your God.
Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us;
Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

Pray, oh! Ye nations! The royal scions are in misery.
Once I paid a visit to the Mnqhanggi Mountains.³⁰
10 There, the ancestors can no longer perform their duties,
For their role has been taken over by usurpers and
nonentities.
At Mhlobo's place³¹ people sleep no more; they sleep with
their eyes open.
They have to protect the chief from his own blood.
15 Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us;
Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

These things are to be expected from a coercive
Government.
They come as no surprise from a partial administration.
From a dictatorship, I expect anything.
20 It's just as well that the chiefs have discredited
themselves;
Otherwise we would never have known the potential of
the black nation.
Angels and heavenly spirits, come and be protectors to
Sabata.
Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us;
25 Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

At the top of the Mabel'entombi Mountains³² is a
calamity.

³⁰ Mountains overlooking Matanzima's main residence.

³¹ Mhlobo is Matanzima's father.

³² Mabel'entombi are the mountains leading to the Mnqhanggi Mountains from the southern side.

I found the shepherd dead, and the flock scattered all
over and wandering in all directions.
30 I noticed that the flock has been hybridized; the goats are
like sheep and the sheep are goat-like.
I was informed that the shepherd had disappeared to the
heights;
Heights from which he will never return.
Thus, the ranks of the black nation have been ripped
open.
Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us!
35 Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

At the top of the Mdlunkulu River³³ is a miracle;
There, I found a pole-cat and a leguan having a
conversation.
The leguan says, 'It is nice and cool in the water below.'
40 They continued, challenging and daring each other.
The leguan came out and basked in the sun to its
satisfaction
Behold! The pole-cat jumped into the depth of the lake.
That was the end of it, for it came out rotten and stinking.
Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us;
45 Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

Pray, oh! Ye nations! Do not be discouraged.
Terrible things have happened, but worse things are still
to happen.
Perversion of law and human liberties invariably ends in
misery and massacres.
We, who are not yet intimidated, say, 'Things could not
be worse.'
50 The rulers are running our country by violating the will
of the people.
Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us;

³³ Mdlunkulu River is a small river which runs through a noted forest in Thebuland.

Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

Send for Thembu experts on tradition and custom.

The disease you are fighting is not new to them;

55 It started from the time of Ngangelizwe and Matanzima,³⁴

Would that Joyi were still alive and could arbitrate.³⁵

Today his grandson, Bangilizwe,³⁶ is in the wilderness.

Men, call Bangilizwe back from exile so that he may
arbitrate.

He is the only one who is fitted to deal with the situation;

60 Otherwise this land will be thrown into a blood bath.

The Thembu are bitter about what happened to
Bangilizwe.

Our heavenly Father, stretch your arms and protect us;

Jehovah! Your mercy is everlasting.

December, 1962, is the time when the final discussion on the Constitution for 'independence' in the Transkei were being held. The people in the Transkei had clearly shown their opposition to the idea of Bantustans, but the Government pressed on with its scheme. The effect of this on the Transkeian population is expressed in the first two lines of the poem. The blame is again put on those who, like Matanzima, accept unquestioningly the ideas of the South African Government and follow its policies. This has caused strife and misery in the Transkei. Chiefs such as Matanzima are in difficulties and have to be protected by special body-guards, lest they be murdered by the people. The bard interprets all this as a manifestation of a coercive

³⁴ The split in the Thembu group started between 1858 and 1860, when one section under the leadership of Matanzima, Kaizer's great-grandfather, opted for independence. Leading the main section of the tribe at the time was Chief Ngangelizwe, Mtikrakra's heir.

³⁵ Joyi, who was Ngangelizwe's paternal uncle, acted as regent for the young chief. Through his diplomacy and skill, he managed to maintain the solidarity of the Thembu, which was already threatened.

³⁶ Bangilizwe, great-grandson of Joyi, was banished by the South African Government about seven years ago. In Thembuland he is believed to have taken after his great-grandfather and is accorded the same status as him.

and despotic Government, i.e. the South African Government. However, he finds some solace in the fact that the chiefs, by allying themselves from the people who, as a result, are forced to conduct their struggle independently of the chiefs.

In Matanzima's area there is greater chaos; the people have rejected Matanzima and his supporters but have been denied the right to establish a new leadership. The result is that they are scattered like sheep without a shepherd. For personal safety, men who used to be dependable politically have capitulated, i.e. they have been 'hybridized': 'the goats are like sheep and the sheep are goat-like.' In the meantime Matanzima has achieved heights, which in the end will be his downfall. Matanzima imagines that he could have the best of both worlds (black and white) like a leguan which is comfortable both in water and on land. The bard grants the fact that white South Africans, who are in a strong position at the moment, can do this successfully, but Matanzima (symbolized by the pole-cat) is deceiving himself in thinking that he could do likewise. Hence, he is being rejected as 'stinking and rotten' by the people. The result of it all is perversion of traditional laws and a threatened ruin of the whole country. According to the bard, Matanzima's political role has a long history behind it. It started when his grandfather, Matanzima, opted for independence from the senior Thembu chiefs, and migrated to Emigrant Thembuland.

FEBRUARY, 1963

Hay' ukuswela amadoda ezibulukhwani,
Hay' ukuswela amadoda ndiwafuna,
Hay' ukuzalwa wedwa unabantu,
Ha' ukuzalwa namagwala bafondini,
5 Hay' ukuzalwa nezilambi madoda.

Mntwan enkosi yomelela upilise,
Nguwe wedwa unozala wesizwe,
Nguwe wedwa owakhonjwayo esizweni,
Nguwe wedwa ukumkani wezikmkani,

10 Mtwwan' enkosi zihil' ingelosi emazuliwini.
Ivuz' imibethe yamazulu imilebe yakho,
Phila naphakade mntwan' enkosi.

Nditsho kuwe makhafula konke ngokufanayo,
Akhafula bonke bembiza ngegama,
15 Ingqungqumb' imbokotho kahili,
Ubelu olunamazinga ngokwenkonde,
Magqishela ngofele lwengwe nengonyama,
Umqingqi wamatye emkhubekisa.

Mna ndigxeka uYangi nabalandeli bakhe,
20 Nguye owawuhlula-hlulayo umzi kaThembu.
Iintaba zoNonesi zisatheth' uMtkrakra nangoku.
UMvuzo noMhlobo bayamphikisa uTshunungwa,
Angothuka uMatanzima ndikhe ndamvusa.
Ndohlukene naye ehang' umdaka kumaGcaleka,
25 Ukuz' aliwel iCacadu engasathethi.
Lisiko umphakathi ukuphagela inkosi yakhe.

Uya ndothusa umfo kaTshunungwa ngobuThembu;
Ndigqibele uNgangelizwe engabacalulanga abaThembu.
Uya ndothusa ngencasa yakhe kuRulumente.
30 Ndahlukene naye elingwa ematyaleni okungcatsha,
Ndimbona sel' emenz' ikumkani uDaliwong.
Vela nawe Z kaMatiwane umwonge uDaliwonga.
Yinkosi engaphezulu kuK.D. Matanima,
Kuloko akafundanga ufundisiwe,
35 Wada wafundiswa nokunikwa ubukumkani,
Namhla abaThembu bazishwayimbana,
Bayayishwabulela imfundo nabafundi bayo
Ilisikizi, kubantwana beenkosi inengqalekiso.
Kungoku iyabaphanzisa ibahluth' ubukhosi.

40 Uxolo mntwan' enkosi mbokoto kaTato.
Umtaka Mhlobo kun pha akanasizathu.
Ndityhol' iziphatha-mandla ngengxowa ukuba nzima,

- Ke thina zilambi siyakwazi ukulukuhleka;
Ikanti iintsana zethu sizlibele ngasemva.
- 45 Andingxeki umfo kaTshunungwa iphango linzima.
Ndifike ixhama lithengisa ngabantwant kudyakalashi.
Mna ngokwam iinkosi zine, eRhode,
Zimilile zinobukhosi obunengcambu;
Bukhosi bamaNdungwane bukuNdarala,
- 50 Kukhosi bamaGeina buphoswe kuGecelo,
Bukhosi bamaJumba bukuMgudlwa,
Bukhosi bamaHala ndibuphosa kuMatanzima.
- Nanzo ke inkosi zam ngokuzazi kwam.
Ziyinikile imbeko kuMatanzima kub' engowegazi,
- 55 Nje ngoZwelihle kumaQwati namaJumba.
Ngubanina owazidibanisayo wazinika uMatanzima?
Ndiphenduleni baThembu, ngaba nini na?
Ndiphendule kumkani ndim obuzayo.
Ngubani wenza ikumkani eRhode?
- 60 Ngubani owanikela ngamaJumba kaFalo?
Ngubani na owaya kulahla oBanglizwe Joyi?
Ngba nguwe na mfo kaTshunungwa?
Ndiva ukhala ngekumkani yeMfuduko.
Nanifuduka nisiyaphi na madoda?
- 65 Ndiya mkhumbula uMguudlwa esaluswa,
Ndiya mkhumbula kusithiwa ngumninawa kuMtikrakra.
Telimhlophe amabali abhaliwe apho kuwe!
AmaNgolothi kaNgangelizwe ayemdaka namehlo,
Ziintaba ndini zaMabel'entombi nqhinani.
- 70 Wazifihl' uMatanzima kwabakuloNtsasana,
Wavel' uMgudlwa walicinga iramnewa eliindevu.
Ndiya kucela mfo kaTshunungwa roxa ngobukumkani,
Lent' ivili iyajikeleza ngene bafondini,
Hleze abakuloNibe banibonelele banijikele.
- 75 Mhla wanishiya ngophanyazo untwan' enkosi ndiyoyika!
Nditsho acal' omabini ndinovalo udiyoyika.
Ngamagora abantwana beenkosi ndibanamile!

Ndidhphe zidweshwa ndiphuphe isikizi,
 Ndiphuphe abantwana benkosi besebungeni,
 80 Ndiphuphe beceb' ukusub' ubomi bekumkani.
 Iinkosi zintathu, ndiphuphe iintombi zimbini,
 Yint' etsho umzimba wam walumeza.
 Kukumdlisa kuuphela esangamoyisa ngako,
 Lo mntwana kaSampu akasanyelisi uyasibhentsisa.
 85 Yin' ukude athobe noMphathiswa?
 Hay' uMphathiswa akathotywe kumkani,
 Uthotywe zizimvo zabaThembu nezizwe.
 Nkos' eth' abantu bavuma ayithethi nyaniso.
 90 Nigadelwa ntoni na nivana nje nabantu?

Ngxe kumkani akuklo kumbi silukuhliwe.
 Kumkani yezizwe lithemba ezizweni;
 NguSampu owanikela ngengqukuva kwiTshawe
 laphssheya,
 Ikwanguye owanikela ngobukhali besizwe.
 95 Kunamhla abaThembu bathambe bangumtya;
 Zakufihlwa iinyaniso kumka udakada kadade.
 BaThembu le mbokotho yenu bayibungile,
 Bathi ma ife ngedliso ixelise iinkosi ezininzi.
 Ndixoleleni zizwe ngengubo yomzi kaNtu uphela,
 100 Ndixoleleni ide ifike imihla endiybonayo.
 Ndikubona mntwan' enksoi inguwe wedwa ukumkani,
 Ndibona uBotha Sigcawu ekunika imbeko,
 Ndimbona uVic kaPoto ethoba kwakuwe,
 Ndimbona uZwelidumile Hintsisa ezithoba,
 105 Ndimbona uDiliza kaMatiwane ekuthobela,
 Ndimbona uSigidi Matiwane ekuphakamisa,
 Ndibona ubunganga nobungangamsha kuwe.
 Phila naphakade sithunywa samazulu!

Mntwan' enkosi woyika ntoni na kodwa?
 110 Nguwe owacela inkululeko ngaphambili.

Namhla lo Rulumente woxolo uyakuphendula,
 Bayasuka oozipho-nde bayayigxoba.
 Ke wean wawungazithumanga wawuthunyiwe.
 Olu hlobo iza ngalo le nkululeko andiluyiqondi,
 115 Kukho abaxhwiliza ngenzondo eyoyikekayo,
 Ngthi bazakuyizuzwa ngenxa yemilh' ukubambalwa.
 Khona bayizuzwa boyityela phi na bezula nje?
 Dibanani mzi kantu ikumkani ibenye kuuphela.
 Ngumaqhashu ojiwe emasekweni kubahlekazi,
 120 Undipheni amafutha ndimthambise uDondolo,
 Isijamjeka umafungwa nguNxeko noJustice,
 Isithintelo sombeka-phesheya kokaMhlobo.
 Aa! Jonguhlanga! Vuma mntwan' enkosi ndiyabulisa.

How exasperating it is to lack fighters when there *are*
 men.

How frustrating it is to look for volunteers in vain.
 How futile it is to fight a lonely battle in the midst of
 multitudes.

What a curse it is to be born with cowards!
 5 What a curse it is to be born with cringers!

Royal scion, face up to your duties so that the nation may
 thrive.

You are the only hope of the nation.
 You are the only one born in your position.
 You are the only king of kings.

10 Royal scion, the angels have descended upon you:
 Your pronouncements are filled with blessings.
 Live forever noble one!

I am referring to you powerful one like a bull-dozer,
 To you daring and fearless fighter,

- 15 To you round and bouncy one like *hili's* magic pebble.³⁷
To you dark-brown one like an Afrikander bullock;
To you whose penis-sheath is made of a lion and a
leopard skin.
To you shaper of our destiny, though it be directed
against him.
- I blame Young and his followers;³⁸
- 20 They are the ones who have created dissensions among
the Thembu.
On the Nonesi Mountains³⁹ Mtikrakra's grudging voice
can still be heard.⁴⁰
Mvuzo and Mhlobo themselves⁴¹ would question
Tshunungwa's statements.
Matanzima⁴² would be shocked if he were to hear these
things.
It is true that he migrated to occupy Sarili's vacant land.⁴³
- 25 It is also true that by the time he crossed the Cacadu
River,
He was no longer on speaking terms with the senior
Thembu Chiefs.

³⁷ *Hili* is another name for *thikoloshe*, a fictitious animal which is believed to have supernatural powers, and is used as a familiar by witches.

³⁸ Mr. Young was the Secretary for the Department of Bantu Administration and Development.

³⁹ Mountains named after nonesi, Chief Mtikrakra's famous wife, who ruled Thembuland after her husband's death.

⁴⁰ Chief Mtikrakra was the last Thembu chief before the annexation of Thebuland by the colonial government. Apparently he was upset at the prospect of his country being annexed by the white administration.

⁴¹ Kaizer Matanzima's great-grandfather and father respectively.

⁴² Referring to Kaizer Matanzima's great-grandfather.

⁴³ After the 157 Nongqause episode, Sarili, a Gealeka chief, fled his country because the colonial government had threatened to punish him for having allowed his people to carry out Nongqause's false prophecies.

But rebellion by minor chiefs is not unknown in traditional societies.

Tshunungwa's statements on the history of the Thembu are surprising.

Chief Ngangelizwe never sanctioned the division of Thembuland.

Sir, I find your pandering to the feelings of the Government repulsive.

30 When I last heard of you, you were being tried for treason;

But now I find you being Chief Matanzima's ardent supporter.

Do likewise Z. Matiwane,⁴⁴ and support Chief Zwelihle; After all, he is senior to Chief Matanzima.

The only difference is that Matanzima has been educated to the point of indoctrination;

35 He has been taught even how to achieve chieftainship. It is for this reason that today the Thembu are stunned and speechless;

They curse modern education and those who have received it.

They have found it ruinous and degrading to the African ethic,

For it has perverted and prostituted chieftainship, as known to them.

40 Pardon me, Tato's male issue.⁴⁵

Perhaps, Mhlobo's son may be excused;

The explanation for his position is to be found in the heavy pockets of the rulers.

A poverty-stricken population is easy to bribe,

And yet such an action is a direct sacrifice of its posterity.

45 I also don't blame Tshunungwa, for starvation is an unbearable thing.

⁴⁴ Z. Matiwane is a teacher who is one of Chief Zwelihle's advisers.

⁴⁵ This refers to Sabata; Tato was one of the earlier Thembu chiefs.

Don't smaller animals sacrifice their young when
confronted by an enemy?

As far as I know, there are only four chiefs in Rhoda.⁴⁶

Their chieftainship has been established from antiquity.

The Ndungwane chieftainship has been established from
antiquity.

50 The Ndungwane chieftainship is in the hands of Ndarala,
That of the Gcina is entrusted to Chief Gecelo,
That of the Jumba is in the hands of Mgudlwa,
And that of the Hala has been given to Matanzima.

Those are the four chiefs known to me in Rhoda;

They have accepted Matanzima's seniority because he is
of Thembu royal descent.

55 Similarly, the Qwati and the Jumba accept the
overlordship of Chief Zwelihle.⁴⁷

But the question is, who put the Jumba chiefs under
Matanzima?

Is it you Thembu? Please answer, I would like to know.
Answer me, king, I am enquiring.

Who created an independent chieftainship in Rhoda?

60 Who handed over to Matanzima Falo's Jumba?⁴⁸

Who sent Chief Bangilizwe and others to exile?

Is it, perhaps, you Mr. Tshunungwa?

I ask because you have been holding forth about a 'king'
in Emigrant Thembuland.

Where were you and friends migrating to?

65 I remember the time Mgudlwa went for circumcision.

I remember him being described as Mtikrakra's younger
brother.

All these facts are recorded in Thembu tradition.

Chief Ngangelizwe himself acknowledged them.

⁴⁶ Rhoda is another name for Emigrant Tembuland.

⁴⁷ The Qwati and the Jumba are minor chiefdoms under Chief Zwelible.

⁴⁸ Falo is the father of the present Mgudlwa chiefs.

Even the Mabel'entombi Mountains bear witness to these words.

70 Matanzima has put himself under the wing of the white Government.

This has made Mgudlwa revert to the hairy and mighty beast.⁴⁹

Tshunungwa, I beg you, withdraw on the question of Thembu chiefship.

The wheel of fortune takes turns.

Be advised, lest your present protectors leave you in the lurch.

75 I fear, the day Sabata dies things will go haywire. Not only his followers will suffer but everybody, I am afraid.

Does that matter to the modern chiefs, who are so callous?

Once I had a terrible dream.

I dreamt that they were conspiring against my chief.

80 They were planning to take away the king's life.

It was three chiefs and two maidens.⁵⁰

It was, indeed, a frightful dream!

The only way they could kill him is by poisoning.

His only crime is that he has exposed and discredited the enemies of the people

85 The Government supporters say, 'How dare he humiliate the Minister?'⁵¹

It is not he that has humiliated the Minister;

It is rather the views of the Thembu and the rest of the people.

For a long time, my chief has been sensitive to the nation's views.

⁴⁹ Refers to Sabata.

⁵⁰ The dream is completely imaginary and does not refer to any real persons.

⁵¹ Refers to the Minister of Bantu Administration and Development, who had to go to Umtata to meet Sabata because of the latter's militant stand against the Transkei Constitution for 'Independence'.

Any chief who claims that the people are agreeable to the
Government's schemes is untruthful.

90 If this claim be true, why are you chiefs being attacked?

Let's admit, we have been deceived.

Originally, a chief was the strength of his people.

Paradoxically enough, it was Sampu himself who handed
over the Thembu to the British;

It was he who undermined the integrity of the Thembu,

95 It is then not surprising that nowadays the Thembu are so
submissive.

When people refuse to stand for the truth, opportunism
becomes rife.

Thembu, your chief is being watched closely;

They want him to accept bribes like so many other chiefs.

It would be tragic, if that were to happen to the protector
of the people.

100 They should leave him alone until the fearful days ahead
come.

I see him as the only chief that represents the people's
wishes.

Even Botha Sigcawu treats him with respect.

Chief Victor Poto also holds him in esteem.

I see Zwelidumile Hintsu paying homage to him.

105 Diliza Matiwane also obeys him unquestioningly.

Sigidi Matiwane also extols his deeds to the sky.⁵²

I see him as a personification of power and mightiness.

Live forever heavenly messenger?

Royal scion, what are you hesitant about?

110 You were the first chief to ask for independence in the
Transkei.

Now, this our 'peaceful' Government is answering you.

But opportunities have grabbed it with both hands.

You yourself did not ask for it on your behalf.

⁵² Important men and paramount chiefs in the Transkei.

- The way this 'freedom' is being offered is puzzling.
- 115 Perhaps, they see it as the last straw in their dying days.
 Supposing they get it, where will they enjoy it?
 Is it not true that they spend most of their time in hiding?
 The only remedy, black multitudes, is to unite under one
 leader.
 There is only one well-trying and seasoned among the
 chiefs.
- 120 He is the one who believes that 'the proof of the pudding
 is in the eating'.
 I am referring to the dark-brown turbulent heir of
 Dalindyebo.
 The only weapon that can cut Matanzima down to size.
 Aa! Jonguhlanga!!⁵³ Royal scion please respond, I am
 saluting.

The Thembu are one of the groups which have been resisting consistently the implementation of the South African Government schemes in the Transkei. When this poem was written, they and their chief were engaged in a grim battle against the Bantustan Constitution in the Transkei. In the first three verses the bard expresses their loneliness in this political battle. He feels that if it were not for the division that has been created among the Thembu, and had Matanzima not been prepared to perpetuate it, the Emigrant Thembu would have been willing to help. He takes the opportunity to refute Tshunungwa's statement⁵⁴ that Thembuland had already been divided by the time of Mtikrakra. He admits that when Matanzima (the senior) crossed the Cacadu River after the Nongqause episode in 1857, he was not on good terms with the senior Thembu chiefs, but maintains that it was never his intention to sever relations with them. He alleges that the statements made by Tshunungwa are inspired by the politics of the South African

⁵³ Chief Sabata's salutation.

⁵⁴ Tshungwa is one of Matanzima's supporters who has been trying to prove, in writing and in speech, that Thembuland was divided by the Thembu chiefs themselves and not by the South African Government.

Government, and he finds this surprising because Tshunungwa was once a member of the African Government, and he finds this surprising because Tshunungwa was once a member of the African National Congress and a treason trialist, a fact which would indicate his opposition to the Government policies. He derides Mstanzima for being a willing 'stooge' of the South African Government, despite his education (B.A.). He also makes some references to the attitude of the people to Matanzima and educated Africans in general; the people mistrust the educated but need them for leadership.

However, the bard feels that people like Matanzima and Tshunungwa can be looked upon as victims of a social system which aims at keeping the Africans at a level below the bread-line, and thus makes them easy to bribe. He then goes on to describe the statuses of the various Thembu chiefs, as defined by tradition. He argues that the Thembu chiefs never establish an independent chieftainship in Emigrant Thembuland, nor is it legitimate for the Mgudlwa chiefs (another section of the Thembu chiefs) to be put under him. The Mgudlwa chiefs were accorded a senior status by Chief Mtikrakra himself, a father to Mtanzima (the senior). He fears that there will be pandemonium and chaos in Thembuland the day Sabata dies, for he sees him as the last dependable chief among the Thembu and in the Transkei. He points out that the stand taken by the Thembu on the question of 'independence' in the Transkei belies the claim that it is Chief Sabata who is the source of trouble in the area; it is the people who reject the Government's schemes, only Chief Sabata is sensitive to the people's opinions and will not allow himself to be bribed by the South African Government. For this reason, he thinks that Sabata has nothing to be afraid of, as he was the first chief in the Transkei to ask for independence, i.e. It is still his right to reject it, if he thinks that it is not what he envisaged. He warns that those who are prepared to accept the proposed 'independence' against the wishes of the people are risking their lives.

MARCH, 1963

Ndithetha ndikufuphi nencam kaKhohlamba,

Ndithetha ndijongene neentaba zoMnqhwazi,
Ndithetha zifulathele iintaba zoMnqhangeni,
Ndithetha zidanile iintaba zaMabel'entombi,
5 Ndithetha zithokombisile iintaba zaNkonkobe,
Ndithetha zilusizi iintaba zoMayolo neBaziya,
Ndithetha zinesinqhala iintaba zeGqaka,
Ndithetha zimbatshile iintaba zeKhalinanga,
Ndithetha zithetha iintaba zoGulandoda nezeBumbane,
10 USabata ngumnyulwa kaYehova, uThixo,

Ndiphuphe mntwan' enkosi emi phezulu koQetume,
Wazolula izandla namehlo ajonga phezulu,
Wataruzisa ngenxa yesijwili'nesimbonono,
Ngenxa yamagazi nemlilo neentshutshiso,
15 Ngenxa yomzi kaNtu osezinxwalekweni.
Ndibe ndambona engxange phezulu koDalindyebo,
Walili uNohajisi nonyana wakhe uSampu,
Wathetha uNohajisi nonyana wakhe ngazwi linye,
Wavakalelwa uJongintaba noNdumiso,
20 Lavakala ilizwi elingqongqo liqondisisa,
USabata ngumnulwa kaYehova, uThixo.

Ndidibene neshologu hezu kkwentaba kaXhalabile,
Lathi lona siyamtyoda ngokuthanda amawonga,
Kunjenje nje nguKaizer ngokuthanda amawonga.
25 Yini na ukuzenza ingqanga phezulu kokumkani?
Udincasisile ngoqhla umkhosi wentshabalalo,
Hayi ngokutshabalalisa abantwant bokumkani.
Ubunganga nobukumkani se busezandleni kuye.
Ubendimangalisile kakade ngokuphikisa ikumkani.
30 Hayi ngokuqweqwesa abantu undikhathazile,
NoRulumente ngokwakhe akaze aqweqwedise.
USabata ngumnyulwa kaYehova, Thixo.
Ndifike uSabataesisijamjeka sesinyhibalala,
Wathi okuhle ebaThenjini kulinyala nesikizi,
35 Akwenziwe baThembu kwenziwe yimqgakhwe,
UmThembu neLawu nomlungu inye loo nto,

Sizibopha ngebanti enye yobuzwe obunye.
Ukufa kukaGrobbelaar kusezintloko zemigqakhwe.
Yini na ukubulala isilambi seBhulu?
40 Iingqalekiso zikaSomnini zikubabulali bentsana.
Bebeyephi abantu abasesngweni lenkululeko yenu?
Yifani nje ngezinja benzi bobudenge nenkohlakalo.
USabata ngumnyulwa kaYehova, uThixo.

UNgangelizwe zange angene ngagazi kuRulumente,
45 Uxolo yindalo kookumkani bendalo kubaThembu.
Iimantyi noMongameli ngabancedisi bokumkani,
Iinkosi zonke kubaThebu zihantsi kwekumkani.
Nkos' ezinkulu kabaThembu zimbini kuuphela;
Nkos' ubukhulu bayo kukuphathat umhlaba.
50 Mkhulu uZwelihle kaSilimela phezu KoMatanzima;
Alandele uKaizer kaMatanzima phantsi koZwelihle.
Liqadi uZwelihle kokwabo Dalindyabo,
Kukunene uKaizer kokwabo Ngangelizwe.
Zombini ezinkosi zinenkosi ezingaphezu kwazo,
55 Kuba ubunganga bazo busithwe lifuthe lesiko.
USabata ngumnyulwa kaYehova, uThixo.

Amasiko amahle eentlanga alungile,
Amasiko angasivumeliyo isithethe asiwafuni,
Amasiko asinikezela ezintlangeni asiwafuni,
60 Ma Kube lee kuthi ukunikisa ngamafa obawo.
Phofu eli lizwi liyabulalisa liyatshabalalisa.
Ndigone ngempi iyihlome yahlala eQitsi.
Yifani madoda ngamafa namanchwaba ooyihlo.
Urulumente nezizwe ngenene zingakuni;
65 Akukho nto ilunyanzelo, esizweni yimvisiswano;
USabata ngumnyulwa kaYehova, uThixo.
Ndiyamkhumbula uMbombini kaSihele, igongqogongqo
elisifuba sigrongqololo,
Ndiyamkhumbula ebiza isinkenko sokrufa,
Ndiyamkhumbula ebiza isinkempe sakhe,
70 Ehlaba egwaza iintshaba zikaQaqawuli,

Ethi lo mzi kaFalo namhla uyalahlekelwa.
Ukuba ebevuswa umntu ngendimvusa ndimxhawule.
Namhla uQawawuli uf' ehleli ngokwelolo;
Ikumkani yesizwe yatsho ezimathontsi,
75 Kuloko uRulumente ufunde wada waphuma ulwazi,
Uva ngemfundo nezifundiswa zokwazi,
Umonyulwa kaYehova uThixo umile ukhathazekile.

Ilizwi lisizwe liphuma esizweni,
Alize liphume enkosini nakanye,
80 Namhla iinkosi ezikhoyo zigqiba ngokwazo,
Isiqhamo lihlazo lokugadwa kwazo.
Kha undixelele nkosi yam Kaizer kaMatanzima,
Ugadelweni uthetha izimvo zomzi nje?
Athi ke mna mbongi yesizwe nakanye,
85 Uzityeshee, uzishiyile izimvo zomzi.
Athi ke mna mongi yesizwe nakanye,
Kha ujike ujonge ngasemva uwedwa,
Ubukhosi bakho buselizeni eludingweni.

Hay' umlungu madoda waninceda,
90 Kungoku uyasiralisela umfo kaMhlobo,
Usiraisela kukubi, uhamba ngentaka.
Kumkani wesizwe zola uthi cwaka,
Ubunglobongela abuze buncede mntu.
Ukaizer Matanzima ngumntu wakho kanye,
95 Ulahlekiswe kukulandela iintlanga,
Kungoku akafuni kuzithoba agobe kuwe.
Hayi yimfundo ukufundiswa kundilahlekisile;
Kanti ubukumdani nobukhosi abufundelwa.

Bayangcangcazela abantu bayankwantya,
100 Bayayoyikainja afunza ngayo okaMhlobo.
Uwawole ngani na mfo ndini la magwangqa?
Yini na ade akugeine akukokose ngokosana?
Akwenzeleni na la mabandla akaNtsasana?
Yini na ude uwanike ilifa looyihlo?

105 Nanzo ke izijwili zikrakra phambi kwakho.
Zithe zakuvakala kuJonguhlanga wenza umhlola,
Akaziseli izinewe zomlumkazi uyaziwonxa,
Uthi ukhathazwa zinzingo neentlupheko zomzi.
Ndifike esithi imbodlela liselwa lonxano,
110 Wathi ibulanti ngamasi okumhluthisa.
Wathi ibulanti ngamasi okumhluthisa.
Yinto endisuke ndawa umxhelo ndanotyhafo,
Koko okhonjiweyo ngomnwe akaze adake.

Nditsho kuwe mcephe endiphantse ndawuginya,
Bendingasazi ukuba kukho kutya embizeni,
115 Mbombosholo embumbi wezizwe zichithwa,
Kumbkani ebunganga bumi ngeKapa,
Buye bathintelwa zinduduma zeRawuti.
Hayi-hayi ke madoda ukuswela ingubo!
AmaMpondo namaGcaleka ayavuma.
120 Bathi boyika ufafa lukaMhlbo ngebekunceda;
Kuloko usegumbini neziphatha-mandla.
Hambani isye ezizweni siye kuvumisa,
Lithi igqira ikumkani inye nguSabata,
Unje ngoLizibedi kwelaPhesheya.

125 Xolani zizwe xolani mabandla kaNtu,
Anixoleleki nina mabandla kaPoqo,
Nenze ngobudenge nangobutyhakala,
Niwunyelisile umzi kaNtu,
Xolani mabandla akowethu xolani,
130 URulumente woziva izimvo zenu nixoxa.
OluNxunguphalo nalo linobudakadaka,
Iinyaniso asiziva zigqunyiwe ngamagwala.
Buyelani mxi kaNtu nithethe izinto zenu;
Buyekeni ubusela nani nina babawayo,
135 Anibi ngoku niyahanga niyatshabalalisa,
Xolani zizwe ithethile ikumkani yezizwe.

Ebotwe mfo kaMatanzima siya kudinga,

Ingqondo yomntu omye iyoyisw bubudenge,
Yini na ntamb' ende ethi isongwa ibisombuluka.

- 140 Emva mfo kaMhlobo esisekweni sendalo,
Kunjenje kuwe ngunyana wakho ngomso.
Kubi mntwan' enkosi, nceda roxa
Athi ke mna mbongi yesizwe buyambo,
Ibuyambo madoda;
145 Ubunganga bobuzwe busithwe nguwe,
Ebotwe mntwan' enkosi kwinkomo omzi.

I am speaking near the peak of the Drakensberg Mountains,
I am speaking facing the Mnqhwazi Mountains,
As I am speaking, the Mnqhanggi Mountains are facing the
opposite direction.

As I am speaking, the Mabel'entombi Mountains show dismay;

- 5 As I am speaking the Nkonkobe Mountains are absorbed in
meditation;

As I am speaking the Mayolo and Baziya Mountains look sad;

As I am speaking the Gqaga Mountains are deeply grieved;

As I am speaking, the Khalinyanga Mountains look ruffled;

As I am speaking, the Gulandoda and Bumbane Mountains are
speaking.⁵⁵

- 10 Sabata is the servant of Jehovah, our God!

I dreamt that the royal scion was standing at the top of the
Qetume Mountains,

He was praying because of the terrible wailing and the bitter
tears of his people;

Because of their torture and persecution;

- 15 And because of the misery of the black masses.

I saw him once again standing over Dalindyebo's grave.⁵⁶

He could hear Nohajisi⁵⁷ and her son, Sampu, crying.

⁵⁵ The names of the various mountains in Thembuland are used here to symbolize certain chiefs in Thembuland.

⁵⁶ Note here the fusion of Christian and ancestor-cult religious ideas.

⁵⁷ Nohajisi is Sabata's grandmother and Dalindyebo's wife.

But Mvuzo and his son would not change their attitude.
Jongintaba and Ndumiso became concerned,
20 And a strong and foreboding voice could be heard.
Sabata is the servant of Jehovah, our God!

I came across the ancestors at the top of Xhalabile's Mountains,
They said we were subverting the country by our great desire
for power.
Things are so critical because of Kaizer Matanzima's
ambitiousness.
25 How could he strive to get a higher position than the
paramount chief of all the Thembu?
He has shocked me by unleashing such destructive forces.
He has destroyed the reputation of the Thembu nation.
He imagines himself as all powerful and important.
He revealed his true colours by accepting a position that does
not legitimately belong to him.
30 For his coercive ways, he will never be forgiven or forgotten,
No democratic government ever forces people to do things
against their will.
Sabata is the servant of Jehovah, our God!
I found Sabata greatly agitated and perturbed,
For what has happened in Thembuland is a disgrace and a
scandal.⁵⁸
35 It has not been done by Thembu but by invaders and
foreigners.⁵⁹
A Thembu, a Coloured,⁶⁰ and a white is one and the same
thing.
We all share a common bond of belonging to a single nation.
Grobbelaar's death⁶¹ is an obvious sign of political degeneracy.

⁵⁸ This refers to the murder of five whites (two men, a woman and two children) near the Bashe Bridge in February, 1963. The Bashe Bridge is in Thembuland.

⁵⁹ The terms are used here to describe individuals whose actions were foreign to the majority of the Thembu.

⁶⁰ In South African terminology a Coloured is a person of mixed descent.

⁶¹ Grobbelaar was one of the victims of the Bashe Bridge murder.

Why kill an innocent poor white?
40 The curses of the Almighty be upon you murderers of children.
Where were those who stand in your way to liberty?
Die like dogs you doers of evil and cruelty!
Sabata is the servant of Jehovah, our God!

Ngangelizwe never fought against the colonial government,
45 Peacefulness is one of the virtues of the Thembu chiefs,
If only the magistrates and Bantu Commissioners could be
subordinate to the paramount chief.
All Thembu chiefs are under the supremacy of the paramount
chief.

There are only two senior chiefs in Thembuland.
There is the paramount chief of all the Thembu,
50 And there is Chief Zwelihle, who is senior to Matanzima.
Kaizer Matanzima comes after Zwelihle.
Zwelihle is the great grandson of Dalindyebo in the 'rafter' of
the great house.
Kaizer is the right hand son in Chief Ngangelizwe's father's
house.

These two chiefs are senior in their count,
55 But their seniority is subject to Sabata's paramountcy, as
dictated by custom.
Sabata is the servant of Jehovah, our God!

Good customs from foreigners are to be welcome;
Customs designed for our permanent subjugation should be
rejected.
60 A surrender of our rights should be repugnant to us.
I know, these truths can be a cause for my arrest and
prosecution.
I once saw an army attack Qitsi villagers⁶² for a similar reason.
All the same, men, be prepared to die for your rights.
The nations of the world are on your side.

⁶² Qitsi villagers had resisted removals under the Betterment Scheme, an action which was considered justifiable in Thembuland.

65 Coercion and oppression are objectionable to civilized peoples.
Sabata is the servant of Jehovah, our God!

I remember mbombini Sihele, a giant with a husky chest;
I remember him calling for his deadly assegai;
I remember him calling him for his murderous *panga*.

70 He was preparing to fight Qaqawuli's enemies.⁶³
He complained that he household of Falo was being ruined.
If people could be resurrected, I would resurrect him and
congratulate him.

Today Qaqawuli has been buried alive like a syncophant.
The paramount chief has made protests but to no avail.

75 The Government is so powerful and knowledgeable that
nobody can advise it.

Matanzima and others have been learning from these
intellectual giants.

Sabaa is the servant of Jehovah, our God!

Worthwhile decisions come from the people themselves;
They never come from the chief alone.

80 Nowadays the chiefs make unilateral decisions,
And the result is their having to be protected.
Please tell me, Chief Kaizer Maanzima,
If you express the people's views, why have you been provided
with a bodyguard?

As a spokesman of the nation, I deny your claim.

85 You have deviated from the views of the people.
As a spokesman of the nation, I deny your claim.
Turn back and you will see that you are alone, you have no
following.
Your chieftainship is founded on a precarious base.

The white Government is your source of strength,

90 Time and again we find you, son of Mhlobo, in lofty positions,
You fly over us like an eagle.

⁶³ A mgudlwa chief who had been deposed by Matanzima because he disagreed with his policies.

Honourable chief, take stock and reconsider your position.
 Crudeness and barbarity never make a man.
 Kaizer Matanzima, you are one of us but you have been misled
 by our enemies.

95 You have been misled by foreigners.
 You are now too proud and stubborn.
 You thought you were being educated, and yet you were being
 brain-washed.
 Chieftainship is one course that is not studied in the class-room.

People are shivering with fear, they are afraid of your striking
 arm.

100 They are terrified of Mhlobo's hunting dogs.
 What could be your reason for serving the interests of our
 enemy?
 Why are they being so protective towards you?
 What have these white officials done for you?
 Is it worth the heritage of your forefathers, your rights, and
 your children's future?

105 There stand your embittered and wretched fellow-men in front
 of you.
 When their voice reached Jonguhlanga, he responded in a
 surprising way.
 He does not drink European liquor but he swims in it.
 He says the difficulties facing him are alarming, and at times he
 dreads the thought of them.
 I found him using brandy as a quencher of his worries.

110 He has found it a suitable substitute for the traditional *amasi*.⁶⁴
 I found this depressing and distressing.
 What can he do? These people are born in their positions!

I still look up to you, though with less hope.
 I did not know that you still have some life in you.

115 Builder of a nation that is being destroyed, I still appeal to you.

⁶⁴ Curdled milk used in traditional Nguni society.

To you great king whose power is felt as far afield as Cape
Town
And the mine dumps of Johannesburg.
Is it lack of courage, men?
The Mpondo and Gcaleka are willing to join hands with you;
120 Only they are afraid of the tall and graceful son of Mhlobo.⁶⁵
This is not surprising because he is the Government's favourite.
Even so, we are all agreed that Sabata is the only paramount
chief of the Thembu.
He is like Queen Elizabeth to the British.

125 Be calm and composed, black multitudes.
You Poqo⁶⁶ members, you are excluded.
For you have acted stupidly and irresponsibly.
You have disgraced the whole black nation.
Discipline and self-respect must reign among us.
130 The Government will listen to your views in discussion.
Under the State of Emergency this is difficult to achieve,⁶⁷
For we are bottled up and we cannot hold open discussions.
We cannot advise one another on matters that affect us all.
Thieves, you are also advised to stop stealing because by so
doing
135 You are creating ill-feeling and misunderstanding.
Go back to your normal behaviour, fellow-men, I beseech you.

We also appeal to you, grandson of Matanzima, to return to the
senior Thembu chiefs.
Remember a single mind is more liable to stupidity and
blunders.

⁶⁵ i.e. Matanzima.

⁶⁶ Poqo is another name for the South African Pan-Africanist Congress. It is derived from the slogan '*AmaAfrika poqo*', meaning 'Africans only' and thus emphasizing the exclusive nature of the organization.

⁶⁷ The Transkei has been in a State of Emergency since 1960 and one of the Emergency regulations (Proclamation 400) makes it illegal for any group of more than ten to hold a meeting without the permission of the magistrate.

Why must you press on at the peril of your own life?
140 Son of Mhlobo, you are not only ruining your future but also
that of your children.
It is you today, and it will be your son tomorrow.
Be advised, abandon the course you have chosen;
Things are bad enough, as it is.
You are the weak link in the chain;
145 You are continually undermining our unity.
Return to the other Thembu chiefs, I appeal to you.

The mountains referred to in the first verse represent certain chiefs in Thembuland. The Mnqhanghi Mountains stand for Matanzima, who has turned his back on the people: the amaBel'entombi symbolize the Mgudlwa chiefs who are dismayed by the matanzima's behaviour. The chiefs who are absorbed in meditation are the Qwati chiefs, several of whom have been attacked by the people; Mayolo and Baziya represent the Joyi chiefs, two of whom have been banished; the Gqaga Mountains overlook Chief Mxakeki Sigidi's place, which was invaded and burnt down in February, 1963. The ruffled man is the All Saints headman who was feeling very unsafe and always had two rifles at his side at the beginning of 1963. The Bumbane Mountains represent Sabata, who had been the most vocal chief during the discussions on the Transkei Constitution.

The bard goes on to discuss the factors that have galvanized Sabata into action, and this is contrasted with Matanzima's unchanging attitude. He sees ambition as the mainspring of Matanzima's actions and tenacity. For the embarrassment and the suffering he has caused the Thembu, Matanzima will never be 'forgiven or forgotten'. Sabata is greatly perturbed about the position in Thembuland, and his reaction is not accounted for by any racialistic feelings because in the eyes of the Thembu 'a Thembu, a Coloured and a white is one and the same thing' and belong to 'a single nation'. He feels that the murder of the five whites near the Bashe Bridge in 1963 was an act of vandalism which was not sanctioned by the people; it was a 'sign of political degeneracy'. A curse be upon those who did it and they should 'die like dogs'.

He then goes on to discuss the structural relationship between the white officials, the paramount chief and other chiefs in Thembuland. He points out that the Thembu are not necessarily a disloyal people and are not fighting the whites and their customs just for the sake of fighting them, but are doing so because they feel that they are being deprived of their natural rights, for which they are prepared to die. He quotes local cases where individuals such as Sihele were up in arms in defence of Qaqawuli Mgudlwa, whom Matanzima had deposed because he disagreed with his policies. He maintains that, traditionally, chiefs had no right to make unilateral decisions. Therefore, modern chiefs, who do not observe this norm, have deviated from tradition, hence the attack on them by the people. He quotes Matanzima as the epitome of this trend or practice. He feels that Matanzima is using his power tyrannically and is prepared to sacrifice the people for his personal gain. Politically, he has identified himself with the South African Government and, as a result, the people are bitter against him.

The bard makes a jibe at Chief Sabata for drinking excessively. He finds this 'distressing and depressing', because the political situation in the Transkei is such that Sabata cannot afford to ruin himself with liquor. All the same, he still has some faith in Sabata and sees him as an important political figure in South Africa. He appeals to the black masses to keep calm, despite the difficulties they are faced with. His exclusion of Poqo members, who have acted 'stupidly and irresponsibly', is noteworthy. He sees discipline and self-respect as the hallmark of a principled struggle. Finally, he appeals to everybody, including those who have deviated from the views of the people, e.g. Matanzima, to come together and unite.

CONCLUSION

Like so many of those who are critical of the South African Government policies and articulate the aspirations of the mass of the people in South Africa, the bard discussed here has received several warnings from the police and the officials in the Transkei, asking him

to stop 'sowing seeds of dissension between the people and the chiefs, or between the people and the Government'. Once he was summoned to appear before the chief magistrate in the Transkei because Chief Matanzima had complained that he was 'inciting the people against him'. He also told me that one of his uncles once received a letter from Matanzima, asking him to tell his nephew (the bard) to 'watch his step'. At the time of the interview he had been raided or interrogated four times by the police. During the elections in the Transkei and the time of the inauguration of the Assembly, he deliberately stayed away. He explained that attendance on his part would have been 'courting trouble'. His absence was greatly felt by the people, who kept enquiring about him and remarking that 'he is the only *mbongi* who speaks sense'.

The strong political content of the poems analysed here and the sharp reaction they drew from the authorities in the Transkei cannot have escaped the notice of the reader; and yet the main purpose of this article is not to show how political the African bard can be, but to highlight his role as a mediator between two social categories, the ruler and the ruled, whose structural positions are opposed but are at the same time inextricably bound together, while the political community survives or maintains its unity. By virtue of the power vested in his position, the ruler is always in a stronger position in relation to the ruled. Therefore, if the bard is to play a useful role in the maintenance of balance of power between the ruler and the ruled, he must throw more weight on the side of the latter, i.e. he must be more representative of the people than the king or chief. He does this by making mild or sharp criticisms of the chief on behalf of the people. But when he feels that the chief is fair and just, then he tries to maintain popular support for him by extolling his virtues and good deeds.

It then follows that what the bard emphasizes in his poems is determined by current social factors. The present social situation in the Transkei is marked by violent conflict between the people and the chiefs, on one hand, and the people and the South African Government, on the other. In some regions the conflict between the

people and the chiefs is so acute that open hostilities have been seen as the only solution to the problem. This is what happened in Chief Matanzima's area, among several others. The question then is, what role is the bard expected to play under these conditions? Once the relations between the ruler and the ruled are so bad that the two parties no longer refer to or manipulate the same set of ideals and values in pursuing their interests, then arbitration becomes impossible and the position of any type of mediator is rendered untenable, as the general standard of social behaviour he appeals to in making his criticisms has become obsolete. In other words, he is forced to abandon his role as mediator and join hands with either side. If he joins the side of the ruler whose authority is being questioned, then he loses his special position for which he depends on general acceptance by the people. This, then, accounts for the general position in Emigrant Thembuland and the unpopularity of Chief Matanzima's *mbongi* among the people. They have lost their status and are no longer representative of the 'voice of the nation'; they represent Matanzima's voice, on whom they depend for their positions. Though they were officially in attendance at the 'independence' celebrations in Umtata (the capital of the Transkei), the people rejected them as 'crude upstarts, who could not compose proper "praise-poems"' and demanded that 'they go home and stop wasting the people's time'.

In times of conflict the bard who is conscious of his position would be expected to identify with the general populace. This is what the Thembu bard has done. His criticism of chiefs such as Matanzima and others has developed into an open attack, and he treats them as enemies of the people. At the same time he does not fail to point out the contradictions in Sabata's position, his tendency to hesitate to take strong action under certain conditions and his personal weaknesses, such as heavy drinking. It is then not surprising that he enjoys great popularity in Thembuland and the Transkei in general. The people like him because 'he speaks sense' or 'he says worthwhile things', i.e. the ideas he expresses are representative of public opinion. This is the key to his role and status. The general acceptance of the Thembu bard is illustrated by an incident in Emigrant

Thembuland, where he pitted himself against Matanzima's *mbongi* at an installation of a new chief. When it became apparent that the response he drew from the people was tremendous, he was not only refused the use of the microphone but was also asked to leave, after he had drawn away from the main meeting the greater part of the audience by continuing with his recitation a few yards from the microphone.

It is on these grounds that I cannot agree with Schapera's suggestion that the enthusiastic applause a bard receives from his audience is not necessarily based on the comprehension of what he has to say. Though Schapera admits that 'he did not inquire into the matter fully', he points out that the impression he gathered was that 'in assessing a poem people look mainly at its content and language'. Furthermore, the attention and acceptance the Thembu bard receives from a population which is generally involved in a bitter struggle against a political system which is considered to be unjust, and the opposition of the officials and the police in the Transkei to him, clearly shows that he does more than just praise the chief. He is what he proudly calls himself, the 'national bard' or the 'voice of the nation'.

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Chapter 45

Can't You Write About Anything Else

by

Arthur Maimane

When I was working on a magazine in Johannesburg in the early fifties, I would occasionally be invited to what was known as a 'mixed party' in the white suburbs with some of my African colleagues. And without fail some white person or other would ask at the party: 'When are you going to write The Great African Novel?' And we would reply with an embarrassed laugh, or something like 'In a few years' time' or 'When I have the time'.

I was at that time not only a journalist, but also a short story writer and, naturally, that matter of 'The Great African Novel' was part of my subconscious. I wanted to write it, you see, despite the patronizing manner in which the question was so often put to us. And I knew that, for myself, it was more than a matter of making enough time to write this epic opus.

I also knew that I would never be able to write it—or any other thing longer than a short story, for that matter—while I still lived in South Africa. The subject matter, I knew, would be too close to me for me to be able to look at it objectively for all the many months it would take to write a novel. I would, I knew, get too involved, too excited to have the patience to remain sufficiently objective for the subject which was, of course, to be *apartheid*: or perhaps, I should say the effects of *apartheid* on the African.

So my hope was that one day I would leave South Africa for some other country where I could gather my thoughts and views in tranquil patience to be able to write a novel—hopefully, ‘that Great South African Novel’. Well, I finally did leave. I went into exile, where I’ve now lived for over twelve years.

When I arrived in London in the early sixties, I was invited to parties where I also met white people concerned about my life—and that of other South Africans—in a white-dominated society. But they were equally concerned that, as a writer, I seemed to only want to write about *apartheid*. ‘Why don’t you write about something else?’ they asked: ‘a ‘universal’ issue, for instance’.

This kind of attitude, as we all know, has also been experienced by black American writers who have been accused of being possessed by an obsession about race. There are, of course, two answers which can be made to this question. On the issue of universality, one could say that since the colour *bar* or *apartheid* is practiced in one form or another everywhere in the world, it is indeed as universal as love. On the issue of its being an obsession with black writers, one could ask why James Joyce was never accused of being obsessed by Ireland—the subject of all his works during his decades of self-exile from his home country.

And if James Joyce is ancient history for some people, a modern form of reply would be to wonder why Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and others are regarded as the great American writers of the day when all they ever write about is life as a Jew in America. Is *Portnoy’s Complaint* a universal subject—even for America?

To avoid any misunderstanding, let me say at once that, as I read it, the complaint was not Portnoy’s physical obsession but the Jewish problem of how to get out from Mama’s suffocating embrace.

The proper answer, of course, to this sophisticated issue of which subjects are universal, and which not, is that when an artist is born under a certain set of circumstances, he cannot—or does not—want to write about anything else. Some make the break and succeed—like Frank Yerby who made more money writing historical white fiction than Richard Wright ever made with his classics about black contemporary history in the same country. And others who have tried to make the change fail simply because they cannot work up the same enthusiasm or commitment for their new subject.

And, as we all know, strong feelings—be they artistic, political or strictly financial—are necessary for any writer to do his best. In South Africa, if you are black there can only be one thing you feel very strongly about: *apartheid*. And you do not have to be an artist, either. You only have to be aware of what this system is doing to you as an individual and also as a community. So the first thing which those of us who can write want to write about—feel impelled to write about—is the effect of this supremacist ethos on ourselves and on the supremacists themselves.

It is on this latter point that the first difficulties occur. How can an African write fully about his white fellow-countryman if he has no chance to study them outside the master-servant relationship? Unless the writer has been a domestic servant—or has done a great deal of research among such people—he has no idea of the simple mechanics of white living in the same city he lives in himself. And, by the same token, white South African writers are faced by the same problem when they want to write about Africans.

Not only the white writers but all white people are ignorant about life across the colour line. And this, surprisingly, creates greater problems to the aspiring African writer than it does for the white one. Because the African is constantly aware that if his short story, novel

or play is ever going to be published or performed, it must make sense to white people. They, after all, own the publishing houses and theatres—and that's not a complaint. Yet, it is just a recognition of the facts of life.

So to make his work understood by a white audience, he cannot simply write, for instance: 'James told his wife that she was behaving like Alice in Wonderland'. If he is going to be true to the cultural background of his African characters, the same reference would be to an African folk-tale. And how can he use that without having to explain the details of the particular folk-tale?

Explain... that is the major problem for the aspiring writer. How does he explain without seeming to be explaining—boring his readers with cultural explanations? It's like trying to write for people who live on a different planet and know next to nothing about your own planet. And after all the necessary explanations have been made in the text—as few as possible, integrated into the story as much as they can be—the publisher's verdict is likely to be summed up by one word: 'didactic'. This is not a bad novel, really, he says. But it's so didactic, you see. Novels should entertain and perhaps even inform. But not instruct.

And who's to say the publisher is wrong? There is no point in reminding him that George Bernard Shaw's plays were all didactic. Not everybody is G.B.S. and, anyway, that was a long time ago. And, of course, we all know that many African writers like Chinua Achebe have managed to make their explanations without becoming didactic or even boring.

This, of course, is a comparatively minor objection from publishers or critics. The major ones are more confusing for the black writer. I remember the reaction from the first publisher to read my first novel. He told me with a mixture of surprise and disappointment that my

novel did not have 'any fire in the belly'. Any novel by a black South African, he explained to me, must by its nature have 'plenty of fire in the belly'. I refused to rewrite and add the fire.

Then, a few months later, I was told by another publisher that my novel had missed being published by his house by just one vote out of a total of six. And why had it been turned down when I was assured that it was well-written and so forth? Because, he told me, they believed that I had exaggerated the treatment Africans received from white people in South Africa. We know *apartheid* is terrible, they were telling me, but we can't believe that it's as bad as you say it is. What they were saying, in fact, was that white people could not be as evil as I portrayed them.

There is, of course, the general belief that, because we have chips on our shoulders or are anti-white, we can never portray white characters fairly and with credibility. But when an African critic criticizes a white writer for presenting black people as stereotypes, nobody—nobody white, that is—takes him seriously. He is showing the chip on his shoulder, they imply. We can't win, can we?

I suppose the question after that is: why bother? Why depend on white publishers—or even white readers? The answer, as far as I know, is that there's nobody else. We're stuck with this situation. But perhaps somebody here today can tell me something different or show us a way out of this confusion and frustration.

Chapter 46

Make Music

by

Bessie Head

'They thought what other people only sing in songs,' said Zhivago of his love for Lara. He could not have meant the run-of-the-mill but the songs Miriam Makeba chose for her repertoire. Who else sings of love and life that has a long thread of continuity and purpose?

I have said so many tentative things about her, out of surprise. I once said that the human voice must have power and authority to be heard and she has this—because of the demands she makes on the concentration. I also came around to the view that she has a great soul and this made her transcend the achievements of anything run-of-the-mill. She could never be cheap entertainment.

That two unlike artists like Pasternak and Makeba eventually said the same, eternal, everlasting things to my heart, appears to me that they traveled a similar road where everything was a mass of pain, confusion, loss and human stupidity. They recorded it all with silent eyes, possessively keeping the beauty in their hearts to themselves, knowing it had no place where false ideals were set up whereby people *had* to live or be shot dead or imprisoned.

We were thinking about other things when wading through the bleak terrain that makes up so much of 'Doctor Zhivago'—there were those detailed, precise recordings of what one peasant said and what another peasant said and the recording goes on and on with ruthless precision. The heart of the writer is not involved and that is half the pain of the book. He was just looking and looking and simply not liking anything he looked at. He was a man slowly having a nervous breakdown because of all the things he had been born with in his heart, that he had been born to have a great love affair, in spite of the revolution; that a love affair conducted amidst total collapse was going to be the only worthwhile achievement of his life. Because nothing prepares you for the shattering beauty of the last pages of the book.

The references to Lara are always small, abrupt sentences tagged onto those eyes which silently watched a hateful and inhuman world. They teeter at the end of a terrifying description of Moscow, overrun with the plague and rats, if secret police, where things like fresh vegetables have gone on the black market and are only obtained at the risk of being deported to Siberia. It is those agonies which dominate. There can't be people there anymore, only terror and insanity. In all this Lara says: 'Yura, I want to tell you something.' He knew, says the author with quiet amusement, she thought she was pregnant.

It holds you for some time, the man's heart which he keeps such a secret, as though he is conducting a silent conspiracy of his own against all those things which are not truth but evil. It's as though his heart and what was in it would eventually acquire the power to make the universe whole and sane again. It has that effect, because once the man breaks down and shows you his secret heart, you can't remember or care any longer what one peasant said or the other peasant said—only those eternal lines: 'Oh, what a love it was, how free, how new, like nothing else on earth!'

The voice of Makeba breaks in on the ear in the same way: Oh, how free, how new, like nothing else on earth!

I think it's the shock of the contrast. This same precise, ruthless recording is going on in Southern Africa of life on a bleak, terrible terrain. One black man said this about losing his family and home overnight and another black man said this and you know that the white man who said that can only increase the terror and insanity because his way of life which coddles him and sets him apart from the rest of mankind, needs it. You know Makeba lived through all of this and recorded it with still, silent eyes but when you turn to her

music, some other world reaches you where in all, all this a mother sang a song to her baby about a canary.

It is more than just a song when Makeba sings it. It is her whole life and secret heart which she kept to herself throughout all those years she was a recorder of everything that amounted to rubbish—because that's what evil is: *Rubbish*. It is almost with relief that one listens to her music because it says the true things about Southern Africa, that the children who made up the game song about the pretty new dress are going to survive, that there are people here too, black people, born to have great love affairs, full of wonders and things, which will be more important than our revolutions.

I have no logical argument as to why those things are more important, except that I believe in the contents of the human heart, especially when that heart was a silent and secret conspiracy against all the insanity and hatred in mankind. In this context, the heart of Pasternak is the true liberator of Russia and Makeba music is the liberator of all black people.

They could have said other things because we were thinking of other things. But they are greater than others because the end products of both their gifts to mankind is only what they were born with in their hearts.

Chapter 47

The Impact of Christianity on Twentieth Century Black South African Writing

by

Bob Leshoia

Dealing with such a broad subject in such limited space will not enable one to refer to as many writings as one would like to deal with. Another problem is that the majority of the writings are in the native languages of South Africa. One can, therefore, only sample one or two writings from the main language groups of one's own language, Sesotho, Isi-Zulu and Isi-Xosa of the AmaZulu and AmaXosa respectively.

In recent months we have interested ourselves in the study of both English and native language writings of black South Africans of the late 19th and 20th centuries. This study was prompted by the fact that there is so much in them that is lost to South Africa and to Africa by their being neglected. One hopes to translate a few of these works into English to make them available to a much wider reading public. Just a couple of months ago we received from Lesotho, A.M. Sekese's

classical study of the behaviour and habits of the birds of Lesotho in his book “Pitso Ea Linonyana” – “The Gathering of the Birds”. This great trial is based on the local Basotho legal system. We only hope that our translation will not destroy the beauty of the setting, the mood, the native traditional atmosphere and the very idiomatic language.

In this book Sekese sets up a conference of the birds – small and large – of Lesotho. The gathering and its procedures are based on the legal system of Lesotho. The centre of the controversy is the hawk who is the accused. The judges are the eagle and the vulture. Some of the very interesting prosecution witnesses are the smallest bird, Motintinyane (the grass warbler), the butcher bird and the owl. The indictment is that the hawk is guilty of persecuting the birds and making their lives miserable – making it impossible for them to enjoy their meals. The entire bird family is there to see that justice is meted out and that the hawk gets a just punishment.

Anyone who has sat in a local traditional court case held under the shade of a tree in the king’s headquarters cannot help but admire the gift of observation that the author possesses. Again anyone who knows the birds of Lesotho cannot fail to see the profound knowledge the author possesses of the birds of his native land. The author begins his book by explaining that regular national conferences are held in Lesotho for kings and counselors to discuss national problems; for kings to meet the nation to hear their problems; for the various rulers to meet to discuss national problems.

“A nation which does not hold national conferences is like a patient whose illness is ignored by the doctors who are able to diagnose and cure disease.”⁶⁸

The trial extends over a period of several days and in the first session Motintinyane is the first witness and the author describes the proceedings thus:

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“And Motintinane stood up, the poor fellow’s eyes unable even to look at the honourable judges; he is an old, old man with a head that is grey, and he supports himself on a walking stick. He held his hands on his waist and spoke and said: “Honourable my masters, you will wish to know what this thing is that speaks first. Indeed, in truth I am nothing in your presence; though it may be so, though I be nothing, yet I hate to die and see my children killed year in and year out. I have only one thing to say, I say, let the hawk give up his chieftainship, he is destroying and finishing the nation of the Bird Family. Even I, as tiny as I am, I am on the fleeing path all day with torrents of perspiration streaming down my face. I just do not understand how he thinks he can chew me up when there is really nothing to chew of me. I wonder whether he does not think of putting me into his nostrils. You hawk, you have no shame indeed! You are such a great king, yet you insist on making such useless things as myself unhappy. Well, I have spoken, but I end with these words: Oh, please my masters unite in your decision so that the hawk (Phakoe) should be stripped of his chieftainship! (And the nation cried: away with him! Away with him!”) And these are my words, I Motintinyane.”⁶⁹

There follows a number of other witnesses to corroborate Motintinyane’s words, but the first meeting ends indecisively. On the second day the great convocation meets again and it is now the hawk’s (phakoe’s) turn to answer the many accusations against him. He is proud and looks scornfully and disdainfully with steady steel-like eyes around him, at the judges, and then, his accusers and speaks:

“Yes, My Lord and the court! We are all familiar with what happened in the first sitting of this court, and we all know what caused the postponement of the proceedings. The accusations of my accusers were very unclear, and even I on that day I did not put my defence adequately and clearly. But so as to avoid the waste of valuable time

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with trivialities, I can say that I am still expected to defend myself today. Yes, My Lord, chieftains and you the nation of the Bird Family, I am the son of the hawk (phakoe),

I do not sing my own praises
For one is worth of praise if others sing his praises.

I the hawk, I am the third in the line of succession after the Eagle and the Vulture. But, though I am a king I am ashamed that today I should be standing here dressed in the ugly name of the accused. I have listened to and have heard all your misgivings and lamentations about me, and though I have been so greatly pained, in one respect it is an honour and great respect for me to see here before me the entire national of the Bird Family. I am especially happy that today you will all hear and know what my position is over you, both you accusers and lamenters alike, above all I request that in this sitting today you should not show yourselves lacking in good manners of speech which would prove that indeed you do not know my responsibility over you. I am not imposing myself on you, if you don't know my responsibility over you, no one forces you to know it, for I have already realized that you do not pretend, you indeed, don't know my position over you; among you some have called me a cannibal, others say that I am a constable, and still others say I should be killed like Chaka was killed, if not so that I should be expelled and driven out of this nation! It was when I thought of all these accusations that I said earlier that I was very glad that today you will hear and know those things that you have never heard nor known all this time, with regard to my kingly position of responsibility over you. I am particularly disgusted that my best friend here, the Butcher Bird, (Tsemeli) should have called me a constable!

My Lord and the court, and you my accusers, I trust you still remember what I said at the beginning of this sitting for I had said that I had not put my defence very clearly at the first sitting. You are aware that what I have said here today all concerns the matters that were raised in that sitting, all those things which I had not adequately answered on that day.

Now when I continue with my defence I say to you, these are the kings who have given me the responsibility of being a shepherd over you; ask them, satisfy yourselves perfectly on both sides, whether I was not put over you by them or whether I have imposed myself over you."⁷⁰

Anyone who has been to a native traditional court sitting cannot fail to recognize the great sense of oratory that Sekese has written into this classic. The speaker prides himself in the use and control of the language. The real point at stake is not so important as the beauty of speech. At that point of Phakoe's defence speech the Chief Justice, Lenong, (the Eagle) interrupted him with these words:

"Just a minute, just a while, son of the Hawk, I don't wish to disturb your speech. (I don't wish to enter your mouth). In short, and in one unanimous voice I accept the truth that Phakoe was given the responsibility over you by us; but though it may be so, we did not give him the power and the right to spill blood, and above all we did not give him the right to paint his lips red with blood like greedy dogs do.

It is not a custom among kings to give a subordinate such powers and responsibilities that are greater than the powers and responsibilities of those who are above him, for the hyena is always brought to the king's palace! ..."⁷¹

This is the richness that we have lost by neglecting the many master pieces that have been produced in the native languages by our writers, some of whom have long gone into obscurity through death. We must begin to dig these gold mines for if we don't very soon adventurers from Europe and America will discover them for us and it will be too late to moan and cry about outsiders coming to exploit the literary wealth of Africa. Now, I should not, like son of the Hawk,

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go off the track for my aim in this paper is to show the impact Christianity has had on the black South African writing of the periods indicated.

The history of South Africa shows clearly how closely Christianity followed behind the wars of liberation fought by the black people against the white invaders and colonizers. Where the whites were victorious they set up missions and opened schools for the express purpose of Christian indoctrination. The victories they had won were not handed to them on a golden plate but it cost them sweat, blood and the lives of thousands of their men, women and children. So Christian indoctrination was applied as vigorously as the gun had been used to enable the whiteman to gain a firm foothold on the African soil. Going hand in hand with the building of mission stations was also the founding of Christian printing presses. This was to make sure that a great deal of what was published by both black and white writers was closely censored by the church. This was especially so for the African writer who could not have his work published by the white commercial publishing houses who themselves were strict censors for most of them were also owned by white people closely connected with the church.

In South Africa the two publishing houses which published black writers were Morija Printing Press in Lesotho and Lovedale Printing Press in the Eastern Cape. Morija Mission station was founded in Lesotho near Thaba Bosiu, King Moshoeshoe's strong hold, in the year 1834. the founders were missionaries of the Paris Evangelical Missionary Society who arrived in South Africa in 1829. Lovedale was founded in the town of Alice in the Eastern Cape in the year 1841 by missionaries of the Glasgow Missionary Society of the Church of Scotland. In the preface to his book A History of Christian Missions in South Africa the author, Professor J. Du Plessis, has this to say:

“From the pages of the book it will be abundantly evident that Mission history and Cape history have always been associated in the closest possible way. In South Africa, at any rate, they form, not two parallel and separate streams, but two streams

which Unite and Commingle. And this "History" may claim to be the first attempt to place the establishment and growth of Christian Missions in South Africa in their true historical setting."⁷²

And this "true historical setting" was that Christianity followed closely on the heels of military conquests. The missionary followed closely behind the soldier to consolidate his conquests and to spread Christian indoctrination. There is no doubt that the missionaries did a thorough job. They reaped rich results in spite of the great odds they worked against. One of the first and finest results of missionary efforts was the conversion of a Xosa leader, Ntsikana, by Joseph Williams in about 1881. This man, Williams, was so strong that he also impressed the strong King, Ngqika, and many of his followers. Dr. Shepherd of Lovedale Missionary Institution has this to say about this man, Joseph Williams:

"One of the Bantu declared that when Williams lifted up his hands every man saw that he had hold of heaven and brought it upon earth. Ngqika, after hearing him went to the bush to weep and pray. The whole country appeared to be on the brink of a great moral and religious change."⁷³

It is in this kind of atmosphere that the early writings of black authors were published and it is, therefore, not surprising that Christian influence is felt in almost all writings belonging to the period under consideration. Though Ntsikana was not an educated man in the European sense yet he soon became a great and flaming evangelist among the Xosa people. He assumed the dimensions of a teacher, artist and prophet and one of his best creations which has been handed down from generation to generation is still sung with great emotion by South African blacks. After his contact with the missionary this great leader and warrior became one of the greatest legendary figures in black South Africa. His war cries ceased and

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instead he poured out floods of Christian sentiment. At this point I would like to give you the original version of his great composition, “Ulo Thixo Omkhulu ngosezuliveni” – “He the great God, high in Heaven”, and then afterwards Professor D. J. Darlow’s English Translation:

“Ulo - Thixo umkulu, ngosezulwini
Unguwena, Wena, aka lenyaniso
Unguwena, Wena, Nqaba yenyano
Ulo ‘dal’, ubomi, wadala pezulu
Lo - Umdali wadala wadala izulu
Lo - Menzi wenkwenkwezi nozilimela.
Yabinza inkwenkwezi, isixelela.
Lo - Menzi wemfama uzenza ngabomi
Latela ixilongo, lisibizela,
Ulonquin’ izingela imipefumlo,
Ulo - Mkokeli wasikokela tina.
Ulengub’ enkulu siyambata tina.
Ozandla Zako zina maxeba Wena.
Ugazi Lako liyimrozo yinina?
Ugazi lako lipalalela tina.
Lemali enkulu - na siyibizile?
Lowonzi wakon - na siwubizile?
Amen?⁷⁴

The following translation into English was done by the then Professor of English at the South African Native College, Fort Hare, Alice, Cape Province in 1941 on the occasion of Lovedale’s centenary celebrations.

“He the great god, high in Heaven,
Great ‘I am’, of truth the Buckler
Great ‘I am’, of truth the Stronghold,
Great ‘I am’, in whom truth shelters
Who created life around us

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Who created Heaven above us
And the stars, No-Zilimela (Theh Pleiades)
We were blind until He taught us.
(Thou mad'st us blind, it was Thy purpose)
With a trumpet gave the message.
As He hunted our spirits.
Toiled to make our foes our brothers
(Thou our leader who dost guide us.)
Then He cast His cloak about us,
Cloak of Him whose hands are wounded
Cloak of Him whose feet are bleeding.
See the blood that streameth for us;
Flows it, though we have not asked it.
Is it paid without our praying
Heaven our Home with no beseeching?"⁷⁵

Among the Africans of South Africa religion is found in the veneration of spirits as distinct from God himself. Among the Basotho these spirits are Balimo; among the Zulus and Xosas these spirits are Amadlozi or Iminyanya - the ancestors. This composition of Ntsikana's therefore, is about a God unknown to the black people of South Africa. He wrote or, as it was then, composed about a strange God brought to him by the missionary Joseph Williams. This then is what Christianity made of this great African leader who was born and lived and died in an area where South Africa's bloodiest battles were fought between the white invaders and the indigenous peoples.

Even at this time of the twentieth Century the Morija and Lovedale presses had to continue with the role for which they were intended. Dr. Shepherd makes a very interesting remark about the role that the Christian press had to play when he wrote about Lovedale in 1941, one hundred years after its founding.

"It is another proof of the statesman like views of the pioneer

Missionaries that so early they recognized the power of the Printed word. John Ross, who conveyed the printing-press From Britain in 1823, declared in a later day that there must be Provided “good books for youth and age, for the Lord’s Day And week-days, for schools and libraries ... The church has Still her own people, for whom to care. She should not forget That her commission extends to the world – whence others are To be called – the world of readers, who become the men of Action, for evil as much as for good”.⁷⁶

The book referred to at the beginning of this paper, “Pitso Ea Linonyana”, by A.M. Sekese was first published by Morija Printing Works in 1928 in the early Twentieth Century. What is interesting about the book is that though it is an apparent criticism of the political situation in Lesotho at the time of writing, yet the writer could not avoid being influenced by the powerful Christian atmosphere of the country. The hawk, dictator and murderer, is on trial during the second sitting and after several witnesses, such as the quail (Koekoe) had spoken, the Partridge (Khoale) interrupts the proceedings with these remarks:

“Quail, child of my younger brother, just take a breather for a while by sitting down. Hawk (Phakoe) listen and let me tell you a true story of long ago and which is true even today. It is said that a certain persecutor who persecuted people who worshipped the God of over there, on a certain day, even after he had been given the power and right to kill by permission of the king, when he invaded a certain town, on the way the ruler of that town which he was invading got hold of him and throttled him and threw him to the ground; and while he was still unconscious, he was awakened by a voice that called him by his name, though he did not see who called him. When he answered he asked, ‘Who are you my master?’ And the answer was: ‘I am him who you are persecuting! It is difficult to kick against the pricks. At once the persecutor regretting his actions and repented. I must say, though that his regret and repentance were not quite

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complete for he should have been convinced by the dust in which he had found himself.”⁷⁷

Khoale goes on to explain that Phakoe is in the same position as this persecutor and also reminds him that “the heart of our Creator is not pleased by the things you do to us. And if our masters don’t speak strongly to you about your doings, you yourself better pull yourself up and correct your way. Open your ears Phakoe, and listen to my second example concerning the matters I am composing for your benefit”.⁷⁸

The exchange between the two goes on with Khoale giving another example of another king who lived in another far away country and who ruled over his own people and many other nations which he had conquered but who killed mercilessly. This went on until the Strong Man (Senatla) who rules over all of us realized that this king had no repentance and he decided to kill him, and so he killed him.

At the end of the second day nothing really decisive has been reached and so there is another adjournment. During the third session more witnesses give evidence gets very rough treatment from the judges. As a result of the unsatisfactory manner in which the whole trial has gone Tlaka-Tsooana is forced to close it with the following sad words:

“I Tlaka-Tsooana, I am one of the staunch supporters of the kingship, though it be so yet we are amongst those to whom it is always said by those in high places, close our eyes so that the big one may be able to swallow! At this very trial we closed our eyes to enable the big one to swallow Sephooko (owl).”

The setting of the story is a political one and it reveals the corruption of those in high places, but Sekese thinks he can solve a political problem by appealing to the moral and Christian consciences of those

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involved in political corruption. So, what could have been a clever and satirical attack of the corrupt morals of those eagles, vultures and hawks in high places, is reduced to another sermon from a Christian pulpit. After having said all this one must also say that one is not condemning Sekese's artistic qualities as a writer and observer of the world around him. Unfortunately he lived at a time when black writers had to produce "good books for youth and age, for the Lord's Day and Week-days..." "Pitso Ea Linonyana" is definitely one of the best classics in the Sesotho language, rich in idioms and beautiful expressions.

Sekese concludes his book by telling the story of the case between a blindman and a cripple over the skin of a buck which they had snatched from the birds. After they had eaten the meat they began to quarrel over the possession of the skin. The blindman claimed the skin because he had carried the cripple to where the birds were eating the buck and had again carried back the cripple, the meat and the skin to the cave. The cripple claimed the skin because he had seen the birds which were flying to where the dead animal was and he had skinned it and had carried the meat and the skin in his hands on the blindman's back when they returned to their cave.

He ends his story by saying it was God's plan that these two people should work together for each other's good, but that things went wrong when they began to quarrel over who should possess the skin. He concludes very irrationally that the skin really belonged to the blindman because the blind are always the victims of those who have eyes and can see. The cripple looks fatter than the blindman and this, therefore, means he must have had a greater share of the meat without the poor blindman knowing it. Like in the story of the birds Sekese's purpose in this story is to preach the moral lesson that it is wrong for those in better and higher positions to exploit and cheat those in lesser and inferior positions. Very heavy overtones of Christina morality!

We wish to look at a book published ten years after "Pitso Ea Linonyana", Thomas Mofolo's "Chaka". The publishers are also

Morija Printing Works and the book has been translated into English by F.D. Dutton and published by Oxford University Press. In the preface to the English translation the publishers claim that “This book Chaka is not a history of the great Zulu chief, for it does not claim to give all the known facts of his life. But Mofolo used fact as a basis for his story of human greed and unchecked ambition, an ambition that masters its victim and leads to his downfall and terrible punishment” .⁷⁹

There are very interesting similarities between Chaka and Dr. Faustus by Christopher Marlowe. Where Marlowe uses the devil Mephistopholes, to mislead Faustus, Mofolo uses the African medicine man, Isanuse, to do the trick. Both victims have a long spell of successes in life and have the world in the hollow of their hands for a while. Both die a terrible and painful death in the end with their masters coming in just at the right moment to claim the wages of sin, death. In Mofolo’s eyes Chaka is not a nation builder as he is treated by Seydou Badian the West African playwright who incidentally used Mofolo’s book as a basis for his play “The Death of Chaka” also published by Oxford University Press. To Badian Chaka’s death is regarded as a great loss to the nation, but to Mofolo Chaka deserves death for he had chosen the path of sin. After Chaka has met the Lord of the Deep Waters he hears these words from a voice in the grass:

“Ahe, ahe. The world is yours,
Child of my own people.
You will rule the nations
And their chiefs and kings,
You will rule all the nations of men,
You will rule the winds and the storms of the sea
And the deep pools of the mighty rivers,
And all things will obey your word,
They shall fall down before your feet.
E, oi, oi. But take care,

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That you follow the right path.”⁸⁰

Yes, indeed Chaka ruled a vast area of land; he was victorious in war; he ruled chiefs and kings and all the nations of men, but in doing so he had chosen the wrong path. And for this he had to pay dearly for in terms of Christian philosophy the wages of sin is death. Isanusi leads him from one cruel deed to another till he wades deep through the blood of his nation, his mother and his wife, Noliwe. Like Shakespeare’s Macbeth he cannot go back any longer for his hands are red with blood and his heart longs for more blood and power. The following extract which is Chaka’s dream of Isanusi in his greatest hour of need will make the point better than any lengthy explanation. This dream comes at the end of Chaka’s days.

“And Chaka watched them thus in his dreams, Isanusi came with his companions. The three of them remained quite silent, as if they were rejoicing over Chaka with a terrible joy, like the joy of a man who overcomes the enemy he has prepared himself to kill. It was the joy of those who see that their day has come. And Isanusi said: ‘Chaka, today I have come to demand my reward. I told you that if I should pass here again you were to have all preparations made; there was to be no delay; you were to give me what is mine without argument. For I have worked well for you, and you have won the chieftainship and power and honour and riches and glory.’

Harmless as these words were, the pain they caused Chaka was terrible. He saw that Isanusi was counting up all the dead who had gone to fill Udonga-luka-Totiyana during the years of his chieftainship, for as Isanusi spoke he looked down into the valley. When Chaka heard these words he seemed to leap up in his sleep and fall on one of Isanusi’s companions and kill him. He woke and looked this way and that, and all he saw was that the night had gone. Beyond this there was nothing else for him to see, except he knew he had been dreaming.

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The sun rose and with great difficulty Chaka found the courage to go out and speak with the soldiers, but the Chaka who spoke was no longer the Chaka they knew. He stood up like the royal lion of the Mazulu, like a wild beast without fear, but like a lion with its strength gone, unable even to raise its head. His fine body, his broad shoulders, could no longer carry out his commandments.

Death, the mighty ox, had seized Chaka, but he did not see it; it had come to him and he could not run away or fight against it.

Death came to him in the moment of his glory, in the hour of his boasting, when he said that the armies of Mazulu had fought against death and overcome it and marched over it with their feet. At such a time death had come to him and there was no deliverance."⁸¹

The next Morija publication we would like to examine briefly is a drama in Sesotho by Twentyman M. Mofokeng entitled "Sek'ona Sa Joala" - A Calabash of Beer - published in 1953. The purpose of this play is quite clearly meant to militate against polygamy and throughout the church's voice is clear and loud. The story of the play is about two intimate friends, Lefaisa, father of a beautiful girl, Keneuoe, and Seobi, father of a young man, Phephei, engaged to the beautiful Keneuoe. Seobi is a polygamist and his friend Lefaisa does not approve of it. One day Morongoe, Seobi's second wife, offers him a calabash of poisoned beer which his friend knocks out of his hands because he knows that the beer is poisoned. This act strains the old friendship between the two men and also affects the engagement of the two young people. Though the play ends with a reconciliation because of Morongoe's confession, the playwright attempts throughout to stress that polygamy is unchristian and dangerous because it goes hand in hand with jealousy and hatred as was proved by Morongoe's attempt in trying to poison her husband because he paid more attention to his first wife, 'Malirontso'.

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The first scene opens with Phehei at the local well just after his arrival from the gold mines in Johannesburg. In his long soliloquy, amongst other things, he meditates about how the eyes were meant to see the beauty of nature by God, but how that they also see the ugliness of the sinful world; how God meant the tongue to speak good things, but that it also is capable of speaking evil things. Some of the things that were useful to the nation have now been turned into bad things by man.

“Perhaps this thing which today has become witchcraft was once great knowledge very different from what it is today, was something which was used in various ways for the good of the nation; but today it was changed into a terrible thing which the priests and wise people wisely condemn when they say that people should not believe in them because they are bad.”⁸²

Then he bends down to drink water from the well with these words:

“Wonderful cool refreshing water. I believe that the well from which Moses let the flocks of his father-in-law drink was as cool as this when, he, Moses saw Sephra and when Jacob saw Rachel, and – listen! What’s that I hear?”⁸³

He soon sees his beloved, Keneuoe, walking to the well to draw water and he hides behind the nearby rocks as she draws the water to the companyment of this song.

1. “We put ourselves at thy feet our Father in Heaven, we ask for your protection as we go to rest.
2. At night the evil spirits will surprise us with evil dreams; please protect us.
3. Encircle us with an army of angels, watch over us, protect us, You Jesus, Saviour.

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4. When we wake in the darkness of the night, protect us and give us good thoughts only.
5. In our imaginations give us good thoughts only, thoughts about repentance and new life and new Spirit.
6. In our thoughts at night teach us They truth only, so that we may find and follow the road of heaven."⁸⁴

We said in the beginnings that the play was an attack on the age-old custom of polygamy, but before we say something about that here is another example of sentimental indulgence in religious hope by the characters. When Kenouoe hears that her father has broken her engagement because of the calabash of beer incident she wails,

"Even though my mother and father desert me, my God will keep me. Phephei, my beloved, I was created for you by God, and there is nothing in heaven or earth that can separate me from you. I may be asked to drink blood in place of water or eat bread covered with the slimy saliva of frogs or be burnt with fire or be covered with open sores, all these things I would gladly do because of my love for you as all these things that pain my heart are not greater than love; even death I can face without fear, because I love you with a red hot love ..."⁸⁵

When Seobi explains to Llerafu, Lefaisa's brother-in-law, the cause of the quarrel with his friend he says,

"In fact you remind me one matter which I almost forget to tell you about. The beer calabash was given to me by one person Lefaisa has always criticized me for in secret, she is this second wife of mine, Morongoe. Lefaisa always criticizes me for having married her as a second wife, and sometimes I believe it is for this reason that he has cancelled my son's marriage to his daughter."⁸⁶

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And when eventually Morongoe, Seobi's second wife, explains to Phephei, his son, why she wanted to poison her husband this is how the conversation goes.

"MORONGOE: How I have told you all, but I wish also to tell Seobi in your presence because I now wish to return to my people so that I may get married to someone else; I am fed up of being responsible for the breakage of the love affairs of other people, indeed I live in constant fear when I realize that Seobi has greater love for his first wife than he has for me, but even so their first love has diminished; all that remains for me now is just to confess to both of them and then to go away from here.

PHEPHEI: You indeed speak the truth, polygamy can never let people live in peace at all. Let me go and call Seobi for I have already sent word for Lefaisa to come here. You go into this room and wait for my return."⁸⁷

And later when Lefaisa meets Phephei this is the trend of the conversation between them:

"LEFAISA: By the way this woman says she wishes to confess?

PHEPHEI: Yes, in fact she wants Seobi to return her to her people, for she wishes to give up polygamy as she has found out that there can never be peace in a polygamous marriage, and she wishes to get married to another man, if it is possible."⁸⁸

The play ends with both Morongoe and Seobi making the following passionate speeches and public denouncements of polygamy. It is very much like what happens in the numerous incidents in church when members of the congregation make public confessions and testimonies.

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“MORONGOE: Now I realize that Lefaisa, your friend, who is your enemy today, had seen me when I put the poison into the beer, and it is for that reason that he knocked it from your hands, and spilled it. I plead with you, I pray you, I beg you and ‘Malirontso, with tears in my eyes I say, O, please you of the Bafokeng people, forgive me! I feel terrible about the manner in which I have destroyed your friendship with Lefaisa; I feel ashamed to think of the manner in which you had driven your son from your house, I am horrified of myself when I think of the many evil plans I tried, to make you hate your wife and lose your love for her. Now I end my words by requesting you to release me so that I may return to my people; and if I should suffer I won’t mind because I will have been responsible for my suffering; no one weeps for those who bring calamity upon themselves.

SEOBI: The blame is mine, I am to blame I who did not fear to take you into marriage though I had a wife. When you ask me to forgive you I also ask you to forgive me. O, my dear friend, Lefaisa, my honest helper, I dread to think how I have wronged you. May the word forgiveness be the dominant word today, and my son also whom I have driven away from his own home, may be also forgive me, that Mofokeng, wherever he may be. And you, Morongoe, you who I deceived with clever words, even though you are guilty of nearly spilling blood, that guilt of yours is made insignificant by what motivated you; as you have said, no one weeps for one who brings calamity upon himself, this which has happened to me now, and that which nearly happened to me, I brought them upon myself.”⁸⁹

Polygamy is an accepted custom among the Basotho people like the ones Mofokeng is writing about in this play. They see nothing wrong in it so that the words that come out of the mouths of Seobi and Morongoe, condemning this respected and time-honoured custom

are words coming out of the mouth of the converted Christian, Twentyman T. Mofokeng himself. It is the church speaking!

We now wish to take a glance at two books written by two authors from among the Zulus. The play, "The Girl Who Killed to Save" was written by H.I.E. Dhlomo and published by Lovedale Missionary Institution Press in 1935. And the novel "An African Tragedy" was written by R.R.R. Dhlomo and also published by Lovedale Press in the thirties. The two brothers have written these books in the English language and they had a combination of talents for journalism, music composition and authorship.

The play is based on a historical event which took place among the AmaXosa of the Cape Province in the year 1856. Umhlakaza a medicine man, and his daughter, Nongqause, tired of the oppression of the white invaders told the nation that they had communicated with the ancestors. The message of these great past brave warriors to the nation was that they had to destroy all their food and cattle and that on a certain day new herds would emerge from the ground, the country would be filled with quantities of grain and the ancestors would come out of the dead past armed to the teeth to drive the white men into the sea and rid the land of them for good. This great event was to take place on 27th February, 1857 and so for ten months there was a great destruction of food and animals. That day dawned as any other day and nothing happened. A terrible period of starvation set in and Umhlakaza and an estimated number of 20,000 men, women and children died, while about 15,000 cattle also had been destroyed, and the countryside was white with bones. Nongqause lived for years after this incident.

During this period of distress, many people sought refuge on the white farms and missions.

Dhlomo was written a beautiful play with lots of traditional music and dances in it, and he has given it an authentic African atmosphere. The author has also woven into this play the story of the missionaries and Christianity. He also sees this great heroic story of the Amaxosa

to rid themselves of white oppression as a story of salvation. Death and destruction helped to plant, cultivate and nurture the seeds of western civilization and Christianity. It would make an interesting study to compare this play with Ebrahim N. Hussein's "Kinjeketile" which he has based on a similar kind of historical event in Tanzania, the Maji Maji War of liberation against the Germans by Tanzanians in 1906. Hussein sees Kinjeketile's Maji as a unifying factor against the Germans and Dhlomo sees Nongqause's act as something that was essential to bring Christianity to the Amaxosa. The play is full of examples of the tremendous impact that Christianity has had on the author.

In scene III when the administrator, Brownlee, and Hugh, the Christian, speak about Nongqause's appeal to the people they have this to say:

"HUGH: Nongqause, the source of this drama, may accomplish in a short time, by means of an expensive method, what in the ordinary course of events would have taken generations of Christianity and education and administrative wisdom to do. The only thing to ask is whether or not the price she asked the people to pay is not too costly. The passing of time will, I believe, show that it wasn't too costly. If we believe in the doctrine of the survival of the fittest then we may excuse her by saying that those who may survive her purging and liberating test will be individuals physically and intellectually superior to the others. You have told us that some of the people already have shown their intellectual independence by being skeptical and refusing to kill their cattle. This reveals strong characters and keen minds not totally trammled by tradition, or enslaved by superstition."⁹⁰

Scene V opens in an interesting and revealing manner. It shows very clearly the author's mental attitude to Christianity and to the African. This scene happens many months after the event which Hugh describes as Nongqause's drama.

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“(Many months after, Interior of a Christian, but “raw” Xosa home; showing a room and a sick man lying in bed. Three women attending the patient talk in whispers and walk stealthily).

“LUMKA: Sh! He has fallen asleep. Be careful not to wake him up. Sleep soothes. In sleep the sick and healthy, poor and rich are all alike, you know. Poor Daba! Wakefulness brings pain. (Coves him up with care).

“MRS. DABA: O, O, Yo-o-o. I’m afraid. No hope my sisters, no hope for him. He may die. Oh! He will die. Yo! Yo!

“NOMSA: Don’t MaXaba, don’t. You will wake him up. He needs rest. Be calm and trust in God. Today, you know, things are different. Before that great Nongqause Famine, death was a fearful black thing. But today we know of our Lord and Saviour of whom the good missionaries preach. Today death means birth. We need not fear for Daba who is a baptized believer. We should pray, believe, work and wait. MaXaba God loves you. (Gently touching the covered up, and bundled MaXaba).

“LUMKA: (To Nomsa) Before he slept, did you give him the medicine the missionary brought?

“NOMSA: Yes, I did. But the old man, his father, insisted upon him taking also the herbal mixture brought in by Mdhlamkcmo, the herbalist. We give him both preparations alternatively.”⁹¹

All this Christian talk takes place only a few months after the “great Nongqause Famine” among the then “raw” and superstitious ancestor worshippers. Yes, of course, Christianity can perform miracles.

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Now, for us, here follows the most devastating piece of evidence. The play is about to end and Daba is dying. There is present the three women, a missionary, a doctor and a Xosa, Tiyo Soga, a new African missionary from Scotland, and all this only a few months after “the great Nongqause Femine.”

“DABA: (Suddenly sitting right up – unearthly expression on his face) MaXaba, Look! Listen! See the beautiful crowd singing? Ah! This is the host of those who perished in the Great Famine. Do you see those people, surrounding, thanking and laughing with Nongqause? They tell her that hunger and destitution drove them into the paths of life, led them to the missionary and his divine message; put them into the hands of god. So there is triumph in death; there is finding in death; there is beauty in death. Nongqause laughs as she tells them that she was really in earnest but was ignorant. They laugh and sing. They call her their liberator from Superstition and from the rule of Ignorance. These people are dressed, not in Karosses and blankets as we are but in Light – Light that makes it impossible to see their bodies or to distinguish their sex. (Bright light bathes his face, and he stretches out his trembling arms, and smiles). There she comes to us. I greet you Nongqause. Yes, I come. Yes, thank you, do lead me to the Master. O, Nongqause, the Liberator!

(Falls back dead)

Wife falls into the arms of Nomsa: Lumka closes Daba’s eyes and puts the blankets over his chest (the three women sobbing softly. Missionary sits at organ and plays. Others stand rigid with heads hung down).

Soft music fills the place.”⁹²

Now, we are not mocking when we say that the power and influences of Christianity over Dhlomo was so great that it could create miracles in just a few months after such a great famine. It could liberate easily those bound by superstition and the rule of Ignorance. It created Scottish trained African missionaries, and even produced

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organs miraculously in “raw” Xosa homes. Of course, Marxists always tell us that opium creates hallucinations in the minds of those who use it.

“An African Tragedy” is a novel in English by the Zulu Writer, R.R.R. Dhlomo, brother of the playwright we have just examined. Dhlomo, we learn from the Publishers’ Note, was educated at Ohlange and Amanzimtoti Institutions in Natal. He was a teacher and a mine-clerk in Johannesburg and was also a keen journalist. The Dhlomo of “An African Tragedy” most probably experienced the same Christian influences of his brother for he dedicates his novel,

“To all those who have not found God’s all in all this story – the humble effort of my inspiration – is with my innermost and fervent – feelings dedicated.”⁹³

Dhlomo explains in the Preface of the book that the story is about the causes that undermine the peacefulness and blessedness of the newly-founded homes of young married people as he had observed then in Johannesburg. The novel tells the story of a young Zulu teacher, Robert Zulu, who left his job at Siam Village School to seek his fortunes in the big city of Johannesburg to raise enough Lobola or Mahadi money for the girl he wished to marry. In Johannesburg, he meets with serious personal problems because of bad company such as prostitutes, drunkards and knife-happy Malawian (Blantyre card players). This young Christian teacher soon forgets all the good ways of life of his people and gets mixed up in a murder case which forces him to abandon all and flee for his life to his native home in Natal. Back at home two friends plan to get rid of him because they complain that since his return from Johannesburg he plays havoc with their girls and monopolizes them as if he were not married. So both Daniel Zibi and Jonathan Moya plan to “send him across the Jordan” which they eventually do by using a girl to be their bait. So very much like the Samson and Delilah story of the Bible.

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There is no doubt that Dhlomo believes that the problems that worry him and which he is writing about in his novel can only be solved by Christianity. To him Christian morality is the only panacea to the social problems of young married couples and young people generally. If they wish to be victorious and successful in life then they must cultivate the still small voice in such a manner so that in their struggle with the evil forces of the devil they can always hear it loud and clear as in the following instance in the story soon after Robert Zulu's arrival in Johannesburg.

“In his heart, Robert heard a soft, warning voice say:--‘Do not! You will be ruined! Think of your duty to God. Think of those you left behind you. Be a man!’ Yet another voice loud and insistent this time rang in his heart: ‘Pleasure is the essence of young people’s lives in Johannesburg. Enjoy it, man! You will be loved and admired by lovely, dancing ladies of fashion, if you mix up with the gay throng and let your money and clothes advertise you!’”⁹⁴

Now Dhlomo was writing when Johannesburg was prosperous and there was a great rush by black and white to the gold mines. There was money, there were slums, there was segregation (today apartheid) and there were all the other problems that are found in any prosperous large city. To Dhlomo all these social problems could only be removed by people being obedient to this still small voice and rejecting the loud and insistent voice.

The author believes that political problems also can be solved by Christianity. In the following extract he describes a scene and then immediately comments on it.

“At one end of the room an organ was being hammered by a drunken youth. Couples – literally fastened to each other – were swaying giddily wildly, to this barbaric time. In this mood young

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girls are deflowered in their youth. Yet we hear people wondering why there is so much license among young people.

“do these people who have the welfare of our nation at heart, ever visit these dark places and try to win back the straying youth?

“Carrying war only in clean and favourable surroundings; and preaching to the well-to-do and educated, is no remarkable and self-sacrificing warfare. War, if war it is, should be waged right into the enemies’ lines where the source of all evil is.

For after all is said and done what is the use of trying to unite our peoples when their offspring wallow in the mud – so to speak? Do Christians who profess to love God and seek to do his will ever visit such places – not as they do on Sunday afternoons when the people in the yards are already half mad with drinks and evil passions – but in the quiet during the week when these people are more amenable to reason?

Does it occur to their minds that these slaves of vice may be the sheep of whose welfare Christ spoke so eloquently and so feelingly in the 10th Chapter of St. John’s Gospel: Verse 16?

Pardon my digression, my poor effort being to write the story of Robert Zulu as he handed it to me for publication – not to presume to teach or preach.”⁹⁵

In fact though the author realizes his digressions too teach and preach, nevertheless, he does so throughout the entire story. Robert Zulu finds himself in positions, all the time, which cause the angels in heaven to hold their breath in fear and dismay. Now and again his mind fixes on the serious problems that face black people, for example the pass problem, but he believes that such political problems will only be solved through Christianity.

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In conclusion we wish to refer to the last chapter in the book entitled "God and Sinner". The two rivals of Robert Zulu at last get their girl friend to poison him and as he dies before his wife this is what happens.

"Those two young scoundrels had got him. For the first time in his life Robert Zulu felt the pressure of the Hand of God.

"Where is the Minister? He gasped. The Minister soon made his appearance. The air in the room became tense, and fraught with tragic issues ...

"My sins", Robert's voice broke the silence feebly.

"My sins are past forgiveness."

"Hush, my son", said the Minister fervently.

"Not past forgiveness, 'The Blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth us from all sins.'"⁹⁶

We wish now to quote in full the last part of this chapter because it illustrates quite clearly how easy it was for Dhlomo to digress from his main story in order to teach and preach. The lines that follow are the closing ones of the chapter just after Robert Zulu's death.

The rain began to fall with a fury of a storm. The Minister stood calmly before the awe-inspired gathering and opened his Bible read. "Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. Whither shall I go from thy spirit or whether shall I fall from thy Presence. If I ascend up into Heaven, Thou art there; Psalm 139 if I make my bed in Hell, behold thou art there; if I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea, even there shall Thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me.

'Yea, the darkness hideth not from Thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee!'

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He closed his Bible.
Had the Boundless Love of Jesus
Revealed itself to Robert Zulu during that
Brief hour of visitation?
Who knows?
'God moves in a mysterious way ...'⁹⁷

After all that we have said about the writings of these early writers they should prompt us more and more to find, read and analyze their works so that we may know the forces that have influenced the development of writing among African authors. In fact we believe we should begin to search for not only the writings but also other works of art. For example we know a man, in the Transvaal, who has two of the early paintings of Gerald Sekoto who has been living in Paris since 1947 as a painter. He bought these paintings for ten shillings each before Gerald left South Africa, but when we spoke to him in 1963 he would not part with those paintings for thousands of shillings

The two paintings "The Symphony of Labor" and "Starvation in the Midst of Plenty" are a political statement about the blackman's position in that country. It was in the political situation that Gerald Sekoto found his inspiration and creativity.

The powerful Christian influence which worked on Mofolo, Ntsikana, Mofokeng, Sekese and the Dhlomo brothers, and many others of that time whom we have not mentioned, had no effect on Sekoto. When he came onto the scene the political situation was hot just after the Second World War. Africa was engaged in the violent struggle of breaking the shackles of oppression and imperialism. And, therefore, Christianity had no fascination for him. He wanted freedom.

Chapter 48

Black Child

by

Peter Magubane

The education system for black children was formulated in 1953 by Dr. Hendrik Verwoerd, then Minister of Native Affairs and later Prime Minister. In 1953, he told Parliament that “if the native [meaning the black in South Africa] today, in any kind of school in existence, is being taught to expect that he will live his adult life under a policy of equal rights, he is making a mistake.”

Dr. Verwoerd introduced the Bantu Education Bill, which placed black education under one state department. Until then, black education, like that of other races, was under the control of the individual provinces. In his speech in Parliament, Dr. Verwoerd questioned the usefulness of teaching blacks about the kinds of England and Canada’s wheat exports, and added: “What is the use of teaching the Bantu child mathematics when it cannot use it in practice? That is quite absurd.” Dr. Verwoerd went on:

. . . if my department controls native education it will know for which types of higher profession the native can be trained, and where he will be able to use his knowledge to make a living. It will guide him, instead of allowing him to choose his own path in a direction where he cannot find a sphere of activity, thus becoming a frustrated and dissatisfied being. But apart from these persons who can serve their own people, there is the much greater number of natives who have to find a future in other forms of work. The latter should have a training in accordance with their opportunities in life, and no department will know better where and how great the opportunities are for the Bantu child.

It is this approach to education that still governs the schooling of blacks in South Africa. How long must these children suffer? How long is it going to take the government to realize that Bantu education overall is neither fair nor good for the black child and must be done away with? After all, this was what sparked off the June 1976 riots.

Although the bill became law, the debate on it in 1953 was heated. A Labor Party M.P., Mr. Leo Lovell, pointed out angrily that the real meaning of the bill was that black people were to be educated to become a commodity whose labor could be bought and sold “like a bag of corn.”

One of the selling points of Dr. Verwoerd’s program was economy: education was to be extended to all blacks without any increase of expenditure. This would be achieved by sticking to fundamentals – a knowledge of reading, writing and arithmetic, a sound knowledge of English, and a basic knowledge of Afrikaans. This was all the education he considered necessary for a black child. He was right that it would be economical; in 1980, the amount spent by the government for each black child’s education was one-tenth the amount spent for a white child.

Another issue Dr. Verwoerd introduced during the same debate was that of control. He said that if the state paid for the Bantu’s education, it should also control it. He forgot to consider that black parents also pay for Bantu education. Though their contributions may not cover the entire cost, many of them spend a large proportion of their earnings on the school fees which the government has always exacted from the parents of black – but not white – children in public schools.

Control was still an ideal twenty-three years later. On the day violence erupted in Soweto, Dr. Andries Treurnicht, Deputy Minister of Bantu Development and Education, told an Afrikaans newspaper that the policy that Afrikaans should be taught side by side with English in black schools had been applied with great tolerance. “In white areas where the government provides the buildings, give the subsidies and pays the teachers, it is surely our right to decide on the language dispensation,” he said. (By “white areas” he meant all those parts of South Africa that are not designated “Homelands.” Soweto, though all its inhabitants are black, is part of a white area.) Dr. Treurnicht said he had been aware that dissatisfaction was brewing in Soweto; nobody knew better than the Afrikaner the dangers of forcing people to use a language. But it had been felt that a

knowledge of both English and Afrikaans would be to the pupils' advantage.

Since the riots, black schools have been permitted not to use Afrikaans as a medium of instruction, though it is still a compulsory subject of study. But the government has moved to make further protests ore difficult. A new Education and Training Act, passed in 1980 and to be implemented gradually beginning in 1981, will make education for blacks compulsory, though still not free. The act is designed to shift the role of containing the restlessness of black youth from police to parents. Parents and guardians who fail to ensure their children's attendance at school will be liable to a fine or imprisonment. Parents, already burdened with school fees, will hardly be able to afford to flout the law.

So far, boycotting classes has been the best means of protest available to students. Now that the consequences of their actions will be borne by their families as well as themselves, their political activity will inevitably be restricted.

The Education and Training Act was passed in spite of the opposition of educators like Professor Michael Ashly, Dean of the Educational Faculty at the University of Cape Town, who disagrees strongly with making education compulsory at this point when the grievances that underlay the boycott are still unresolved. He believes that compulsory education should not be introduced until at least 90 percent of the children who would be affected by it are already enrolled in school. Instead of making education compulsory in the present unsettled climate and thereby risking political confrontation, the department ought to concentrate on building up the system. This would include new schools and classrooms, repair to schools damaged during the riots, elimination of double sessions and platoon systems, and more and better teachers. Steps should also be taken to reduce the high drop-out rate. As it is, students will be forced into a grossly inadequate system.

It is not just through the schools that the government affects the lives of black children. A whole range of oppressive and humiliating laws combine with poverty to make it difficult for black parents to create a stable family life, or even to maintain their sense of dignity in the eyes of their sons and daughters.

One of the white man's legislative measures most bitterly resented by the blacks is the influx control laws, which restrict the movement of blacks from the rural areas to the urban areas, virtually reducing them to the status of prisoners in their own land. These laws require all men and women over sixteen years of age to carry a passbook. Without a passbook, a person cannot obtain work, get married, own a house, or travel-and even with it, before he can do any of these things he must get his passbook stamped with permission from the authorities. A man from the rural areas, if given permission, can work in the urban areas, but only in certain classified jobs: for example, as a garbage collector, a cook, a gardener, or a road digger. Those who go into classified jobs find themselves living in what are called hostels, in the most inhuman conditions. These men cannot have their wives, girlfriends, or children to stay with them.

Another hated law devised by the government is the migratory labor law. It is a proven fact that not one of the rural areas is economically viable. The government had to devise the migratory labor law to enable blacks to move at controlled periods to the rich mines to seek work under a contract system. The law forbids men to take their families with them to the mines, fostering the most complicated and cruel social and emotional problems in men who are suddenly bachelors and women who are suddenly grass widows.

Life for blacks from the urban areas is little better. In Soweto the living conditions overall are appalling, except for the lucky few who are rich and can afford to have beautiful houses in Dube, Rockville, a section of Orlando West called Beverly Hills, and a new area being developed called Selection Park. The ordinary basics of civilized life such as street lighting, housing, shopping facilities, and cultural

centers are grossly inadequate in Soweto. Only now are shopping centers being built in some parts of the township.

The races continue to drift further and further apart under a government that is not prepared to back down on any of the racial and security laws which are the cause of this state of chaos.

In the tragic South African situation, it has been difficult for the various non-white races – the blacks, the “coloureds” and the Indians – to perceive themselves as one oppressed people, because the country’s racial laws are calculated from the old theory of “divide and rule.” The riots brought a shock to the government, for black awareness and identification with blacks was registered on a large scale amongst coloureds. In Durban, the Indian students of Westville University boycotted classes in solidarity with fellow blacks. Both in Cape Town and at the University of Western Cape, coloureds demonstrated against the shootings in the black townships of Soweto, Guguletu, and Nyanga. This was the first time that coloured schoolchildren demonstrated in solidarity with the children of Soweto openly on such a scale..

As rioting spread from Soweto throughout the country, it was clear that the blacks were rejecting the whole concept of white rule and its values and norms. This awakening of a people was long overdue.

Yet many black parents are disturbed by the increasing radicalism of their children. Percy Qoboza, editor of the *Post* in Johannesburg (a leading black newspaper, which the government forced to close early in 1981), expressed the problem in an address to the Ikageng Women’s Association in April 1979:

How many times have we heard the anguished cry of fathers and mothers who daily tell us their sons and daughters are only 15 years of age but the political views they express are frightening? Your child shares in your sense of indignity when you are stopped outside your yard and asked to produce your passbook. Your child shares in our sense of outrage and anger

when police arrive in your house in the middle of the night and take you away, throw you into jail without trial, and for weeks, even months, refuse your wife the right to see you.

As the police cars drive off into the night, they leave behind seeds of hatred in the hearts of your small kids. This is the cruelty under which the children have to be brought up in Soweto.

In South Africa, from the moment black children are born they taste oppression. Many of them are forced to become adults at an early age. Often when a child in Soweto reaches one year it is left in the care of its brother or sister, who may be about eight years old, while the mother leaves home as early as 5:00 a.m. to go to work as a domestic in the suburbs of Johannesburg or in a factory. The love that every child needs is rarely given to a black child. Instead, the black mother spends the whole day working and giving all her affection to a white employer's child. By the time the mother gets home she is very tired and there is not enough time, love or care left over for her own children. It is amazing that, out of all these sufferings, so many black children still manage to become normal adults.

The little child left to look after a younger sibling is responsible for cooking, cleaning the house, washing the clothes and paying the house rent. If these chores are not properly done or a slight mistake made, the poor child gets blamed as if he were an adult, not a child. He is only a child when it suits the mother, and is otherwise subject to harsh treatment.

Most black children don't know what toys look like. The toys they know are home-made ones, put together from tomato boxes and wire. Only children from well-to-do homes can afford to have toys from stores.

These babies left in the care of other babies are bound to suffer from numerous diseases, particularly those connected with malnutrition. Even in the rural areas, where mothers stay home but husbands are away for months at a time, you find a lot of malnutrition and cases of

the protein-deficiency disease kwashiorkor. The women are unable to cultivate the land because it is so dry, and their husbands send very little money to them to maintain the children.

I remember going to the Transkei in 1976 to do a story on life in the Homelands. In a village called Ngcuka, near Tsolo, east of Umtata, I found a ten-year-old child vomiting in the street. His stomach was painfully distended. I asked his mother what was the matter with him, but she didn't know. He had been eating as usual, but had been vomiting for several days. I took the child and mother to the nearest hospital, where he was examined and marasmus was diagnosed. This is another disease caused by malnutrition. The soft porridge which was all the mother could provide for the child to eat simply did not contain the protein he needed.

In 1979, I did a story on malnutrition in Natal. At the Charles Johnson Memorial Hospital in Nqutu there were five wards of children suffering from kwashiorkor. That particular part of the country has the largest percentage of children with the disease, but in the whole country it is only black children who suffer from kwashiorkor. South Africa has no reason to have so many cases with all the food it exports. Instead of being exported, food should be given to the needy people in the country.

South Africa is one of the few countries in the civilized world where child labor is still an issue. We do have a Children's Act, but it protects only the white child. Black children are not protected, and often their families' poverty forces them to work, at wages that are cruelly exploitative.

In urban areas, children are employed by the newspaper industry to sell papers. Both the English and the Afrikaans companies employ and grossly underpay them. They start to assemble as early as 3:00 a.m. At 5:00 a.m. they are taken to different points to begin their round of selling. After selling the morning papers, they take a short break before starting on the afternoon shift. When the afternoon

takings have been counted, they are brought home. At the earliest, they get home by 8:00 p.m.

The situation on the farms is even worse. In an agricultural country like ours, it is perfectly natural and healthy that children should help with light tasks around the farms, but there are certain guidelines that should surely be complied with. First of all, I do not believe that very young children should be separated from their parents for long periods to work on the farms. Secondly, farmers who employ children during harvesting should take the greatest care to see that they do only the very lightest work; that they do not have to work long hours; and that they be given nutritious food and enough water. And most important, they should not be allowed to work at the expense of their education. All of these guidelines are consistently ignored on the farms of South Africa.

Between 1958 and 1967, and again in 1979, I was drawn closer to child farm labor issues through my work with *Drum Magazine*. During these years I visited a number of farms in the Eastern Transvaal region that produced potatoes, maize, pumpkin, tomatoes and other vegetables.

Some of the children I spoke to on my visits complained bitterly about their wages, food, accommodations and working conditions. The youngest child I spoke to said she was nine years old. Little boys and girls who should be at school or at home under their mother's care are digging potatoes and loading pumpkins for white farmers in the Eastern Transvaal. Some of the children are recruited from far-off Sekhukhuneland, the Transkei, Ciskei, Bophutatswana, and Weenen in Natal. Many come under a nine-month contract. The farmers bring them from their homes at the start of the nine months, and take them back at the end; they have neither the money for transport nor any free time to go home for a visit during the time of the contract. Others are from the local townships. Children are paid the equivalent of about 50¢ a day.

Farmers provide transportation for the local children to be picked up from their homes as early as 6:30 a.m. and brought back after sunset. On the job, these children are provided with porridge, no meat.

Farm-working children are supervised by a black foreman. This foreman has orders to report any strangers discovered on the farm talking to workers. On a number of occasions I was told that I should not talk to the child laborers or take photographs, but sometimes I managed to convince the foreman to let me talk to them and take photographs. On other farms, I was simply told that no strangers were allowed and I should leave immediately.

In 1979, I went to the Eastern Transvaal in the Delmas, Leslie, Bethal, Kinross and Caroline areas to conduct a survey of migrant farm laborers on the contract system. At an old dilapidated white farmhouse in the Delmas area lived a group of eighty Xhosa laborers from Lady Frere, ranging in age from twelve to forty. These men, women, boys and girls were living under appalling conditions. They had arrived in February of 1979 to work on a farm belonging to a man named Sam Hirschowitz. When recruited, they were told that they would be paid good money and have good accommodations and food. "Our travel documents were taken away from us and given to the farmer for safekeeping," Mrs. M. Nohombi Matyulweni told me. "If we want to leave before the contract expires, the farmer refuses to give our documents back, so we are made to work until we have completed our contract. If we should get ill, our money is deducted for the number of days absent, and you are not taken to the doctor immediately. It is only when you become seriously ill that the boss boy takes you to see a doctor. The farmer pays for our medical expenses and later deducts it out of our salary. . . . Some children have gone back to their homes in the Transkei, leaving behind their documents and their pay. If I had my way, I would run away."

None of the children I spoke to had ever been to school. They all lived in the dilapidated farmhouse, which was filthy. One of the boys described it as a "cattle corral." "We can't even see the cement flooring because of the caked dust," he said.

A typical farmhouse, complete with veranda during its better days, it had no doors or windows when the laborers came to live in it. There was no furniture in the house except for the foreman's room. Some of the workers, mostly young boys, lived in an outhouse not far from the main house. It was about 10 feet long by 8 feet wide. There were no electric lights or running water. The water was drawn from a stream some distance away; for light, they relied on the sun, diesel lamps, and cooking fires. Improvised mattresses were made from sacks and other material, including dirty, ragged blankets and articles of clothing. The floors were cracked and littered with mealie husks, cobs and dirt. During my visit to this farm three young girls gave birth in that filthy farmhouse without running water or any medication. After seeing this place, I could no longer contain myself. I drove back to Johannesburg and gathered clothing and food from friends in the city. I was able to feed the laborers for about three weeks before they returned home. I also got a doctor to visit the farm with me. Dr. Selma Browdie was amazed and shocked when she spoke to some of the children in their filthy home.

In the Weenen district in natal, children of as young as six are collected by trucks in the morning and taken to the farms. They are not provided with any food – they have to bring their own. These children work from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. Some are paid in money, others are given potatoes or tomatoes. One of the farmers in the district said it was better for him to employ children than adults because children can bend for a long time. Harvesting and planting require bending. My colleague and I asked the farmer why the children were not at school; did he not realize that it is an offense to employ children? His answer was: "it is not an offense to employ black children. I'm doing them a favor by giving them work. Without work they would starve." During the summer months it is unbearably hot; yet these children spent the whole day exposed to the sun.

In some cases children are made to work for land tenancy. This means they work on the fields to enable their parents to stay on the

farms. Parents who have two children will have one child work for six months while the other one is at school, and vice versa.

My last venture into the farms was in Delmas. My colleague and I went up to a farm, but before we could enter the gate, which was out of bounds for visitors, the farmer called on us to stop. He was followed by a young white policeman. They came up to us demanding to see our passes and wanting to know what we were doing in the area. I explained that we were doing a story on child farm labor, and pointed out that we were not on anybody's property. The farmer then pulled out a revolver, threatening us and insisting that we wait in the company of the policeman while he went to get a witness. He got into his car and drove off. I asked the policeman whether we were under arrest. He said no. We left immediately, knowing that the policeman would not be able to protect us if the farmers gave us a beating.

In the whole of South Africa you will not find any white children working on farms. The system is meant to kill the black child spiritually, morally and mentally at a very tender age. By the time black children reach adulthood, they have nothing much left.

South Africa has silenced nearly all the organizations that were outlets for black protest. The students' organizations were almost the only ones left, and in 1977 the government banned the South African Students' Movement (SASM) and its offshoot, the Soweto Students' Representative Council (SSRC), for their part in the Soweto riots.

In May 1979, judgment was passed in the trial of the "Soweto Eleven": the judge found eleven members of the SSRC, some of whom were only sixteen at the time of the riots, guilty of sedition. They had already been in jail for over two years. The judge took into account their youth and the time already served, and let seven of them off with five-year suspended sentences. Perhaps he also feared the anger of the black people throughout the country who were watching the trial anxiously. The longest jail sentence he gave was four years.

But the ones whose sentences were suspended did not get off free. They will have to tread carefully for the length of their sentences – if they offend the law in any way during that time, they may have to serve the whole sentence in jail after all. It is not always easy for a black person in South Africa to avoid breaking the law. Certainly, it will be difficult for them to be involved in any kind of politics.

Meanwhile every year more black children are old enough to be angry. Their elders, the ones who ought to be leaders, are all in prison, or banished. The children's anger will keep boiling up without direction.

Children continue dying to save the world. The tragedy is that South African laws are made for the benefit of the white minority and to persecute the black majority. Let our children grow up like other children of the civilized world. The future of South Africa lies in the hands of the children. Without children there is no tomorrow.

Chapter 49

Language, Literature and the Struggle for Liberation in South Africa

by

Daniel P. Kunene

The contemporary South African scene makes exacting demands on the writer who chooses to accept the challenges of the current political realities of that beleaguered country. 'Chooses' is almost certainly an inept word in this context. Nadine Gordimer, the noted South African novelist and critic, has observed that 'Black writers choose their plots, characters and literary styles; their themes choose *them*.'⁹⁸ In other words, the themes arising out of the contemporary milieu in that country stare the writer in the face daring him to ignore them. If he does, he will be irrelevant to the human drama daily enacted there. If he accepts the challenge, he inevitably situates his characters within the daily trials that surround the black person's life.

⁹⁸ Nadine Gordimer, *The Black Interpreters*, Johannesburg: SPRO-CAS/Ravan, 1973, p. 11.

'In this sense,' says Gordimer, 'the writer is the voice of the people beyond any glib political connotations of the phrase.'⁹⁹

The writer is the synthesizer and conduit of the concerns of the society for which he claims to speak. As such, he may be regarded as not only having a stronger-than-ordinary sensitivity to the human problems of his milieu, but also a strong sense of empathy with his audience. Since, however, language, in the sense of speech, is his only means of reaching that audience, his task becomes complicated and more difficult if any of his readers employ languages different from his own. In his effort to teach them, therefore, it is incumbent on him to be linguistically versatile and temperamentally attuned to their emotional needs. This is a challenge that faces every committed writer in South Africa. The message is one. It is the message of liberation and the creation of a new society. The linguistic environments in which the audiences have been nurtured differ to varying degrees.

The widest gap, both linguistically and culturally, is that between white and black South Africans. This is mentioned here because the need arises every so often for the black writer to address his message to his white neighbour. This division between white and black is how all discussions of the South African socio-political situation begin, or should begin. After all the problem in that country is the problem of colour politics. White racist supremacists have, over the years, unleashed a relentless propaganda, both direct and by insinuation, that has defined hard lines that divide the people by colour, *not by class*. We are a despised people for the simple reason that we are black. Steve Biko has said that:

In South Africa, after generations of exploitation, white people on the whole have come to believe in the inferiority of the black man, so much so that while the race problem started as an offshoot of the economic greed exhibited by white people. It has now become a serious problem of its own. White people

⁹⁹ Gordimer, p. 11.

now despise black people, not because they need to reinforce their attitude and so justify their position of privilege but simply because they actually believe that black is inferior and bad.¹⁰⁰

This message is conveyed also by Walter Rodney in his *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*. And, needless to say, it is a lesson that has, unfortunately, had to be learnt by blacks in the process of trying to cope with their social environment. The writer addressing himself to the white oppressor has to control his anger at the same time as he finds ways of making the English language do his bidding.

The writer's first duty is, of course, to maintain a dialogue with his black brothers and sisters whom he must constantly inspire with the message of hope. In doing so, he must come to terms with the fact that these brothers and sisters speak either Zulu or Sesotho or Setswana or Xhosa or Sepedi or Ndebele and so on. So the linguistic challenges multiply. The immediately contemporary South African situation highlights these problems in a most singular manner. This is because one of the demands on the author today is that he, like the oral narrator, must stand face to face with his audience and harangue them with his own voice. Again, as in a typical oral narrative situation, the audience feedback is immediate and not always concurring. But that is another problem to which we shall return. For now, we wish to draw attention to the challenge posed by the fact that the audience receiving the writer's or poet's or dramatist's message is in most cases a multilingual one. What must the committed artist do in order to overcome this problem, or perhaps even make it in his favour?

When the struggle has progressed to a certain point, the demon of fear is conquered. The politics of fear are replaced by the politics of confrontation, for the oppressor can now speak to his oppressor from

¹⁰⁰ Steve Biko, *I Write What I Like* (A selection of his writings edited with a personal memoir by Aelred Stubbs, C.R.), San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1978, p. 88.

a position of equality. This stage was reached quite decisively in the late sixties and early seventies. For the writer, the problem of choosing a suitable linguistic medium then becomes more complex. For, let it be stated almost superfluously, that white people as a group do not know the African languages, and any black wishing to talk to them has to defer to this white man's deficiency. The most recent example of this is the English-language poetry that gushed out of the students of Soweto and other black townships following the bloody massacre of school children by police beginning 16th June, 1976 and continuing with varying degrees of savagery to this day. The students struggled with the English language, they struggled with form, but their message was strong and unequivocal, and while also serving to galvanize the struggling masses, its most prominent feature was that it was in the face of white authority.

This, then, is the broad context within which the writer has to choose the language or languages he will use.

Creating a militant poetry in the African languages is a challenge that faced the oral poet in the nineteenth century as the Boers encroached more and more on the African's land during the so-called Great Trek and beyond. The contemporary young activist poet of the seventies and eighties can take courage from, and also feel humbled by, the fact that his activity is nothing new. He has a tradition to fall back on. He has poetry of high caliber that used powerful imagery and direct exhortation, that was created in the heat of the wars of dispossession. His courageous forefathers resisted the invaders, and his artistic predecessor immortalized them in his poetry of praise. He is therefore able to measure his own efforts against his glorious past. One must emphasize here first the necessity to become aware of this poetry, for I have no doubt that many of the younger poets have, unfortunately, never availed themselves of it. The pride and humility which will, of necessity, follow such an exercise will be to their advantage.

Here is an example. During the War of Disarmament (also known among the Basotho as *Ntoa ea Lithunya* or The Gun War) in the latter

part of the nineteenth century resulting from the British Administration's decision to deprive the blacks of their guns, the Basotho found themselves split into the 'Loyalists' (Mateketa) and the 'Rebels' (Marebele). One of the most outstanding rebels who fought personally in many of the battles was Chief Maama. In his glorious career, he performed many outstanding feats including his killing of Erasmus, the savage Boer soldier who played havoc among Basotho warriors as he skillfully drove his equally fearsome grey horse into their midst. Maama therefore deserved the highest praise for his deed. Being himself a poet of no mean order, he composed a long poem based on the episode, creating numerous eulogies for himself in the process. Often Maama assumes a dramatic posture as he chooses to address himself to this or that audience, defined in the poem. To his peers and comrades-in-arms he says:

Le se mpate bahlankana beso!
Ha leke le re ken na ka mo thula!
Ha le re ken na ka bolaya pele?

Do not hide my actions, young men of my country!
Will you not say it was I who stuck him?
Will you not say it was I who killed first?¹⁰¹

To the white people, the enemy, whom he refers to as the white men 'by the sea', he speaks through the surviving Boer soldiers.

He refers to Erasmus as the 'child' of the white people for whom the message is intended:

Ba re: 'Re le tjee re tloha re tswa ntweng,
Re tswa kgabong ka ha Ramabilikoe.
Ka mona ka ha Mafa le ramabilikoe,
Ka mona ha Suhlane le Rampoi,
Kgalong la Boleka le la Mathebe,

¹⁰¹ Daniel P. Kunene, *Heroic Poetry of the Basotho*, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971, p. 60.

Eitse ha re bapala motho a wa.
Ngwan'a lona o jelwe ke Koeyoko,
O jelwe ke Koeyoko ya Letsie,
Koeyoko, Seja-bana-ba-makgowa?'

They said: 'As you see us here, we have just returned from
battle,
Ramabilikoe,
Not-far-from-her, at Mafa's and Ramabilikoe's,
Not far from here, at Suhlane's and Rampoi's,
At the mountain passes of Boleka and Mathebe,
It happened, while we were playing, a man fell.
Your child has been devoured by the Koeyoko,
He has been devoured by the Koeyoko of Letsie,
The Koeyoko, Devourer-of-the-children-of-the-white-man?'

Of course 'the white men by the sea' did not hear him. Neither were they intended to in a physical way, firstly because they were not present when the poem was recited, and secondly because the words spoken were in Sesotho. Why then does the poet engage in all the game-playing? The fact is that these words were all intended for the Basotho audience who derived pride, courage and a boost of their morale from the knowledge that their warrior was capable of doing such a deed to their enemy. The poet was sharing with the home-side, the Basotho, the sense of confidence, of daring the enemy. He was telling them there was no room for fear and diffidence in their ranks.

The Boers, in their northward wanderings, first met the Xhosa, then the Zulu, then the Basotho, and so on. (This is, of course, after they had virtually wiped out the San as 'vermin'). The poets in these language groups all composed poems similar to the one quoted above. There was a growing realization, however, that despite language differences and sometimes even conflicting interests at the local level, the new threat called for a united voice and united action. Politically this was to happen in a decisive way in 1912 when the first organization to unite all blacks under one banner was formed,

namely the South African Native National Congress which was later to become the present African National Congress of South Africa. This was a direct response to the formation of the Union of South Africa in 1910 under a constitution that excluded all blacks from participation in the political life of South Africa. The composition of the leadership strongly reflected this sentiment. It included John L. Dube (Zulu, President), Walter Rubusana (Xhosa, Co-Vice-President), and Sol T. Plaatje (Tswana, Secretary-General). It was a recognition of the fact that the Union united Boer and Briton, and brought the erstwhile independent provinces under one central government, in order to facilitate a more thorough exploitation of the blacks.

At about the same time as the war between the whites and the blacks was passing completely from the battlefield to the political arena, around the turn of the century, the blacks were consolidating their newly acquired skill of writing. The verbal artist was henceforth going to be able to write down his compositions on paper. Such well known writers as Thomas Mofolo, John L. Dube, S.E.K. Mqhayi, and Henry Masila Ndawo were producing the beginnings of a written literature. This period may be characterized as one in which written African literature was in its infancy. For reasons of survival, this literature largely steered clear of political themes. It also gave a wide berth to themes and concepts that might be considered offensive to the missionaries who, after all, owned and controlled the printing works and publishing houses.

Poetry, however, was another matter, for it was here more than anywhere else where war imagery could be, and was, easily adapted to the new phase of the struggle, or the new war whose warriors were the educated man, the political or civil leader, and so on. Heroic poetic techniques are found in abundance in poems of this nature in which persons of worth are praised while they live, and lamented when they die. An excellent example of this is provided by S.E.K. Mqhayi in his anthology of poems, *INzuzo*.¹⁰²

¹⁰² S.E.K. Mqhayi, *Inzuzo*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (The Bantu Treasury Series), 1957 (First published 1953).

Since this presentation is intended largely to examine the contemporary scene, we must, rather abruptly, take a giant leap into the sixties, the seventies and the eighties and see what happened, and is happening there.

This period is one characterized by a new political awareness referred to as the Black Consciousness Movement. What makes this period so unique is that, beginning in the late sixties and continuing throughout the seventies and into the present day, the young black students in the 'bush' colleges had been established by the government with the intention to control the minds of the students, yet, by a strange irony, it was precisely out of these colleges that a new and revolutionary definition of the struggle and the role of the black person therein were born. This was the political coming-of-age of the blacks. Steve Biko, the 'father' of Black Consciousness' stressed that the first prerequisite was self-liberation. He said that 'the most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed. If one is free at heart, no man-made chains can bind one to servitude.'¹⁰³ This underscores the need to conquer fear before one can stand up and declare one's own views with conviction.

The spirit of daring manifested itself in the political sphere through acts of defiance such as the workers' strikes in Durban and Port Elizabeth in the early-to-mid seventies. The workers knew that it was illegal for blacks to engage in strike action, and that they were risking heavy fines and sentences. Organizations such as the South African Students Organization (SASO), the Black People's Convention (BPC) came into existence. The word 'black' took on a new significance, symbolizing both the new sense of liberation and the unity of all oppressed under one, positive defining concept. Thus the intellectual process and political action reinforced and constantly redefined each other.

¹⁰³ Biko, p. 92.

For purposes of this discussion, the importance of this new sense of confidence, self-identity and lack of fear is that the white man suddenly became willy-nilly part of the black writer's target audience. We must therefore examine the question of communication, through literature, with white authority by blacks whose mother tongue English is not. Mongane Serote, one of the contemporary young black poets, interviewed by Michael Chapman in 1980, made the following significant statement: 'I am not English-speaking. I have worked hard at the English language. I didn't complete high school, and of course the English press made me very conscious of the fact that English isn't my home language. There was no way that could stop me from writing. I worked hard. I spent nights at the typewriter writing and re-writing.'¹⁰⁴ The most obvious follow-up question Michael Chapman might have asked, but did not, is 'Why then do you write in English?' To which Serote might conceivably have responded: 'If I wrote in my own language, this interview would not be taking place!' Or perhaps Serote might have said: 'If I wrote in my in my own language I could not convey to my oppressor and tormentor this important message: 'I do not fear you any more!'

It seems to me it is just as well that the question of why the contemporary black South African writers write in English should be asked, not by the white South Africans, English-speaking or otherwise, but by the black critics and ultimately by the black writers themselves. It is not a futile academic exercise, but a practical approach to a problem of communication. Surely there must be a strong reason why Serote would 'work hard at the English language.' It is one thing to spend 'nights at the typewriter, writing and re-writing.' It is quite another to decide what language this process is to take place in. Serote chose English. He could have 'spent nights at the typewriter writing and re-writing' in Sesotho. The question then is relevant and important: Why in English?

¹⁰⁴ Michael Chapman (ed.), *Soweto Poetry*, Johannesburg: McGraw-Hill Book Company, p. 114.

This question quite clearly sometimes bothers some of these writers, and they feel the need to confront it head-on. Siphso Sepamla wrote in 1976 that he had sometimes questioned the correctness of the English used by black writers, including himself. As regards the question whether English should be abandoned as a medium his answer is an emphatic 'No, never.' Later he declares his belief that 'writing in English is going to be strengthened' because of its common use on social occasions, the clamor for its use as a medium of instruction in schools, its use in industry, the influence of the English-language newspapers among blacks, and its use in the neighbouring black independent states.¹⁰⁵

I have no doubt the question, if seriously posed, would evoke a miscellany of responses, some flippant, some arrogant, some confused. Some people might even wonder why they hadn't thought about it before. A few might take it seriously. Perhaps some might even see some absurdity in performing poetry in English in the black townships. Some might have had experiences similar to those reported by Sepamla who says:

I owe nobody an apology for writing in English. Et inside me is this regret that at the moment there is a handicap that mars complete communication between me and my audience, particularly the black audience.

He believes there have been ominous rumblings of discontent in the black audiences, and that the artists may, in fact, be alienating the people:

When people talk of izifundiswa (the educated) or when they say khuluma isiZulu (speak Zulu) ha re utlwe bua seSotho (we do not hear, speak Sotho) then the divisions begin. Those who speak in English will tend to avoid such hecklers. And what will happen to the effort of uplifting ourselves and those down there? I think we have a serious problem here. I have watched

¹⁰⁵ Chapman, p. 117.

the same problem rear its head when such stage productions as *Sizwe Bansi is Dead and How long?* are presented. Either people have gone to sleep or they have shouted khulumani isiZulu. ..

¹⁰⁶

One wonders what questions arise in the minds of writers and performers faced with this hostile reaction from their audiences. Does this not make them doubt the wisdom of oral performances of this nature being carried out in English? One would hope that such performers would not be tempted, as Sepamla fears they might, to avoid black audiences who indulge in such interjections. If that were to happen, then the alienation would be complete.

When we go back to the interview of Serote by Chapman, then we see how the ironies multiply. Michael Chapman's next question to Serote is: 'Whereas your first two collections seem directed at both a black and a white audience, *No Baby Must Weep* (1975) indicates a distinct shift in perspective, and seems directed primarily at fellow blacks. Would you comment on this?' Serote: 'It's directed at Africans in particular. Look, I don't simply want to write for the colours of skins. I want to try to understand the complex issue of the scale of privileged positions in South African society, which includes the white, the Indian and the coloured – I have been called a 'kaffir' by all of them. This is complex, but I have become increasingly aware that it is the Africans who hold the tools of liberation in South Africa. And it is to the *No Baby Must Weep* is addressed.'¹⁰⁷

The claim that a book written in English is addressed to blacks makes no sense unless one specifies that it is for those blacks who have acquired enough English to be able to read and understand it. Then we would understand that it is not intended for the masses, counted in millions, who do not have that skill.

¹⁰⁶ Chapman, p. 116.

¹⁰⁷ Chapman, p. 114.

Ezekiel Mphahlele, interviewed in 1979 by Noel Chabani Manganyi makes a similarly surprising statement. Referring to the mid-fifties, he claims that the then-budding, elitist group of writers who were mostly journalists working for *Drum* magazine, wrote a proletarian literature'. 'People were really writing furiously in a lively, vibrant style. It was quite a style of its own, an English of its own. . . . There was, as I say, a new kind of English being written. Significantly, *it was the black man writing for the black man*. Not addressing himself to the whites. *Talking a language that would be understood by his own people. . . . Ours was really a proletarian literature.*¹⁰⁸ (my emphasis).

Even restricting one's comments to Johannesburg, one cannot see stories written in English reaching any significant number of workers, let alone the millions of rural Africans and migrant workers for whom *Drum* an urban magazine, was so totally irrelevant.

The problem with the *Drum* generation of writers is that they failed to place their writing within the context of the long tradition of verbal art, both oral and written, especially that devoted to the struggle. A knowledge of the tradition and an acknowledgement of its contribution to the long, continuous fight against the forces of oppression would have broken this self-imposed isolation and instilled a salutary sense of humility, if not of pride. It might also have opened the eyes of the *Drum* group to the fact that a proletarian literature can only be written in a language that is understood by the masses.

Mphahlele himself, commenting on the *Staffrider* generation of writers, strongly advocates this sense of tradition. 'What I see in *Staffwriter*' he says, 'is a real, vibrant literature. But it lacks a myth. By myth meaning this, what are you saying, that there is no tomorrow. That literature captures the agony of the moment. It has no resonance because it has no past either. It has no past to work on. We were just saying earlier that our present day writers have been cut off from the fifties. They don't even know that it existed. They think literature

¹⁰⁸ Chapman, p. 42.

begins with them. So there is no resonance going to the past and no resonance going to the future. This is what we must move beyond.'¹⁰⁹

Sound advice which, however, fails to come to terms with the fact that 'the fifties' were not the beginning African literature either. Mphahlele's dismissal, elsewhere, of African-language literature as 'Anaemic writing that is meant for juveniles'¹¹⁰ is too facile a way out. There is a bit more to African-language literature than that. What needs to be done is to break down these walls of isolation and let tradition flow.

The problem of language choice and what motivates the black writer to choose one language as against another is therefore also a problem of attitude. 'The fifties', no less than 'the seventies', failed to look at the literatures written in the African languages for guidance and inspiration. For, even though there was no 'school' as such, there is an unmistakable periodicity noted. There is no question in my mind but that the era of the oral heroic bard ought to be regarded as a literary period whose major instigating force was the immediate danger of the loss of land, property and liberty, a compelling motif and a unifying force.

Since writing meant that publication was the passport to reaching an audience, and the means of publication and dissemination were in the hands of someone other than the composer of the verbal art, the introduction of writing brought in a 'middle man' between the artist and his audience. The ideological and commercial interests of this 'middle man' became a powerful instrument which he used to control the artist. That is why written prose fiction showed so little of the daring and outspokenness of the oral poetry and prose. It is curious, however, that written poetry and song were less inhibited in their criticism. Reuben Caluza composed the words and music of this song 'i-Land Act' which was a bitter attack on the notorious Land Act

¹⁰⁹ Noel Chabani Manganyi, *Looking Through the Keyhole*, Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1981, pp. 36-37.

¹¹⁰ Ezekiel Mphahlele, *The African Image*, New York, Praeger, 1974, p. 205.

of 1913.¹¹¹ Many similar songs were written by other composers whose intention was to keep up the African's awareness of his plundered rights. Needless to say that in order for 'the fifties' and 'the seventies' to have had the greatest possible impact, they should not have forgotten or ignored these earlier artists of the struggle.

Not all African writers in English are motivated by a sense of commitment to social change. I would suggest that for some, the promise of wide exposure and possible recognition in the white-dominated field of literary criticism is a strong factor. This ensures that even a mediocre piece of writing will at least be talked about, if not given a prominence way out of proportion to its merit. It is therefore relevant to ask what makes a mediocre poem written in English a better poem than an excellent one written in Sesotho? Ms. N.M. Khaketla, one of the best poets I know, wrote many a poem in her native language Sesotho in which she indicted the British Colonial Administration in Lesotho before independence. Her husband, also a poet in addition to his other literary activities, had just been expelled from his teaching job at the Basutoland (now Lesotho) High School for political reasons. Their daughter, born shortly after this event, was named *Molelekeng* ('Chase-him-away/Chase-her-away'). Mrs. Khaketla wrote a poem¹¹² in which she wove the name of her daughter into her husband's (and of course her own) harassment at this time. The poem is written in dramatic form in which the persona assumes different roles and creates a lively contrapuntal dialogue among the several 'voices' or 'characters'.

From the third line of Stanza 4 and for the whole of Stanza 5, the persona's voice is interrupted by a white man's voice, a government

¹¹¹ *The Natives Land Act of 1913*, one of the early pieces of legislation passed by the government of the Union of South Africa founded in 1910. The aim of the Act was to remove Africans occupying land on white-owned farms (which meant virtually every single farm in South Africa). It created hundreds of thousands of homeless people taking to the roads with their cattle and meager personal belongings, not knowing where they were going.

¹¹² N.M. Khaketla, 'Molelekeng,' in her collection of poetry *Mantsopa* Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1963, pp. 10-13.

official in Maseru. The voice speaks through a letter the white man is writing. This could also be considered to be the persona-as-poet's husband suspending his own words in order to quote the white man, who says, *inter alia*:

Stanza 4 (partial)

'Moshemane ha a ikentse kheleke,
A bile a khanya ka ho bua haholo,
O tla ruta bana ho rola liflihong.
Le 'metsetse kamose, Forei Setata
Etlere ha bua polesa le thunye
.....

'When a boy brags of being so eloquent,
And makes a habit of speaking too much,
He will teach the little ones to put aside their modesty.
You must throw him across the river, into the Free State
Where, the moment he opens his mouth, a policeman will shoot
him.'

.....

Stanza 5 (partial)

.....

'Moshemanehali enoa oa khantsa
E ka hoki, o ja a ntse a roar,
O halala sengoatho le phophi ea lebese,
O batla polokoe le khameo e lolobetse.'

This overgrown boy is too proud,
He is like a pig that grumbles as it eats,
He is not satisfied with a piece of bread and a drop of milk
But demands the entire loaf plus a milk-pail full to the brim.'

A wealth of imagery. Sesotho proverbs rearranged and woven into the fabric of the poem. A name, a child's name, undergirding the major poetic image, the 'chase-him-away' image. And then the inevitable return, the epic hero come back to oust the usurper. The richness of the imagery, the easy flight into metaphor, symbol, and

allegory, are all facilitated by the fact that N.M. Khaketla draws her inspiration and her testimony from the constantly bubbling spring, the *Ntswanatsatsi*, of Sesotho culture. Words are released from their daily meanings to re-emerge with cultural codings that engage the reader in the fascinating game of 'do-you-recognize me?': 'My mother had not even the smallest piece of cloth to cover her naked shoulders;' 'My father rejects me though I have come from his loins;' 'My little mother is not telling the truth;' 'The beast I earned;' 'I am fit to be given a wife.' *Mother, father, little mother, beast (cow), wife*, these are surrogates for meanings much deeper than their surface denotations. Yet Mrs. Khaketla never got to be interviewed by any of the numerous white self-styled experts of African literature. But that is not the real tragedy. The tragedy is that African-language writers of Mrs. Khaketla's caliber were never taken as a source of inspiration by either 'the fifties' or 'the seventies', for 'the fifties' and 'the seventies' considered themselves sufficient unto themselves. So they never learnt humility.

One can mention many other cases of militant writing, Jac Mocoancoeng's poem 'Exoda'¹¹³ uses the metaphor of the movement of the Israelites out of the house of bondage, to preach the message of freedom. No white man read it, for it was written in Sesotho. S.M. Mofokeng wrote the play *Senkatana*¹¹⁴ based on an old Sesotho legend in which the young man, Senkatano, left alone with his mother after an enormous monster has swallowed all living things, goes and slays the monster with his single spear and releases its captives. The message of liberation again is quite clear. No white critic read it. But again the tragedy is that no black man seems to have read it either. It is a safe bet that one day when an African writer received the Nobel Prize, it will not necessarily be for the most meritorious work, for no other reason than the linguistic inaccessibility of many excellent

¹¹³ Mrs. B.M. Khaketla's middle name, which means 'Surprise,' 'Amazement,' etc. It is translated in the poem as 'Surprised-One' since it is used as the proper name of a person.

¹¹⁴ Jac. G. Mocoancoeng, *Tseleng ea Bophelo ie Lithothokiso tse Ncha*, Johannesburg: Witwatersrand University Press (The Bantu Treasury Series), 1955.

works to those entrusted with the frightful task of selecting the winner.

Once the black writers confront the questions squarely and honestly: Should we or should we not write in English? it is predictable that the answer, by an overwhelming majority, would endorse the continued use of English. However, the affirmative answer would result from reasons as complex as the South African situation itself. Having come to that conclusion, they would have to devise a *modus vivendi* whereby they can retain the respect of their black audiences at the same time.

I would suggest, as the first prerequisite, that, in reading to black audiences, the readers *must* read in one or other of the black languages of South Africa. It doesn't really matter whether one reads a Zulu poem to a predominantly Sesotho audience. There might be no way of determining this predominance, anyway. A mosotho in such an audience will appreciate your Zulu or Xhosa or Ndebele, etc., even if he may not understand much of what you are saying, just as readily as he will feel offended by your English which to him is a measure of your alienation from your own people.

Given the government's ethnic zoning of the townships, an assessment of the linguistically dominant group in any given township audience might not be too difficult a task, thus turning this divide-and-rule trick into advantage. One is constantly inspired by the fact that the South African Students organization (SASO) and the Black Consciousness Movement arose out of a ghetto college which was subverted by the students to a beneficial use quite in opposition to its original purpose.

When the poets read in the situations described above, they must never miss the opportunity to explain that they also *have* to write and read in English because they have a message for the white oppressor who would otherwise not understand what they are saying. They might even go to the extent of translating some of their more militant poems into an African language, just so that their audience might

partake of the joy of this new-found emancipation For it is an act of self-emancipation to be able to confront your oppressor face to face and tell him in uncensored language what you think of him. The poetry suddenly becomes alive with the I (Black man) you (White man) confrontation, in which the accusatory 'you' is hurled like a barbed spear at the white oppressor. The language explodes with swear words like *shit* and *fuck*, and images of violence such as *throw up*, *vomit*, *throttle*, *retch* which are scattered all over the poetry. Yet these are neither swear words nor words of violence. They are an expression of freedom as legitimate as the shouts, 'I'm free!' They constitute an explosion of the bottled-up feelings of forced restraint over these many centuries. Sharing this feeling will make any oral performance session much more consciously an educational event aimed at consciousness-raising.

Composing originally in an African language and later translating into English may be another way of boosting the morale of one's black audience. Let the poem be born in the black language. Such poets would be in good company. Ngugi wa Thiong'o, after all, reached the hearts of the Kikuyu people much more readily and deeply when he reverted to writing in Kikuyu; Mazisi Kunene composes in Zulu and translates into English. They would also be in the company, of course, of the old oral poets and creators of myths whose tradition continues in some contemporary poets writing in praise of modern heroes. As regards the co-called 'coloureds,' the Indians and the Malay, the principle would be the same as for the Africans – continue writing in their languages, i.e. the naturalized forms of English and Afrikaans, which are found, to varying degrees, in writers like Alex la Guma, Adam Small, Achmat Dangor, and so on. Of course these groups will have to make an effort to acquire some knowledge of an African language. After all the black man has been, and continues to be, the one called upon to meet all the other groups in *their* territory, linguistically speaking. Such efforts should be serious, and not mere tokens.

In summary, we may state some of the writer's problems as follows:

Firstly, even as the story gets born in his head (hopefully in his heart as well) the writer must seriously ask himself: For whom is my story intended? Bearing his audience constantly in mind will help him focus his plot and motivate his characters with a great deal more purpose and conviction. He will, hopefully, realize, even as he picks up his pen, that a story intended for the proletariat, for the millions and millions of labourers, ought to be written, not in English, but in the languages of the people.

If the story is intended for a readership that includes English-speaking people, both in South Africa and elsewhere, then of course it will be inevitable to write it in English. This will facilitate communication among all shades of blacks in South Africa. One way to achieve this is, of course, to engage in extensive translation projects with a clear purpose in selecting the works to be translated. This means translating both into and out of English.

Secondly, the writer might take his cue from the many African-language writers who have stated their intended didactic messages quite openly in prefaces and introductions to their stories. Not that writers *need* to use prefaces and introductions. One does not want to summarize a story for one's readers. The message is to be carried in the mind of the writer as he begins to write, and constantly thereafter. This will determine whether the work is intended to be a contribution to the struggle, or is purely for entertainment, or to satisfy the writer's ego, or as a commercial venture, and so on. Many of these are, in any case, not mutually exclusive. We are talking more about emphases than mutual preclusions.

Thirdly, assuming a given work has a didactic purpose, and given further the necessity for oral communication with audiences in the townships throughout South Africa as the writers and poets perform their works, the question arises whether such sessions are used optimally to raise the political consciousness of the audiences involved. As stated earlier, the artist here has the opportunity to engage his audience, and be engaged by them, in a direct dialogue in which ideas are shared, something possible only in oral

performances. When the audience interrupts and shouts 'Theth' isiXhos, asiva!' or 'Bolela Sepedi, ha re kwe!' and so on, the performer must immediately engage the interrupter, whom I refuse to call a heckler, in a dialogue describing the problem of language choices, of audiences targeted, and so on as already described above. It is important, and it bears repeating, that a member of the audience who is suddenly moved to say something, whether the comment is approving or critical, is not heckling, but is asking for a dialogue.

Fourthly, the oral performer or performing group must in one way or another always include the message of unity to their audiences. The question of the high degree of mutual intelligibility among their languages, and of their cultural homogeneity must be underscored. It must be emphasized that ethnic separation in the locations is intended to divide the people, and it must not be permitted to succeed. The students in the ethnic colleges have not allowed this physical separation either to divide them or to stifle their minds. There is an even greater danger on the horizon, and we must prepare for it now. After we have attained our independence, there will be numerous neo-colonialist interests waiting to sow dissension among us. We have seen it done in other black independent states. In the latest such case, namely Zimbabwe, these imperialist forces play up the language differences between the Shona and the Ndebele. They make it appear that the country's politics are defined along tribal lines. They in fact create the 'tribalism' and then proceed to criticize the government of Zimbabwe for it. And it was the same falsification that subverted the victory of the united black liberation forces against Ian Smith's illegal occupation of Zimbabwe. Lancaster House sabotaged the victory, making it appear to be a victory of Mugabe against Sithole, i.e. Shona against Ndebele, and Smith's defeat by the joint forces was never mentioned.

If we as artists constantly speak to our people with wisdom and clarity, we will strengthen them against such onslaughts when they do happen.

My final statement is this: The theoreticians, the readership, the strategists and the enunciators of the ideology on which political action is based, will probably find English a useful tool. At the grassroots level, however, there is a compelling need to talk to the people in their own languages, thus reinforcing their pride and their sense of identity.

Chapter 50

South Africa: The Struggle of Things Then

by

David Goldblatt

Section III:

Poetry

Chapter 53

Dennis Brutus

Early Poem

Abolish laughter first, I say:
Or find its gusts reverberate
with shattering force through halls of glass
that artifice and lies have made.

O, it is mute now---not by choice
and drowned by multi-choired thunder---
train wails, babies' sirens' wails:
jackboots batter the sagging gate
the wolfind barks where the tinsplate gapes,
earth snarls apocalyptic anger.

Yet where they laugh thus, hoarse and deep
dulled by the wad of bronchial phlegm
and ragged pleuras hiss and rasp
the breath incites a smouldering flame;
here where they laugh (for once) erect---
no jim-crowing cackle for a watching lord,
no syncophant smile while heart contracts---
here laugh moulds heart as flame builds sword.

Put out this flame, this heart, this laugh?
Never! This self at its secret hearth
nurses its smoulder, saves its heat
while oppression's power is charred to dust.

[Mid-fifties]

Longing

Can the heart compute desire's trajectory
Or logic obfuscate with semantic ambiguities
This simple ache's expletive detonation?

This is the wordless ultimate ballistic
Impacting past Reason's, Sciences's logistics
To blast the heart's defensive mechanism.

O my heart, my lost hope love, my dear
Absence and hunger mushroom my hemispheres;
No therapy, analyses deter my person's fission:

My heart knows now such devastation;
Yearning, unworded, explodes articulation:
Sound-swift, in silence, fall the rains of poison.

[August 1960]

The Mob

[The white crowd who attacked those who protested on the Johannesburg City Hall steps against the Sabotage Bill]

These are the faceless horrors
that people my nightmares
from whom I turn to wakefulness
for comforting

yet here I find confronting me
the fear-blanked facelessness
and saurian-lidded stares
of my irrational terrors
from whom in dreams I run.

O my people

O my people
what have you done
and where shall I find comforting
to smooth awake your mask of fear
restore your face, your faith, feeling, tears.

[May 1962]

Poem About Prison

Cold

the clammy cement
sucks our naked feet

a rheumy yellow bulb
lights a damp grey wall

the stubbed grass
wet with three o'clock dew
is black with glittery edges;

we sit on the concrete,
stuff with our fingers
the sugarless pap
into our mouths

then labour erect;

form lines;

steel ourselves into fortitude
or accept an image of ourselves
numb with resigned acceptance;

the grizzled senior warder comments;
“Things like these
I have no time for;

they are worse than rats;
you can only shoot them.”

Overheard
the large frosty glitter of the stars
the Southern Cross flowering low;

the chains on our ankles
and wrists
that pair us together
jangle

glitter.

We begin to move
awkwardly.

[*Colesberg; en route to Robben Island*]

On The Island

1

Cement-grey floors and walls
cement-grey days
cement-grey time
and a grey susurration

as of seas breaking
winds blowing
and rains drizzling

A barred existence
so that one did not need to look
at doors or windows
to know that they were sundered by bars
and one locked in a grey gelid stream
of unmoving time.

2

When the rain came
it came in a quick moving quall
moving across the island
murmuring from afar
then drumming on the roof
then marching fading away.

And sometimes one mistook
the weary tramp of feet
as the men came shuffling from the quarry
white-dust-filmed and shambling
for the rain
that came and drummed and marched away.

3

It was not quite envy
nor impatience
nor irritation
but a mixture of feelings
one felt
for the aloof deep-green dreaming firs
that poised in the island air
withdrawn, composed and still.

On Saturday afternoons we were embalmed in time
like specimen moths pressed under glass;
we were immobile in the sunlit afternoon
waiting;

Visiting time:

until suddenly like a book snapped shut
all possibilities vanished as zero hour passed
and we knew another week would have to pass.

Under House Arrest

For Daantjie---on a New Coin envelope

On a Saturday afternoon in summer
greyly through net curtains I see
planes on planes in blocks of concrete masonry
where the biscuit factory blanks out the sky

Cézanne clawing agonisedly at the physical world
wrested from such super-imposed masses
a new and plangent vocabulary
evoking tensions, spatial forms and pressures
almost tactile on the eyeballs,
palpable on the fingertips,
and from these screaming tensions wrenched
new harmonies, the apple's equipoise
the immobility of deadlocked conflicts
---the cramp, paralyses---more rich
than any rest, repose.

And I, who cannot stir beyond these walls,
who shrink the temptation of any open door
find hope in thinking that repose
can be wrung from these iron-hard rigidities.

Chapter 55

Arthur Nortje

Thumbing a lift

Emaciated sand dunes and grease-black pylons
On afternoons teeming with impurities;
Brittle bitter-brown wire; the sky-blotching ravens
Must be September's electrified existences.

I live beside sap-fired willow striplings,
Yet alien on their cause, spring-exultation
Cars pass by the thin thing of my brown thumb
Rhythmically beckoning in painful indication.

Gnats swarm from scumcamps: above the asphalt
Shimmy-shaking witchdoctors gnarled like bluegums
Drunkenly perform their corrugated dazzle,
Leering through read heat with futile venom;

I scream in sad fury for movement home.
They ignore me, mama, they and their crazy
Machines, bright machines. Past this wheedling tramp
Cars swish and whiz in dust-whirling frenzy.

To be but a sliver of velocity pillioned,
Exquisitely frozen in foam-rubber pose;
Or dreamily sculptured in lavish freedom,
Trading vague pleasantries, parading poise . . .

There now, in chromium Chrysler Rambler
(Cream-leather atmosphere, cool man, relaxed)
Comes a smiling Samaritan---ah but those bulging
Ogres palm me off on an incredible next!

Trafficking with me now in truces of poison
White flags od exhaust fumes envelop my person
So I'm afterwards only O. K. when, chosen,
A cattle truck careers me towards the horizon.

South Africa, 1960-61

Midnight

Tonight, precisely at that wall
my room's floor pauses in its walk,
throws up a gaze, observes the clock.
Bulb and brandy begin to talk.

Energy flows and sounds emerge.
but not from me---some alien source.
Beyond glass panels at my door
the darkness grins with utter force.

It creaked, the room's one empty chair:
Devil or angel on my seat?
Outside my window, lampposts bead blood
down on a tired waiting street.

The toilet gurgles by my ear,
sucks someone's paper down the drain.
Its chain keeps keeping vigilance
on odours of bowels, odours of pain.

Night after night I lie and wait
for sleep's return, but she, but she
is gripped in spastic fists of fear,
trembling at noises made by me.

South Africa, 1961

Two women

Behind the counter, an on-the-prowl
Miss Modern. Strident high heels
Rip, rip, rip at air or wood:
What is it to which she fails to kneel?

Perhaps men stud their floors with nails.
Ask her if you want to be impossible,
Just don't get fresh, she'll wax sarcastic:
Her conversations are confined to the till.

Coups you attempt from a distance
backfire---she forks your ego bar like a bone.
Hate her guts? No, sorry, that's up her alley;
She's strictly speaking a tigress on the phone.

Darkness should hone her sharpness then
When falling shutters signal her home.
But pounced on by night, isn't she rather
terrified by the stars, lampoomed by the moon?

Capte Town, 1962

Soliloquy: South Africa

It seems me speaking all the lonely time,
whether of weather or death in winter,
or, as you expected and your eyes asked, love,
even to the gate where goodbye could flame it.
The last words that issue from the road
are next day regretted because meant so much.

All one attempts is talk in the absence
of others who spoke and vanished

without so much as an echo.
I have seen men with haunting voices
turned into ghosts by a oiece of white paper
as if their eloquence had been black magic.

Because I have wanted so much, your you,
I have waited hours and tomorrows, dogged
and sometimes doggish but you often listened.
Something speaks on when something listens:
in a room a fly can be conversation,
or a moth which challenges light but suffers.

Should you break my heart open, revive the muscle
for March grows on with mounting horror:
how to be safe is our main worry.
To keep you happy I shall speak more,
though only in whispers of freedom
now that desire has become subversive.

The gulls are screaming. I speak out to sea.
Waters, reared for attack, break forward:
without a word, this violence. From the cliffs
above the warm, shark-breeding sea that drowns
the oracle of the vibrant air I walk
and hear the ropes that thrash against the flagpoles.

The wind's voice moans among willows.
Would you say that air can move so much?
It echoes so much of ourselves. In you
lies so much speech of mine buried
that for memory to be painless I must knife it.
It seems me speaking all the lonely time.

Cape Town, 1963

Spell Cold and Ironic

Icy spell traps me after spring bred
fig's green rage, world's froth of blossom.
Cream burst to the surface, rain fed
milk and yellow lilies, I got
goldenrods where twigs had scraped some
warmth and moisture from winter's budget.

Streamers of colour in September's opulence;
water splashed laughs through my fingers, glistened,
danced my face in the element's brilliance.
Hatched eggs, flocks of new birds opened
freedom's country, offered the millions
blood's fresh chance to change and mingle.

But cold snap shuts one in at zero.
Before the switch could click the chill
wormed back into the bone's warm marrow
under half-grown feathers. Chill spell.
Meekness inherits one grime and cinders,
A host of yesterdays. But no tomorrows.

Ironcast sky: agaist the day I'll carry
something subversive, ash in satchel,
showing I've studied death's business, am very
prepared to report in heaven or hell
(barring of course a security leak)
that grey day gagged it---spring could not speak.

October 1963

Chapter 55

James Matthews

"It is said"

It is said
that poets write of beauty
of form, of flowers and of love
but the words I write
are of pain and of rage

I am no minstrel
who sings songs of joy
mine a lament

I wail of a land
hideous with open graves
waiting for the slaughtered ones

Balladeers strum their lutes and sing tunes of happy times
I cannot join in their merriment
my heart drowned in bitterness
with the agony of what white man's law has done

"We matched the white man's arrival"

We matched the white man's arrival
in strange-shaped ships we did not know
now we have become trespassers
on the shores of our land

he brought with him a book
that spoke of a new religion
of love, humility and compassion
to blind us to his deception

the fields that were ours
our cattle can no longer graze
and like the cattle we are herded
to starve on barren soil

we die in the earth's depth
to fill his coffer with gold
his lust for the shiny pebbles
outweighs his concern for our lives

our strong backs build the roads
upon which the white man travels
his chariot sprays us with dust
as we are forced into the ditch

in his house our mothers

and sisters soothe his young
tendering them the love they need
only to be rejected in later years

the coming to our land
of the white man and his tribe
has taught us a lesson
bitter as roots
the word of the white man
has the value of dirt

“Valley of plenty is what it is called”

valley of plenty is what it is called;
where little children display their nakedness
and stumble around on listless limbs
eyes haunted and bellies bloated with their hunger;
where mothers plough their dead fruit into the soil
their crone breasts dry of milk
faces and figures gaunt with labour;
where menfolk castrated by degradation
seek their manhood in a jug
of wine brackish as their bile;
where depravity has become a familiar thing
man adopts the habits of a hound
befouling himself and his kind;
where white people pious in their protest
deny knowledge of the misery that exists
the adversity following in its wake;
and my fair land a’ d’ying of the stench
of valleys of plenty

"Can the white man speak for me?"

Can the white man speak for me?

can he feel my pain when his laws
tear wife and child from my side
and I am forced to work a thousand miles away?

does he know my anguish
as I walk his streets at night
my hand fearfully clasping my pass?

is he with me in the loneliness
of my bed in the bachelor barracks
with my longing driving me to mount my brother?

will he soothe my despair
as I am driven insane
by scrapes of paper permitting me to live?

Can the white man speak for me?

“Opening the newspaper you will see”

opening the newspaper you will see
manifestations of the nightmare of
living in this our enlightened land

big, d bold letters clothed in hanging-judge black
state that it is lawful for an African maid
to be parted from her man

who toils until muscles weakened with age
contribute no longer to the economy of the state
is then sent to join his woman in the wasteland

spent of seed they sit and stare
at the brack and barren land
bitterly asking whether God cares a damn
what is happening to his children
not born with a skin coloured white
in our enlightened land

"The summer of our despair"

The summer of our
despair
Is ripening in the spring of our
agony
Our autumnal years have been
long
The seedbed of our

lives
Potted with many bitter
plants
That have spread deep
roots
And through the winter of our
days
Were nurtured by acrimonious
acts
Will now sprout a fearsome
crop
That will cause havoc in our
land
As it takes toll of the
planters
Of the seeds of their
destruction
In the summer of our
despair

“Flowers just don’t grow anymore”

flowers just don’t grow anymore

in the ghetto

empty houses empty of people
wind keening in the streets
for those who have departed
flower-children the weeds left behind

broken windows apologetic on walls
like blind-eyed old folks
sockets empty and not knowing
when the axe will fall

flowers just don't grow anymore
in the ghetto

houses torn down and bricks a'showing
flesh ribbed away revealing the bone
waiting for the demolition man
to wipe away their shame

street sparrows pipe as they flutter
in the graveyards left behind
voices raised in shrill protest
their nest opened to the wind

flower-children stand around like scarecrows
voices reed-rustle as they moan
their pain of looking
at places lost of people

flowers just don't grow anymore
in the ghetto

Chapter 56

Keorapetse Kgositsile

The Air I Hear

The air, I hear
froze to the sound
searching. And my memory
present and future tickles
the womb like the pulse
of this naked air
in the eye of a tear
drop. The dead cannot remember even the country
of death's laughter. But memory
defiant like the sound of pain
rides the wave at dawn
in the marrow of the desert
palm: stands looking still
and the bitter shape
of yesterdays weaves
timeless tomorrows
in the leaves
of laughter larger than
singular birth . . .

Mayibuye i Afrika

like the memories
of fatherless black children
become fathers of desire
in fox-holes before
they are old enough to build
cattle by the riverbank

the dancing road
uncoils in the ear
pierced by the finger
of the slender smile
of the tight roots . . . these
retrieved eyes across the tight
belly of a pregnant drum
these are the words
of an ancient dancer of steel
---the children of a person
 share the head of a locust---
and who cannot say
life is
an unfolding proverb
woven around
the desire of the memory
of the belly dance

i remember
the taste of desire
crushed like the dream
of ghetto orphans rendered

speechless by the smell
of obscene emasculation
but this morning
the sun wakes up
laughing with the sharp-edge
birth of retrieved root
nimble as dream
translated memory rides
past and future alike

Random Notes to My Son

Beware, my son, words
that carry the loudness
of blind desire also carry
the slime of illusion,
dripping like pus from the slave's battered
back. e.g. they speak of black power whose eyes
will not threaten the quick whitening of their own intent.
What days will you inherit?
What shadows inhabit your silences?

I have aspired to expression, all these years,
elegant past the most eloquent word. But herenow our
tongue dries into maggots as we continue our slimy
death and grin. Except today it is fashionable to
scream of pride and beauty as though it were not
known that "Slaves and dead people have no beauty."

Confusion,
In me and around me,
Confusion. This pain was
Not from the past. This pain was
Not because we had failed
To understand:
THIS LAND IS MINE.

Confusion and borrowed fears
It was. We stood like shrubs
Shrivelled on this piece of earth
The ground parched and cracked.
Through the cracks, my cry:

And what shapes
In assent and ascent
Must people the eye of newborn
Determined desire, know
No frightened tear ever rolls on
To the elegance of fire. I have
Fallen with all the names I am
But the newborn eye, old as
Childbirth, must touch the day
That, speaking my language, will
Say, today we move, we move . . .

To My Mother

Toward the laughter we no longer
know; this way we must from now
on and always, past shapes
turned into shadows of wish
and want, regret too. Your
eye, I know, is stronger than faith in
some god who never spoke our language.

And there it seems to have been aborted.
Words, and they are old and impotent. Here
a slave will know no dance of laughter.

What of the act my eye demands
past any pretentious power of any word

I've known? My days have fallen
into nightmarish despair. I know
no days that move on toward laughter,
except in memory stale as our glory.
I see no touch of determined desire
past the impotence of militant rhetoric.
The anguished twists of our crippled day will not
claim my voice. Woman dancer-of-steel,
did you ever know that the articulate silence
of your eye possessed my breath for long days?
Yet still I know no dance but the slow
death of a dazed continent.
We claim the soil of our home
runs in our blood yet we run
around the world, the shit of others
drooling over our eye. We know
no dance in our blood now but doom.
So who are the newlyborn
who, unquestionable,
can claim the hands of the son?

Section IV:

Short Stories

Chapter 53

Muzi

by

Lewis Nkosi

Ruth Shaw remembered the black man suddenly for no reason that she could comprehend. At the time that memory played this trick on her she was talking to her husband in the lounge of the Durban airport. Eddie was saying: "I hear Clara has gone absolutely potty. She's always having fantasies that the houseboy is about to commit an assault on her!"

Clara Collingworth was an old friend of the Shaws. At forty-eight Ruth thought of Clara as slightly aged—but only slightly—though it was clear to any man whose mind was not distorted by alcohol that Clara was no longer attractive. "Have you ever considered," Ruth asked in an increasingly fretful tone, "that Clara might have reason to suspect it?"

"Reason to suspect it?" Her husband gaped, "Reason to suspect what?"

"That the boy intends an assault on her?"

Eddie could scarcely conceal his irritation. "What kind of man would commit an assault on Clara? Please, tell me?"

"Eddie, we're not talking about *ordinary* men! We're talking about a *Native* houseboy who goes about the house mumbling things! "She gave Eddie what was known as one of her *looks*.

"Honestly, it's enough to scare the living daylights out of any woman. Do you know, according to Clara this houseboy spends hours staring at practically nothing. There's something very queer about him. For all we know he might be a witch-doctor."

Eddie Shaw refused to be drawn any further. At forty-five he retained the ugly attractiveness of a man beginning to develop a

paunch but liking the appearance of opulence it gave him. Somehow the rolling gait and the rotund expansiveness with which he spread his body in a chair seemed to go well with the figure of a man who was making a great deal of money and was keeping a major portion for himself. In these days of fat taxes it was hard to keep money from passing into the hands of those who never worked to earn it.

“Don’t smile, Eddie!” Ruth whispered harshly, hostilely, staring at her husband’s benign face.. “A man like Herman has no business tearing across the country, leaving a highly strung woman like Clara entirely to her own resources!”

Although his wife had warned him many times about pulling at his moustache, Eddie now rolled a strand of it between his thumb and forefinger. For extra pleasure he caressed the crown of his balding head, defying in one stroke Ruth’s elaborately developed theory that rubbing a bald head caused an eruption of rash. “*You* don’t seem to mind being left alone”, Eddie reminded his wife. “In fact you positively enjoy being left to your own resources, as you prefer to put it. Why can’t Clara?”

“I told you, Clara is a highly strung woman”, Ruth chided. “Do you remember that night on a New Year’s Eve when Clara jumped fully clothed into a swimming pool in order to frighten Herman?”

Eddie remembered the night very well because it was the only time in which he had momentarily surrendered to a feeling of lust for Clara’s tawny body. When Clara was finally pulled out of the swimming pool, her body dripping water, there was surprising look of strength in her bony face; her blonde hair clung damply around her small skull. Suddenly Eddie had imagined Clara’s body naked and the feelings to which this thought gave rise were not the noblest he had ever experienced.

“Anyway, the boy has been with the Collingworths now for more than 12 years”, Eddie said. “You would think that anybody who’s been around that long would have done something about it by now if he had ever had a mind to. Why wait until Clara is an old maid, for Chrissake, before assaulting her? Even a *Native* has pride, you know, that’s what people in this country don’t often realize.”

Even a native has pride!

Later, reflecting on it, she thought it was this reference to pride in a native which had reminded her of Muzi. The image of the black man reappeared in her mind so starkly that she was visibly agitated: she pulled her legs in sharply, at the same time she felt annoyance with herself for reacting so physically to what, after all, was now only a memory; she groped for words, conscious of having lost the thread of the conversation; and she turned round searching the faces of the other people in the lounge for a sign that might reveal that they had witnessed her anxiety. To her mild relief the other people—the ones who sat smoking or drinking tea—seemed hardly to have been watching her. The rest were generally caught up in the vast panorama and excitement of air travel.

The scene at the airport was one of great hustle and bustle; people were scurrying hither and thither; they were being summoned to departing airplanes, were being prevailed upon to wait for another ten or thirty minutes, or even longer, while planes were being serviced. All the time the heat fought its way through the open doors and windows into the airport lounge with amazing effect. You could actually smell things burning. You could smell the hot air from the scorched earth outside, or the vehicle tyres and automobile oils steaming under the African heat. And Ruth, sitting in front of her husband, talking animatedly about what she knew to be quite unimportant, talking, nevertheless, with great spirit and gusto in order to keep up morale, remembered the man so suddenly that this

memory was like a sudden brutal stab of the dagger into an unwary body.

Why the memory of the man should have come back with such force, at this particular place and time, Ruth could not explain. For years now she hadn't thought of the man at all. To erase him even partially from memory had taken a great deal of effort and determination; but in the interest of her own emotional stability she had tried and succeeded. There was a time she remembered when she had thought of nothing else., the nights, not so very long ago, when she lay in bed squirming with shame, paralyzed by guilt, groping in the recesses of her mind for some kind of explanation proves adequate for anything that happens.

Now as she sat in the airport lounge, trembling in every inch of the body, it seemed to Ruth that somebody was calling her. From what seemed a muted echo in her mind she heard Eddie calling her and made a strenuous effort to break through the barrier of memory and to regain the sense of the present. When she became fully conscious she noticed that her hands were shaking.

"Ruth!" Eddie seemed to be calling from a great distance and there was a note of concern in his voice. Then she was being shaken. "Ruth, for God's sake! What's the matter? You're shaking all over ! You've spilled tea all over your dress!" Smiling bravely she tried to control herself; but when she looked at Eddie's face she saw nothing but a mass of quivering grey flesh, horror erupting from the eyes, which were ringed with fatigue and boredom. "Ruth, are you feeling all right?" She nodded.

"It must be the hear", he said uneasily. "Do you want the waiter to get you anything?"

“No, no, no, Eddie”, she said very quickly, determined not to be treated as an invalid. “I’ll be all right, I just felt dizzy for a moment but I’ll be all right now.” Her hands were still trembling. In order to conceal her state of nervousness, she started rummaging for a handkerchief in her large handbag. “Eddie, maybe you can ask the waiter for a glass of water.”

He snapped his two fingers at a passing waiter and the black man retraced his steps to where the couple sat. “Can you get madam a glass of water? And make it quick, boy!”

:Yessah!” For a moment the African paused to look at the white woman. He opened his mouth as though he were on the point of saying something but seemed to change his mind. His face opened a mere hint, betraying a slender light of concern, and the next moment the face was completely closed, the light snuffed out, and a dark immovable mask descended so suddenly over it that Eddie had no opportunity to see anything.

“Yessah!” said the man again and then walked away quickly to fetch a glass of water.

TWO

The day he arrived on the farm nobody saw him until he had been there for possibly more than fifteen minutes. The huge man stood in the gateway to the white-walled farmhouse. He was dressed in khaki, with the sleeves of his shirt rolled above each elbow. The sun was behind him and standing there in the gateway he looked like a dark satanic giant held immobile by a great unseen force.

It was Ruth’s father, Kelly Smith, who saw him first through the window of his living room. The man stood very still, so still, in fact, that he looked a little ridiculous. His big hands were held motionless,

resting ponderously by his sides. He showed no signs of wishing to approach the house beyond the gate, neither did he seem to be in a great hurry. He just stood there, waiting, and Kelly Smith, who also waited, wanted to see the man's final intention. The black man merely shifted his weight from one foot to the other and showed no signs of being about to do much else.

Kelly Smith knew enough about Zulu custom to know that the man would probably wait there forever if no one went to his rescue. According to this custom, whenever strangers visited the royal kraal of another chief it was proper to wait at the gate until someone came out to welcome the party in. If the visitors were unimportant, the chief would let them wait the whole day, perhaps for days, before inviting them in. Time was not a factor; custom was more important.

Kelly Smith got out through the back door, circled the house until he reaches the gate. When the man saw Kelly approach he removed a battered hat from the crown of his head; his skin was dry and leathery from long exposure to the sun and his face was strongly lined, his thick lips fleshy but sensitive, suggesting the manly sensuality peculiar to the strongly built Zulu clan who lived at the bottom of the hill. Kelly's first impression was that the man was on the look-out for odd jobs; but when he looked closely at the man's face he quickly changed his mind. That face was too serene, almost totally without tension; his manner had no trace of nervousness as he stood waiting for Kelly to approach. When approaching a prospective employer, job hunters were unusually nervous and apologetic; you could see by the way they held their hands in front of them, wringing them uncomfortably, often smirking or smiling what they supposed to be an ingratiating smile. This man was different; he showed no such nervousness; his pride seemed held back by an enormous sense of confidence and innate dignity. He would not speak first either; he merely stood there waiting for Kelly to say something.

“What do you want?” Kelly asked harshly. The man was unhurried. He cleared his throat before he spoke.

“I heard you were looking for a man to watch over the farm.” The man, Kelly noticed, did not use the word ‘bass’, that form of address used by all black men when talking to white men in this part of the world. To Kelly Smith it seemed that the man had deliberately avoided the word. Kelly wondered about that.

“Who told you about the job?”

“It is common talk down in the valley that you need a man.”

“Have you got references then—letters from other white men that you work well?” Kelly shot at him.

The man was quiet for a while, then he said: “The other white man and I quarrel and he would not give me letters. So I go without letters.” The Zulu’s face had not changed much but seemed, nonetheless, chagrined by Kelly’s form of questioning. “I work hard”, the man said pointlessly. “I only take the money that is due to me and ask no more. The other white man fights and holds my pay. That I do not like.”

Kelly Smith thought: He is a proud one, this one. “I have a big farm”, Kelly told him. “There are many men like you working on this farm and I need one man strong enough to look after everything. I need a man who doesn’t need to be told too many things all the time. If you think you can take charge of things here I’ll make your supervisor on the farm. One thing, though, this job is not for nothing. You’ve got to show what you’re worth. I may be English but I’m a hard man. I demand efficiency.”

To this the man said nothing. "Can you drive a tractor?" Kelly asked him.

"Since I was a young man of eighteen I drive a tractor", the black man said proudly. "Cars I also drive. There's nothing I can't do on the farm. I milk cows and tame horses. I do everything."

Kelly laughed: "Don't boast!"

He motioned for the man to follow him into the gate, to the back of the house. Ruth Shaw remembered the Zulu vividly now, remembered him as he had later emerged from his room, carrying a basin of water. She remembered him as he leaned over the water, splashing it into his face and arms, the broad muscles of his back tight and the line of his pants claspng him firmly around the buttocks; and it had seemed then and later on, that it was this sight of the black man which had first violated her mind, her innocence, because that same day she was crudely aware of having become, without much warning, a woman.

On the farm where she grew up she remembered mainly the wide blue sky, the fierce sun and the air held immobile in the clasp of the African valley. The Smith house which had been built by a Portuguese architect at the turn of the century was always helplessly dwarfed by this wide curving sky. You had to walk into the house itself to appreciate the daring hand, the splendour and the adventurous spirit of the architect's ideas. It was not until she had turned fifteen, in fact, that she became aware of the beauty of this house or even to be awed by the structure; before she had had to fight hard in order to win back her individuality from the crowding sky, from the yellow wealth of the veld at dawn and the mutinous music of insects at sunset. From the very beginning of her awareness of things outside herself she had absorbed these qualities of nature into her being. Her girlhood seemed to have been forged in the

extremities of nature. It was hammered out of the steely tightness of the sunrays in summer and the harsh severity of the morning air in winter. These conditions of climate and nature were sufficiently strong to stamp her soul forever with the imprint of an independent spirit.

When Ruth's mother was at the 'peak of her years', as she often put it, Ruth was only fifteen then, but it did not take her very long to notice that her mother was a great success with men. Then followed the quarrels between the two parents when they thought her safely in bed, asleep; and those quarrels became more numerous as the years went by. On Saturday nights Caroline went to parties, to *braaiivleis* or dances at the local country club; and though Kelly Smith, who hated crowds, often found an excuse for declining the invitation to attend these parties, this did not seem notably to deter Caroline from 'making the best of her years', as she put it. She went with other gentleman friends—businessman, wealthy farmers and retired army officers. While the gentlemen waited for Caroline to get dressed they became very friendly with Ruth, the more annoying ones becoming expansively generous: they pulled playfully at her chin, kissed her on the cheek or gave her coins: "What a super child!" they said. She's going to be the spit and image of Caroline. Look what a lady she is already!"

But she didn't want to be like Caroline. In fact, for a long time, she believed that she hated Caroline though she could not say when she had actually started to hate her. When she was still a little girl she had wanted to be like her father who had been a captain in the army. She wanted to study maps of old military campaigns and to wear breeches and carry a staff under her arm like her father was accustomed to do.

Once, when her mother had been to an all-night party she heard her father gently reprimanding her in the living-room. "Caroline, this can't go on much longer, you know."

"What can't go on much longer?" her mother had countered, her voice beginning to rise.

"These mad parties. Do you know what time it is? Three o'clock in the morning. For God's sake, Caroline, you're the mother of a seventeen-year-old daughter!"

Something slipped and crashed on the floor of the living-room, splintering like a glass. Her mother said: "You don't like to see me have a moment of fun, Kelly Smith. It makes you green with envy to see me have a moment of fun. If it was for you I'd be cooped up in this monstrous house all year round!"

"I've never said you shouldn't have fun. All I said. . ."

"I know what you said," her mother cut in sharply. What you want to see is a vegetable in the house. Well, you can put that idea absolutely out of your mind, my dear man. I won't allow myself to be treated in that kind of way. I'm the only one with a spark of life around this place and naturally men prefer my company and the idea makes you hideous with jealousy!"

"Jealousy!" her father shouted with great surprise. "Since when have I ever been jealous?"

"You are, Kelly smith. Admit it: you are! Hideously jealous!"

Her father mumbled something which Ruth could not hear but soon she heard her mother fly back at him with her hot temper in full throttle: "Just because other men aren't the crashing bores you expect

them to be is no reason you should be so hideously jealous! You think I don't notice your frigid manner when Leslie, Sam or the others call for me? Pretending you are as busy as a beaver! You can't even be civil to your own friends!"

"All right, all right, will you stop this shouting, for God's sake! You'll soon be waking up Ruth and the servants!"

"Let her!" her mother shouted. "Let her wake up and hear the whole truth that you're no man to me and you know it!" With that there was a crashing sound as of a quick slap and then a further crash; then Ruth heard her mother breathing loudly. Caroline started to scream: "Kelly, you *hit* me? You really *hit* me?" It seemed that it was Caroline's turn to register surprise.

"I'm sorry, Caroline. I forgot myself; but you shouldn't say things like that!"

Ruth's realization of the full horror of what her mother was doing to her father came to her in her twentieth year when her father had already started on his slow descent to the grave. He was dying slowly but bravely from cancer, drinking Scotch or playing chess with a slow combative hand; and Ruth's mother, whom she had never liked very much nor could be said to have been much of a mother to her, was openly celebrating her husband's impending death. It was the year in which Caroline entertained a variety of men; she let them take her to cinemas, theatres and dances. In the oak-paneled drawing room she could be frequently heard giving out information about the state of her husband's health.

"He's dying, poor man," she said. "I've done my best by him but I'm afraid there's nothing more that can be done. The doctors say it's a matter of time now. It's cancer, you know, and they haven't found a cure for that sort of thing!"

One night, with the rain coming down in torrents and the thunder crashing all about the farmstead, Ruth tiptoed to the window in order to draw the curtains. And peeping out into the night, there was the figure of her mother and an unknown man sitting on the bench on the lawn. Ruth could see her mother clearly during the swift glare of lighting. She wore a white formal dress made of French lace and her wet hair was down to her shoulders. They sat on the bench, the man holding her by the waist, while Caroline's hard Scotch-spiked voice punctuated the sound of thunder. "Oh, you silly man!" Her mother laughed. "Oh, you naughty man, I simply won't permit it. You can forget about *that!*" Ruth was too shocked to go to sleep that night.

The black man arrived in the middle of all these goings-on. Without any forewarning he seemed to have become a permanent part of the household without anyone knowing when he had actually joined his tissue to that of the Smith household, for his behaviour was not that of a servant but that of a guest and a suitor even.

FOUR

That summer the sun burned like copper in a hard-blue metallic sky and the air seemed hardly to move: it had a peculiar shivering brilliance to it, a harsh phosphorescent light which hurt the eyes. When the black man was not out in the fields supervising the farmhands he was in his room, sprawled on his bed with part of his tall unwieldy body hanging over the edge like a grotesque rubber dummy. In this pool of noonday calm the new foreman lay brooding over the comings and goings of lesser mortals, heavy and inscrutable in his unyielding solitude.

It was clear from the beginning that he meant to take over all effective control in the running of the farm. As Kelly Smith's incapacity for work became increasingly obvious Muzi's

enthronement in his position as boss became less and less questionable. He did not, of course, become immediately popular with the farm-hands; for one thing, he drove them to hard and showed very little inclination to mix with them. At any rate the black hands would have preferred a white "slave-driver" to a black one and they lost no opportunity in making their views filter to the highest places. It was only after Muzi had dared to defy the orders of the white woman, Caroline Smith, that the black hands developed a sneaking, drudging, admiration for him. Still, fretful and suspicious, they watched closely what he would do next. Kitty Maduna, the housemaid, watched too, somber and pressed for the knowledge that would deliver the big man into her lithe sorrowing arms. She moved about the house in a delicate, drugged somnolence from which her body would not awake except on the rare occasions when she saw the new foreman steal a shy, awkward glance at her body and only then did she stiffen into a crazed sexual attention.

Then there was the day whose memory had always stayed with Ruth: in the slow whispering heat she had heard a single splash, then another, the sound of a body plonking into water. The sound was held motionless in the depthless muteness of the noonday African heat. Standing on the veranda of the house Ruth could see her mother down at the swimming pool, her body bare, brown and glossy in the scorching sun. Later on, her limbs frothy with water, Caroline lay flat on her back, her breasts hard and swollen under the scanty top piece of her swimsuit; her hips and thighs were firmed by constant exercise and in the blur of bright sunlight she glowed with a pink youthful vigour. Caroline's constant youth and vitality were amazing to everyone and it became for Ruth a source of mild irritation and envy. Ruth's scratchy feelings about her mother were shared, to some extent, by the blacks. When they trotted past the swimming pool on their way to the canteen they listened with a hazy, profitless anger at the reiterative plonking sound of the body in the

water. And they averted their eyes, not daring to look where the water bubbled pink and frothy in the sun.

That very afternoon Ruth saw her mother again, now changed into a khaki shirt, checkered blouse and jaunty Boy-Scout hat of the same khaki colour. Ruth saw her confront the new Zulu foreman who stood in front of her, bulked and impassive before her onslaught, a little melancholy in the depths of his eyes. Nostrils flaring, Caroline stood in a shower of sunlight, her face slightly veiled by a nimbus of white brightness; and her anger was like a luminous glare of light in a thick shade, visible twenty yards away, as a glimmer of surprised indignation that passed swiftly across her face. But soon her fury spread and caught her entire body, making it seem gaunt, bare, as mean as a whiplash. With stuttering amazement she said: "Did I just hear you say I can't have the boy"? The Zulu towered above her, bulked and impassive against the sun. "Did I just hear you defy my order?" Caroline asked, hard, glittering like a sword drawn from its scabbard. She paused, waiting for an answer and in the Zulu's silence she thought she detected scornful defiance. Now frenzied, feverish and deeply sensual, she quaked with the fury of a woman balked at the peak of desire; the points of her eyes whitened and her mouth bled a load of poisoned bitterness. "You? A Native?" she said, astounded. "You told me what I can and cannot do in my own house?" She ceased further questioning, a wearisome mortification trembling on the edge of her proud, scornful mouth. Her slim hands were deep inside the pockets of her skirt and she waited, gaunt and challenging, for the man to apologize, or at least to retreat from his position of firm defiance. The man's glance remained at an angle to her face.

"Well, answer me!" Caroline's voice was shrill and edged with frustration; it still held genuine surprise.

"I'm so sorry, madam," the man said evenly.

"So you should be," Caroline replied, assertive, triumphant. "I should hope so indeed! Now," she said, "I want that boy to help wash dishes in the kitchen straight away. He'll be back in the fields as soon as he is finished."

"There," said the man slowly, "I cannot help the madam." Caroline stiffened again, astonished by the man's stubbornness. Now something hot and vicious descended to the pit of her stomach and she felt the same tautness, anger and excitement she often experienced just before a rough, purposeful man violated her flesh. The Zulu stood erect above her, dark and surreal against the white blaze of the sun. Beads of sweat shone on his black face and Caroline Smith, in her approaching hysteria, thought she caught a swift hungering male odour emanating from the dark resinous body in front of her. A raw fetid smell of the body of a Native who didn't know his place and perhaps had never had any place prepared for him. Thinking of the brief spell the black man had served in the World War army with the ambulance corps, she thought: They should never have sent them out of South Africa. She tried to picture him walking the streets of Rome in uniform or dawdling at the café table in Paris and she grew alarmed at the freckled prickliness of her breasts under the heat of the blazing sun. They should never have sent them out of South Africa, she thought hysterically. Indignant at the air of doomed lust the man suggested without making explicit, she thought: He smells! He has the fetid odour of a yearning dog. Aloud, she said, "What an insult!"

Misunderstanding her, the man replied: "I'm sorry, madam, but today it can't be helped."

"I beg your pardon!" Caroline exclaimed in a sharp hysterical voice.

"We need every manjack out here in the fields, madam." The man breathed. "Got fifty bags of potatoes to deliver to the market by ten o'clock tomorrow morning."

She said: "I see," very sarcastically.

"I'm sorry, madam, but those are my orders," he told her.

"And who gave these orders, if I may be presumptuous enough to ask?"

He was staring at the point where her white breast was full and round and freckled under the crackling heat.

"Mister Kelly."

"Well, we'll see about that!" she flared, fumbling purposelessly at the neckline of her blouse. "And stop string at me *as though I were one of your Native girls!*" She turned then—turned very swiftly, surprised at her own indiscretion—and quick marched to the house in a raw ravishment of fury.

FIVE

That is when it started.

Later, Ruth heard Caroline moving fretfully in the dark corridors between the bedrooms. "Damn! Damn that native idiot!" Caroline cursed and there was the smell of burning cigarette drifting into Ruth's bedroom through the half-open door. Caroline paced the floor while the black man sang in the backyard, not so loud as to disturb sleep but the way he sang—there was something insistent and frankly annoying about it—made sleep almost impossible. The man had a deep, grumbling voice, deviant and rotund, and listening to the

voice gave Ruth the same sensation as the whorl of a tongue in the mouth. "Damn, damn that native idiot!" said her mother in the dark corridor but did not go outside to quiet down the noise nor lean out on the window to shout her curses at the foreman.

"Kelly," Caroline called out to her husband, who was already asleep in the bedroom opposite Ruth's, "you've got to stop this. This simply can't go on."

"This dammed Native boss-boy of yours. Can't you hear him and his serenades?"

"Oh, you mean Muzi? Well, yes, I suppose he is carrying on a bit."

"Carrying on a bit?" There was an offended surprise to Caroline's tone. "I should say the man is insane! Honestly, Kelly, I don't know where you pick them."

"This one," said Kelly Smith, suddenly wrecked by coughing, "came here on his own accord!" And he laughed, taking both mother and daughter by surprise because in these last days so full of pain and anguish, Kelly Smith was finding very little cause for laughter. They hadn't heard him laugh for months. Ruth began to suspect that her father was in league with the black man and that in some obscure unadmitted way they were both waging a war against Caroline.

Later that night from the servant's quarters came the strains of a guitar carried on light lilac wings. Then came rain and a stiff wind smashing against the house and the trees outside; the voice still sang and the music of the guitar was indistinguishable from the soft hum of the rain. Later, the song became a distinct melody caressing the rain and the night and giving depth to both. Lying in her pool of sweat Ruth thought: He has a soft hand for it. The man seemed to know exactly when to pluck ruthlessly at the strings; then, like a

lover whose fingers had inadvertently torn at the flesh of a loved person, he gently stroked the strings, coaxing, rather than forcing, the melody. Even if Ruth had been able to understand the language, the hum of the rain made it impossible to distinguish the words. The night flowed on endlessly, engulfing and destroying the physical shape of things, softening the sharp outline of trees and rooftops, even the city spires way to the east, until every object, Ruth's own body included, lost its separateness, and seemed to have been rendered one with the universe of night.

"Damn that Native idiot!" Her mother cursed in the darkness. She seemed unable to sleep. "Damn him!" And Ruth drifted slowly into sleep/

SIX

On Saturdays and Sundays there was very little to do on the farm. The farm-hands were issued with 'passes' to go into the city or to visit the native location at the bottom of the hill where much illicit brewing and wrenching went on. Tacitly the hell-raising on weekends was encouraged by white farmers on the assumption that it allowed the 'native boys' to get rid of their excess energy on far safer targets. By this same token, Muzi, who did not get drunk or chase after black women, aroused suspicion, fear and distrust among whites. "My dear," Ruth had once heard her mother announce cautiously, "they've got to be allowed to get rid of their damned up energy or none of us is safe!" But Ruth was yet too young to understand the reasons for her mother's caution. When she did finally understand, she felt only a vague tremulous excitement, the feeling of being surrounded by people both dark and fiercely sensual, so utterly depraved and voluptuous that their excessive. Passions had to be "got rid of" by drinking and womanizing.

From Kitty, who was the only confidante she had in the isolated farmstead, she acquired hints and dark intimations more corrupting than exact knowledge, but received no truth whatever. Then she grew older and felt her body finally becoming less calm, less quiescent; a yawning chasm, a pit hotter than hell, opened at her feet and she bore a dull somber premonition that something gross and fanatical would yet happen to her; but she bore this knowledge with a dull, casual, purposeless rage. It was the infernal, fundal need for the world to release its truth to her which drove her to the depths of tragedy. Later she realized that Muzi had been aware of her profound yearnings and groveling sensual needs long before he had been aware of her marbled aquiline nose. She knew this the very first time he touched her.

They were in the woodshed collecting logs for the fire and she tripped, stumbling forward and the black man spread his large arms for her to fall into them. Her wild eighteen-year-old breasts were showered suddenly by a scared delirious lust which pricked her skin like the needles of a hot summer rain. Her body stiffened, cowering, and, feeling hot and bothered, she breathed quickly and nervously, the moment when she hung in his arms seeming almost too long to sustain her surprise; it seemed to her she was swaying gently on a hot, polished, dark tree, dizzy, fabulously abandoned to the gentle swaying of a dark shadowy tree. The man laughed shyly, but his face, like the sky above him, was mute, imponderable and namelessly alien. "The young Miss must look out," the man said with a false chuckle. "It's perhaps darker than the young Miss thinks."

Now rigid with a black fathomless fury, she tore her body away from the man's over-protective arms, screaming deep inside her throat, yet amazed that she made no sound whatever. Instead, the scream became a groan of lust coming from the depths of the belly, which was severed almost into two by the conflicting demands of her nature. She reared back, balancing on her firm young thighs the

entire weight of her offended body. "Muzi!" she cried. "You mustn't do that. You must never touch me. You know it's not allowed!" And then she was struck by the absurdity of her words; a tidewash of pain, sorrow and confusion swept to her throat. Her body throbbed with anguish. "Oh, you know what I mean!" she cried. "You know very well what I mean."

"I don't know what the young Miss means," Muzi persisted. "Perhaps I should not help the young Miss if she falls." He laughed, leaning the weight of his body against a stockpile of wood. Now she was close to tears. Sniffing through her nostrils, she paused in front of him, thin and fragile, feeling her thighs slip away from under her. In a gentle swaying motion, her belly spun under her smooth round waist. Muzi stood supping his hungry eyes upon her pale face and soft mouth with that strangely quick licking movement his eyes had of looking at a woman. She shivered slightly; with a long, delicate movement she allowed her body to writhe inside the perfumed silk of her underclothes in a series of terrific eloquent murmurs, her white breasts bunched fearfully under her crouching body, feeling herself enveloped within the sullen quivering presence of the black man. She listened to his laughter with the raptness of a startled colt.

"You know very well what I mean. You shouldn't hold me that way. You can get into trouble for doing that."

"If I don't hold Miss Ruth when she falls I also get into trouble!" She was furious at his persistent subterfuge. He knew very well what she was talking about but he was refusing to acknowledge her serious intent. Ruth was sure that the man was trying to drive her out of her mind. There was something akin to malice in the way he had been pursuing her without pursuing her these last few months; touching her without seeming to touch her, possessing her without possessing her: he was always near her without so much as acknowledging it; helping when his help was not requested, always standing by when a

chauffeur was needed to drive her into town for shopping; all the time she was aware of his animate quickening presence and she smelled the humid odour of his desire like the foul musk of a beast of prey which emits a terrible smell before pouncing on its victim. Sometimes when she came to the backyard at twilight, he was there, waiting; on several occasions he was washing from a white basin, dashing water upon his brown face and arms with his quick animal movements. And when he saw her he paused to study her white shape. There was no fastness remote enough or sufficiently impregnable from his invasion. Asleep, she felt his soft catlike movements in the lawn outside her window, always there, waiting as he was waiting now. She gathered from the soft acquiescence of his body the waiting violence of his lust for her. Then doubt! Was it perhaps Caroline against whom he was preparing his siege? Was it--? Was it--?

“What is it you want from me?” she asked fiercely.

Muzi did not move.

“Nothing, I want nothing from Miss Ruth.” He moved suddenly and her blood drifted back into her heart with amazing alacrity. A hair caressed the nape of her neck and she was startled by the mood of terror and purpose the man conveyed to her with slightest movement of his body. “I have not asked Miss Ruth for anything, have I? Only that I should be of service when my services are needed. That is all Muzi asks.” Again he laughed, this time with a muffled bitterness that was strange to her.

Breathless, Ruth fumbled for speech: “Oh, don’t say that!” She fumbled again to no purpose. “Please, stop it! Stop it! I wish you would stop behaving like that with me. You hear? Stop it! Stop it! Stop it!” And she fled, sobbing, to the house.

Now she was thinking: *He has touched my body and I shall never be all right again. Never! And he knows it too—that's why he was chuckling.* With a curious feeling of self-abnegation she felt this all evening till the moment she went to bed; even after she had gone to bed she was kept awake by the memory that the man had enfolded her in his arms. She thought about it the following day and all that afternoon and the next day. Now, in the orange glare of the late afternoon sunlight, she wandered down to the fields and into the woods assailed by a wealth of colour and the acrid abundance of summer fragrances. She walked stiffly with quick, dapper, flouncing movements. She walked straight and smooth, her hips rolling a bit with a startled, whimsical fleetness.

...Stones are yellow and the grass ...is gray ...Stones are yellow and the grass is gray. Where did she remember that from? *The Stones are yellow and the grass...* She hummed, her movements quick, dapper, her hips rolling with a startled whimsical fleetness. Today she herself was all flesh—sunned, bronzed and yellowed by the sun. Her eyes, which were pale blue, were fringed by circles of white and brown and yellow and her chin gave way to a slim throat and a bosom of white, shadowed to near-honey. In the wooded spaces of the farmlands she worshipped her body, looking for her image from the quiet pool in the woods.

If he touches me again, she thought. Walking in the glade of the gum trees she reached the open space where a stream flowed green and quiet under the scarlet afternoon sunshine and an invisible frog croaked its prelude to a summer madness. And Ruth thought: *If he touches me again one more time, I'll tell!* Standing on the low bank of the stream, whipping her dress well up above the knees, she dipped an unshod foot into the cool water and thought again: *If he touches me just one more time I'll tell Caroline.* But even as she thought about it she knew she could tell no one, certainly not Caroline whom she hated more than the black man. She waded deeper into the pool and saw

her legs and thighs refract into pink rubber, the pale flesh corrugate with the gentle wavering movement of water. Then suddenly, without warning, her foot caught a stone, the pale smooth stone rolled, she slipped, went down in a splash and lay there for a time wet to her skin, gurgling and laughing. Soon she was up again. With a swish-swash movement of wet garments she leapt back to the bank where she stood poised to take off her clothes until dull caution stayed her.

There on the edge of the wood, some hundred yards away, stood a derelict hut which had been used as shelter for an old-fashioned water pump. Perhaps it was a trick her eyes were playing on her but she thought she saw something move inside the hut. Then she thought of the black man and a wave of fear came over her and caused her to hesitate though she was already headed for the hut. *If he touches me just one more time, she thought angrily, I'll tell Caroline.* Then she was walking quickly and purposefully toward the hut, smooth, dapper, her hips rolling a bit with a startled whimsical fleetness.

A storm of light broke her vision as though a rocket had exploded at her feet. She saw them first as explosive shapes, as lambent flames of black and white, and steadying herself against her vision, refusing to acknowledge what her eyes saw, she leaned her body against the jamb of the door, feeling her knees beginning to give under her. Then something broke inside her and she was sick. She had reached the hut in time to witness what no one so young, so sensitive and unprepared, should have been allowed to witness; and, witnessing it, something immense and immeasurable broke inside her and she was sick. What she saw in the hut was the final completion of the war between Caroline and the Zulu foreman; and that long protracted battle left her mother prostrate, naked and vanquished, so amazingly white on her bed of straws.

Fifteen years later, Eddie was holding a glass of water to her mouth saying: “You’ll e all right now! Darling, I promise you, you’ll be all right. All you need is a breath of fresh air and you’ll be all right!” But she knew she would never be all right because though it was her flesh that the man had touched, it was finally her mother who had taken her place on the bed of straws.

Chapter 54

The Dignity of Begging

by

Bloke Modisane

The Magistrate raises his eyes above the documents and plunges them like daggers into my heart. His blue eyes are keen: my heart pounds like the bass of a boggie-woogie.

‘I’m sick to death of you. . . heartily sick. There’s not a native beggar on the streets whose full story I don’t know,’ the Magistrate says. ‘I’ve watched some of you grow up. There isn’t one I haven’t tried to rehabilitate many times. Some I was forced to send to gaol, but they always come back. . . they come back to the goose that lays the golden egg.’

These are fighting words. The Magistrate sounds as though he’s going to put us away for a few weeks. My only regret is that Richard Serurubele has to share my fate. If only the Magistrate knew that he is not a parasite like the rest of us, that he’s what is called an exploited beggar. He was crippled by an automobile accident, and since then his parents have made capital out of it. They use him to beg so they can balance the family budget. They never show him the

comfort of love. Relentlessly they drive him, like an animal that has to work for its keep and feed. He is twenty-one. Dragging one foot along, he is an abject sight who has all the sadness of the world in his face. He looks many times older than my mother-in-law.

'You beggars make it difficult for me to do my duty, and in spite of my failure to rehabilitate you, I always believe in giving you another change. . . A fresh start, you might call it.

But I'm almost certain that you'll be back here in a few days.'

The Magistrate is getting soft, I can see my freedom at a distance of an arm's stretch. Here is my chance to put on my act. A look of deep compunction and a few well-chosen words can do the trick. I clear my throat and squeeze out a tear or two.

'Your Honour, most of us beg because we've been ostracized by our families; they treat us as though we were lepers,' I say, wiping off a tear. 'They want us to look up to them for all the things we need. They never encourage us to earn our own keep. Nobody wants to employ us,, people are more willing to offer us alms rather than give us jobs. All they do is show us pity. . . We don't want to be pitied, we want to be given a chance to prove that we're as good as anybody else.'

I can see from the silence in the court that everybody is deceived. . . Everybody is filled with a sense of self-reproach. The Magistrate is as mute as the undertaker's parlour. I can read pity on the faces of all the people in the court; perhaps the most pathetic is my own. I am magnificent. . . an answer to every film director's dream. I know I have said enough. . . enough to let us out, that is.

'I understand you have articulated, your name is Nathaniel, isn't it?' He turns a page of the report prepared by a worker in the Non-

European Affairs Department. 'Yes, here we are, Nathaniel Mokgomare, the department recommends that you be sent to a place where you will be taught some useful trade. I want you to report to Room 14 at the department's building tomorrow morning.'

This is not what I had bargained for; my brilliant idea has boomeranged. Why must I take a job when I can earn twice a normal wage begging? After all, what will horses do if I take a job. I *must* uphold the dignity of begging. Professional ethics forbid all beggars from working.

'As for you, Richard Serurubele, I'll let you go this time, but mark my words: the next time you appear before me, I'll have you sent to the Bantu Refuge. Now get out of here, both of you.'

If the Magistrate had seen the big grin on my face as we leave the court, he would have thrown my deformed carcass in gaol and deliberately lost the key. He does not see it though.

With the exception of a few loose ends everything has gone according to schedule, but my friend Serurubele is just about the most miserable man on earth. The trouble with him is he lacks imagination, but then of course, not everybody is as bright as I am. He always seems to be looking at the dull side of life, a vice coupled with an appalling brand of honesty most bishops would swear didn't exist.

'One of these days, I'm going to kill myself,' Serurubele says, 'I can't go on like this, I'm tired of living off other people. Why did this have to happen to me? Tell me, Nathan. Why?'

How this man expects me to answer a question like this is beyond me. For one unguarded moment I almost tell him to send his Maker a

telegram and ask Him all about it, but my gentler nature sees the harm such an answer might do.

'I don't know,' I say, abruptly. 'Things like this just happen; it's not in us to question why. Nature has a way of doing things, but even then she gives something in return. . . at least I think so. . . but how should I know, anyway?'

This is the one time I cannot find something concrete to say; I want to show him that there is compensation for his disability, but I just cannot lay my hands on it. This, I remember, is what made me leave home.

I left because my parents did not understand. They almost made a neurotic out of me; but today I wonder if it wasn't my own sensitivity which gave their actions then their seemingly absurd proportions. They seemed afraid to walk about freely; everybody sat down as if the house was full of cripples. I was treated like a babe in arms. All the things I wanted were brought to me, I was not even allowed to get myself water to drink. This excessive kindness gradually began to irritate me. . . It became a constant reminder that I didn't belong, that I was an invalid. It then became apparent that they would soon put the food into my mouth which they had already chewed for me, and push it down my throat. These thoughts of inadequacy drove me from home.

A new life opened for me. I got myself a wife, two bouncing boys and a property at Pampoenfontein, also a room at Sophiatown complete with piano. Within two years I had begged well over a few hundred pounds. The money had been used wisely. Only one problem confronts me now, I want enough money to provide for my old age. . . The two boys are also to be considered.

'For Christ's sake, Nathaniel,' Serurubele says, 'what's wrong with you. Why are you always so wrapped up in your thoughts. . . this is where I stay, remember?'

I say good-bye to him and go to my room. After having something to eat I settle down to some hard thinking. There are all sorts of insurances and societies, union and what have you, which protect workers. Why not a beggars' union? I could rally all the beggars of the city into one union with some professional name like The United Beggars' Union, into whose funds every beggar would contribute ten shillings a week. In the city of Johannesburg alone, there are over a hundred beggars and if they could all be talked over, a capital of about two-thousand-four-hundred pounds could be realized in one year.

What a brilliant idea. . . an inspiration of genius. Sometimes I feel depressed that the world has not had the vision to realize the potentialities of my genius. . . possibly it cannot accommodate Einstein and myself in the same generation. Anyway, so much for that.

I could promise to offer each a bonus of ten pounds a year. That would be smart. . . No beggar could resist such an offer. Maybe I should promise to buy each a property somewhere cheap, say, buy one property a year for the needy ones like Serurubele, equip him with third-rate tools and interest him in turning out junk that nobody will care to give a second look at. The scheme would be costly, but at least it would go far in enlisting their confidence. Only one would get the property; the others would wait patiently until I get religion.

The following morning I'm at Room 14 bright and early. A white man with a bored expression on his face is sitting behind a big mahogany desk. I tell him my name. He takes some paper and writes on it. He tells me to go to the address written on the paper.

The faint showers that were falling outside have become heavier, and as I go out I say something nasty about the weather. A brilliant idea strikes me as a well-dressed lady is walking towards me. She looks like a mobile gold mine ready to be tapped. . . in fact, I can almost see the gold nuggets in her teeth. I put on a gloomy face, bend lower than usual and let my deformed carcass shiver. She stops and looks at me as if she's responsible for my deformity.

I play this trick all the way to the address I'm given, and by the time I get there, I count well over ten half-crowns. Not bad, I say to myself; at this rate I can become the richest and most famous beggar in the city. To think the department wants to pin me behind a desk! The idea is criminal, to say the least.

One of these days when I'm on my annual leave, I hope to write a book on begging something like a treatise on the subject. It will be written with sensitivity and charm, brimful with sketches from life, and profusely illustrated with coloured photographs, with easy-to-follow rules on the noblest and oldest occupation in the world: Begging! It will be a textbook for all aspiring beggars, young and old, who will reap a wealth of knowledge from my personal experience and genius. In fact, it will be the only one of its kind in world literature. Even millionaires will take up begging as a pastime to colour their humdrum existence.

It will naturally begin with a history of the art from its ancient crudity of maiming children as a preparation in their education, right up to the contemporary age of beggars who are driven to the city in the latest American cars. . . beggars with a bank balance big enough to impress the receiver of Revenue. I can almost see it on the best-seller list for several months. This reverie almost causes me to lose my way.

I find the place and go in. My heart just misses a beat when I see the large number of people inside. Some, if not most, are deformed monstrosities like myself. What could be sweeter? I can see my plan taking shape.

The man in charge starts explaining the elementary principles of the typewriter. I pretend to be interested and ask many unnecessary questions, but intelligent enough to impress him. By five o'clock I'm running over the keyboard like a brilliant amateur.

On my way home I go via Serurubele's corner. He is still there and looking as miserable as ever. I suggest that we go home. I lure him to my room and when we get there I begin playing a certain tarantella like Rubenstein, only my rendering is in A flat Major. Either my piano recital is good or my friend just loves bad sounds.

'You can have a house like this and everything that goes with it; it's yours for the taking. Why beg for other people when you can do it for yourself?'

'I've got to help with the rent and the food,' he says. 'How do you think I'm going to get a house like this? I can't just wish for it.'

'You don't have to, you must plan and work for it like I did, I have a plan that will give it to you in less than a year. . . Listen.'

I then start explaining to him about the society with particular emphasis on the good it will do to all beggars. I see his teeth sparkling behind thick lips. I put him in charge of organizing them for our first meeting.

Last night I dreamt I was at the race course and I saw the winning double as plain as I see my twisted leg. I raid my savings in the room

and make my way to Turfontein. When I get there I start scouting around for policemen. None are about and a soothing satisfaction comes with the realization that I shall not bother myself with police badges. I put a pound win on two and seven, a double in the first leg. As I'm making my bet, a man with eyes as big and lethargic as an owl's is standing next to me and beaming like a blushing groom.

I'm too nervous to watch the race, so I decide to walk about and appreciate the scenery. Suddenly I feel as though someone is staring at me. I turn round and look straight at Miss Galovidian. A welfare worker, who has the uncanny habit of showing up at the most unexpected places. I don't need a fortune-teller to tell me I'm in trouble. She has a notorious record of having safely deposited more than twelve beggars in the Refuge. My only chance is to get out of here before she can find a beefy policeman. I'm walking to the gate when I hear people talking about two and seven. I even forget the trouble Miss Gallovidian is going to bring me. I run as fast as a man with a twisted leg can to the Bookie. Only six tickets were sold, the loud speaker was saying, only I'm not interested.

As the Bookie is handing me the money Blushing Groom seems even happier than I am. His crooked teeth, which are dulled by tobacco, click every time the Bookie counts a hundred. His greasy lips are watering while a pair of bloodshot eyes are blinking with a dull brilliance. It hurts my eyes to look at him. I have hardly put the money in my pocket, when Gruesome pats me on the back says, nice and loud: 'We made it!'

I must have been a fool not to have been wise as to why Blushing Groom was acting the perfect chaperon.

'That's fine,' I say. 'What have *we* made?'

'Don't be bashful,' he says, 'we caught the richest double. Come, this calls for a celebration.' He extends a hand, and all the time he's smiling as if his wife has given birth to quadruplets.

'Look pal,' I say. 'It's a good try. I couldn't have done better myself. This is the perfect set-up, isn't it? Well, I've got news for you: I caught the double alone, I don't know you and I don't care to. Go get yourself another piece of cheese. . . I'm not that easy.'

This ape suddenly stops smiling and looks at me like I had the plague. His broad, flat nose starts puffing out steam like an angry Spanish bull (only I'm not in the mood to make fancy passes like a toreador). All in all, he looks positively fierce, like the animal in the simile.

'Six hundred and seventy pounds is a lot of money,' he shouts. 'Nobody's going to cheat me out of my share. You being a cripple. . .'

'Shut up!' I yell. 'Never call me that again, you. . . You!' I swing a right cross to his face, but this ape is smart. He blocks it and lands a hard one on my chin. I rock back and land flat on my sitters, while jungle tomtoms beat out a solid conga in my head. After a while my head clears and I get up, burning with rage. If I only had the strength, I would tear this ape apart.

Blushing Groom has put on quite a show; we have a good audience. Some white folk are threatening to beat his brains out. . . I sincerely hope they do.

Suddenly I see a police badge jostling its way through. This is no place for me! I dash and start zigzagging through the people. A junior confusion starts, with everybody trying to give way. I run a few minutes, stumble and fall on my face. The policeman bends down and grabs me firmly by the arm and whispers: 'Look, John,

let's not have trouble. Come along quietly and everything will be just fine.'

Under these circumstances I have no choice but to submit. My mother always told me never to resist arrest, let alone striking a uniformed officer of the law. Me and my money part company after Blushing Groom had preferred charges. My submission causes me to spend a not-so-glorious week-end at the Bantu Refuge. My transfer there being arranged by the thoughtful sergeant in the charge office, who out of pure love could not have me thrown in with hardened criminals. . . what with the place filled with housebreakers, extortioners, professional pickpockets and a generous assortment of other unsavory characters. Frankly, I hoped he would mind his own business. I might even have started a crap game and made me some money.

'I am almost certain that you will be back here in a few days,' the Magistrate had said Somebody ought to tell him he has a great future. . . reading palms. He looks at me and a grin spreads over his pancake-like face. This place must be short of Magistrate; why has it got to be the same one all the time?

'Beggars who play the horses are a dangerous nuisance. They misuse kindness that is shown to them.'

Just my luck: now I have to listen to a lecture on morals. The Magistrate looks pleased with himself, and I don't like it. Miss Gallovidian looks at me and smiles like a proud victress. She probably expects a promotion for this. I'm called on to the stand.

Some man with a thin face asks me to raise my right hand and swear to tell the truth. After saying my piece, the prosecutor starts questioning me as if he's promised thirty per cent of Blushing

Groom's cut. After his session with me, he calls Blushing Groom to the stand.'

'Do you know this man?' the prosecutor says.

'No, sir.'

'How was it then you put up ten shillings to bet the horses with him?'

'I was losing all morning when I decided to try somebody's guesses. I met him, and we started talking.'

'Did anybody see you talking to him?'

'I don't know, but somebody must have.'

'Then what happened?'

'I asked him if he had a tip. He said he had one straight from the horse's mouth. . . A sure thing, he said. I then asked him if I could put up ten shillings. He agreed. I was afraid to make the bet, so I gave him the money and walked over to the Bookie's stand with him where he placed a pound win on two and seven.'

'Why were you afraid to make the bet?'

'I thought he was luckier than I was. . . besides, I had been losing all morning.'

'Why did you strike him?'

'He was trying to cheat me out of my share, and tried to hit me when he couldn't.'

The Magistrate looks at me with something like contempt in his eyes. I won't have to put on a show for him this time. I might just as well kiss half my money good-bye. Blushing Groom's story is watertight.

'I'm thoroughly disappointed with you,' the Magistrate says. 'I didn't know you were a thief too. I don't believe you could have made that bet alone; beggars haven't got so much money. I believe his story, things like this do happen. The money will be shared equally between the two of you.'

'I don't believe you could have made that bet alone.' What a cheek! I'll have that hobo know I make more money in one week than he does in a month. I don't believe you. . . Good God!

I feel like committing mass murder as the court hands Blushing Groom three hundred and thirty-five pounds of my money. This prehistoric beast has a swell racket. A few more jobs like this and he can retire and buy himself a villa on the Riviera.

Blushing Groom is magnificent, inspiring awe. He is completely uncompromising, thoroughly unscrupulous, without qualms or a conscience. He has wholly realized the separateness of good and evil and attained a purity in evil worthy of honest appraisal. He would not allow himself to be swayed from cheating me by my being a cripple. If I were allowed to choose a brother, he would be my only choice.

I take my share of the money and clear out before the Magistrate and Miss Gallovidian cook up another charge against me. On my way home I find it difficult to resist the temptation of stopping at some busy corner and doing my stuff. I might make up for some of the

money, but I just happen to be wearing my best and have been a beggar long enough to know that people don't give money away to beggars who are dressed better than they. People who give alms to beggars do so to establish their superiority over the receiver, and like I said: I'm not an apprentice beggar.

When I get home I find a letter from my wife.

Our son, Tommy, is sick. Please come home. . .

I become afraid and anxious for my Tommy, and even the kind words of my outsize landlady fail to move me.

I had to wait for something like this to show me the folly of my ways. A man's place is next to his wife and family. I had hoped that some day I would be able to provide my boys with a decent education, to grow them like normal boys, not just sons of a helpless cripple. . . to find a place for them in the sun. I might be a big shot beggar but as a husband and father, I stink.

'If I should not see my friend Serurubele, will you. . .'

'Yes, I'll explain to him. I'll always have your room for you if you should ever want it again.'

Deep down I know that I will want it again. I have three hundred and thirty-five reasons why I should. Blushing Groom and the gullible public of Johannesburg will live in my mind for ever. . . I have to come back. I owe it to the profession.

Chapter 55

The Urchin

by

Can Themba

One sling of the braces would not keep up on the shoulder, just like one worm of pale-green mucus kept crawling down to the chestnut lip and would suddenly dart back like a timid creature. But Macala wore his long pants (surely someone's—someone older's—castaway three-quarter jeans) with a defiant pride just ready to assault the rest of the known world. Other boys his ten-year age only had short pants.

He looked up and down from Mafuta's Chinaman store along Victoria Road, Sophiatown, and he thought of how his day ought to begin. Mafuta's was no good: he kept two too-ferocious dogs in his shop, and fairly-authenticated rumour had it that he also kept a gun that made a terrible noise. But the vistas up and down Victoria Road offered infinite possibilities for a man. To the left, there were queues on queues of half-frightened, half-foolish people who simply asked to be teased. Then Moosa's store with all those fruity, sweet things in the window; but they said Moosa trained at night with irons. Opposite, across Millar Street, there was a Chink butcher, but his counter was fenced off with wire, and Ooh! those cruel knives and hatchets. There must be a lot of money there for it to be protected so formidably. And, next to the butcher, the Bicycle Shop with its blaring juke-box: *Too roo roo roo tu! Too roo roo roo tu-tu!*, where a

passer-by girl would suddenly break into a dance step, seductive beyond her years.

All like that, up to Chang's, and from there just the denuded places the demolition squad had left in Sophiatown.

To the right, Macala stared at Benghali House. The only double-storey building in the whole of Sophiatown. In front of it all sorts of peddlers met: sweet-potato sellers, shoe-lace sellers—all bedamned whether or not the shopkeeper alone held a license to sell anything.

Macala's eyes glittered as he saw the Ma-Ndebele women squatting in their timeless patience behind their huge dishes of maize-cobs, dried *morogo* peanut cubes, wild fruits like *marula*, *mahlatswa*—things in the urban African never sees on trees these days.

To Macala, these women with their quaint and beaded necks, and legs made to look like colourful pythons, were the fairest game.

He stepped off the veranda of Mafuta's shop, off the pavement, and sauntered swaggeringly towards those placid women in front of Benghali House. He was well aware that the street-corner loungers, enormous liars all of them, were watching him, thinking that the slightest move Macala made promised excitement and trouble.

He stopped in front of a Ndebele woman transfixed to her white dish, as if one with it, as if trade meant just being there at the strategic place and time: no bawling, no bartering, no bargaining.

'Dis—how much?' and that to Macala was English with a vengeance. She looked up at him with large baffled eyes, but before she spoke, Macala lifted his foot and trod on the edge of the dish, sending its contents churning out of it into the dust of Victoria Road's pavement. He shrieked with delight as he ran off.

What she hurled at him in virulent Ndebele may have been curses, prayers, lamentations, but to Macala it was reward enough; the kind of thing that proves the superiority of the townsman to these odd creatures from the country. And the passing generation's men and women shook their heads and muttered gloomily, 'the children of today, the children of today. . .'

His momentum took him to the vegetable vendor just opposite Mafuta's. In fluid career, he seized the handle of the cart and whirled it round and up for the devil of it. Potatoes, onions, pumpkins, cabbages went swirling into the air and plump tomatoes squashed on the macadam. The khaki-coated vendor stood aghast for a second before he broke into imprecations that shuddered even the sordid Sophiatown atmosphere. But Macala was off on his mischievous way.

He has passed the 'Fish and Chips' too fast for another tilt, and met his pals on the corner of Tucker and Victoria: Dipapang, Jungle and Boy-Boy. Together, they should have been 'Our Gang' but their organization was not tight enough for that.

Boy-Boy's was the brain that germinated most of the junior devilry of the team, but he did not quite have Macala's impetuous courage of execution. He looked like a social worker's explanation of 'conditions in the slums': thin, malnourished, delinquent, undisciplined, dedicated to a future gallows. Yet his father was an important man and his mother a teacher. Jungle qualified by the ease with which he could talk of using a knife, in real *bit-tsotsi* fashion. Dipapang initiated nothing, thought nothing, was nothing, but was always so willing to join in, trying to finish anything the others cared to start.

'Heit, Macacix!' called Boy-Boy. 'It's how there?'

Macala suddenly felt in the mood for the jargon of the townships. The near-animal, amorphous, quick-shifting lingo that alarms farm-boys and drives cops to all branches of suspicion. But it marks the city slicker who can cope with all its vagaries.

'It's covert under the corset,' Macala replied, bobbing his head this way and that to the rhythm.

'Hai, man, bigshot, you must be the reely-reely outlaw in this town,' Boy-Boy parried and lunged.

'Naw,' Macala feinted, 'dis town, Softtown's too small for me. I'll take Western and Corrie and Maclera and London, and smash them into a mashed potato.'

Boy-Boy fell for it, 'Whew!' he whistled, 'don't say you'll crowd me out!'

Macala took him by the throat and went in for the kill, 'Didn't I tell you, buster, to keep out of my country, or else. . .'

He proceeded to carry out the menacing 'or else' by choking Boy-Boy and slowly tripping him over a leg he had slipped behind him until they rolled over as Boy-Boy fell, and tumbled into the gutter.

Boy-Boy gasped, 'Ah, give up, boss, da country's yours.'

The mock battle was over and everybody laughed. . . except Jungle. He was reputed to be 'serious' and that meant of the homicidal type. He sat there on the pavement drain with his mournful face, sharpening gratingly on the concrete his 3-Star jack-knife which from some hazy movie memory he called his 'gurkha'. As the laughter trailed off, he suddenly drawled, 'Have you guys heard that Mpedi was arrested yesterday?'

They stared at him in genuine stupefaction. Then Boy-Boy said, 'Yerrr! How'd it happen, Jungle?'

But Jungle was not one for elaborating a story. Very unsatisfactorily, he said, 'Waal, he was drinking at de English Lady's joint. . . and . . . and dey got him.'

'You mean he didn't shoot it out? You mean dey took him just like dat? But I bet ya dey couldn't put handcuffs on Mpedi!' But Macala was very unhappy about the tame way the idol of the township was arrested.

It was Boy-Boy who made a story of it. 'Yerrr! But *there* is an outee—a great outlaw!' He rose from the pavement and stood before the fascinated gaze of his pals. He stuck his thumbs into his belt and swayed his hips as he strutted up and down before him. Then he mimicked the bull-brained fearlessness of Mpedi, the mirror and form of almost all young Sophiatown, the clattering terror of men, and the perennial exasperation of the police station across the road.

'Ya! Da room was full—full to da door. Clovers, big shots, boozers, bamboos, coat-hangers, hole-diggers, and bullets, blondes, figure 8's and capital If's, wash-planks and two-ton trucks. Da boys were in de stack and da dames were game. . .

'Then Buras Mpedi stepped in, his eyes blood-red. The house went dead-still. Ag, man, Buras Mpedi, man. He stood there and looked left. . . and looked right. . . His man was not there. He stepped in some more. The house was dead. He grabbed a beer from the nearest table and slugged it from the bottle. Who would talk?' Boy-Boy's upper lip curled up on one side in utter contempt, 'He, who would talk!'

Macala and his pals were caught in Boy-Boy's electric pause. Even Jungle was aroused by this dramatic display of township bullycraft.

Boy-Boy's histrionics continued, 'Yerrrrre! A drunk girl came from under a table, and tried Mpedi for a drink. "Au, Bura Mpedi give me a beer." Bura Mpedi put a boot on her shoulder and pushed her back under da table. Hai, man, hai, man, dat outee is coward-cool, man. And he hates cherry coat-hangers. But dat night his eyes were going all over looking for Mahlalela. Yeffies! If he'd caught Mahlalela dat night. . .!'

Lifted by the wide-eyed admiration of his pals, Boy-Boy went on to surpass himself. He flung out his right arm recklessly, and declared, 'Bat dat's nutting yet! You should have seen Bura Mpedi when dey sent four lean cops to come and take him. Payroll robbery, Booyens. . . one thousand pound! Assault with Grievous Bodily Harm, Newlands. . . three men down and out! Housebreakin' 'n *Thatha*. . . Lower Houghton!

'Dey came, man dey came. Four cops; two had guns, two had small inches. Dey surrounded da joint in Gibson Street, and dey called out to him to give up. Dey didn't know Mpedi with moonwash in his brains and a human intestine round his waist. He drew his point-three-five and his forty-five, and he came out shooting: Twah! Rwah! Rwah! Da two cops with the small inches ducked into a shebeen near by and ordered themselves a ha' nip brandy. One with da gun ran down Gibson Street for reinforces. Da last cop took a corner and decided to shoot it out with Mpedi. But da bullets came so fast he never got a chance to poke out a shot.

'Hee-e-e, I tell you Mpedi was da outee.' Then, still carried forward by the vibrance of his enthusiasm, Boy-Boy rounded off his dramatization by backing away slowly as he fired off imaginary guns, and barked, "Twah! Twah! Twah!"

But the elation that had swelled up in Macala was not shot through with envy. 'How come,' he grumbled, 'Da cops got him so easy now?' Yet what really worried hi was that he knew how far he was beneath the fabulous Mpedi; that even in his own weight division, he could not make such an awe-inspiring impression. He was not even as good an actor as Boy-Boy to recount and represent the exploits of the almighties. He looked at Boy-Boy bitterly and told himself, 'I'll beat his brains out if he gets smart with me.'

It was Jungle who wrenched him out of his sour reverie. 'Boys, I think we should go finish off da Berliners,' Jungle said, prosaically.

A flash of fear leapt into Boy-Boy's eyes, for he knew this meant war. Macala was himself a bit scared, but seeing the fear in Boy-Boy, he screwed his heart through a hold too small for it.

And Jungle's 'gurkha' went on scraping the pavement concrete, *screech-screech! Screech-screech!*

'Come-ahn, let's go,' Macala suddenly decided.

They swaggered along Victoria Road, filling it from pavement to pavement as if they were a posse. Silent. Full of purpose. Deliberately grim. Boys and girls scampered for cover. Grown-ups stepped discreetly out of their way. Only the bigger tsotsis watched them with pride, and shouted encouragements like *'Da men who rule da town! Tomorrow's outees!'*

On the corner of Meyer Street, they broke up a ring of young dicers and forced them to join up. Along the way they collected non-schoolgoing loafers who lounged against shop walls; blue-jeaned youngsters who twisted the arms of school-girls in rough love; odd-

job boys who ran errands for shopkeepers; truants, pickpockets, little thugs, within their age-limit—the lot.

By the time they turned into Edith Street, they were a miniature army of hell-bent ruffians. Macala led them and felt the strange thrill of the force behind him. He chose Edith Street because it rose into a rocky hill with plenty of stones for ammunition, and dropped suddenly into that part of Sophiatown they called *Berlin*, where the walls were smeared with crude swastikas.

Macala split his men into two groups. Those with thick, bronze buckle belts were to go under Jungle through a cut in the row of houses precariously perched on huge boulders.

The excitement chopped Macala's breath into collops as he gave out his instructions. 'You boys get dem from de back. You start de war. When dey come running up Edward Road, dey'll meet us. Use dat butcher of yours Uncle Jungle.

Jungle gave one of his rare smiles, and his men took position.

Macala and his group, first placing a sentinel on the hill-top, slowly clambered down the rocks and waited for Jungle to get around.

Though going into the den of the enemy, Jungle did not find it difficult to rout them. There was a biggish group of them playing dice in the usual ring, and when he swooped upon them, they instinctively thought it was the police and dashed up Edward Road, sticks and buckle belts raining on their heads.

Jungle himself had chosen a heftily-built fellow and was stabbing at him as he ran. Boy-Boy was later to describe it graphically, 'Yerre! Dat guy just wouldn't fall. Jungle had him—zip! But he ran on. Jungle caught him again in the neck—zip! He stumbled and trotted

on his hands and feet. Jungle got him in the buttock—zip! But, yerrr! He just wouldn't fall!

Before the Berliners could rally and make a stand, they had run into Macala's stone-throwing division. Though very one-sided the fight became fierce. The Berliners were now fighting, and because they were trapped and because they had to fight with their bare hands most of the time, they became young devils from the playgrounds of Hell.

Stones and all sorts of other missiles were hurled in all directions. Knives were brandished and plunged, big-buckled belts were swung in whistling arcs, arms were flailed in the centre of the imbroglio with desperate savagery. Women screamed, shops closed, traffic diverted itself. Now and then, a blood-bespattered boy would stagger off the street to a side wall just to sit down and watch, too done in to flee.

Then suddenly came the shrill warning cry, '*Arrara! Arrarayii!*' The action stopped almost as abruptly as those ancient films which froze in mid-motion and transfixed the movement into a photograph. And just as suddenly after, they scattered all pell-mell. When the police van came round the corner, it was impossible to decide which flee-ers to pursue. For, now, everybody was running up and down and off the streets. The scores of small boys, ordinary pedestrians who had just alighted upon the scene. Fah-fee runners with full-blown cheeks a-chumping the incriminating tickets of their illicit lottery; everybody was running. In Sophiatown, you do not stop to explain to the police that you had nothing to do with it, or that you knew some of the culprits and could help the police.

The mobile squad were satisfied with merely clearing the street.

Breathless and bruised, Macala found himself at the open commonage called Maccauvlei, adjacent to Waterval Hospital, which served as the waste dumps to the city, and 'golf course' to those Africans who went in for the sport of leisure. Macala knew that most of his gang would sooner or later find their way there. He sat on a mound of ash, gasping heavily.

By the time Boy-Boy had arrived, he had regained his breath, and was pitching chalky, burnt-out pebbles rather pointlessly. Jungle came, for once, apparently, in his seventh heaven. Dipapang, too, grinned happily though his shirt had been torn down and hung like a hula. A few other stragglers from the Black Caps joined them, and then came the News. News that oddly took the shape of 'They say'.

'Dey say,' announced one urchin, 'dat one of de Berliners is dead.'

Stultifying fright seized them all. Some small boy simply broke out crying. Macala had trouble with a choking clod in his throat.

'Dey say,' came in another boy, 'de Berliners are going to call in de Big Berliners.'

'Agh,' grunted Macala in contempt, 'we'll go'n tell Bura Shark.'

'Dey say de cops're going to round us all up tonight.'

Despite all their bravado, all their big-shot stances and their blistering contempt for cops and the law, there is one thing that this knighthood really fears, and it was expressed by a crackling of interjections from each according to his own lights.

'Six lashes and reformatory!'

'De cane and off to a farm!'

'Cuts with a light cane and no fine!'

Someone elaborated the procedure by filling in the gory details: 'Dey say, two huge cops hold you down over a big bench an' you got nothin' on. You can't move. Now, maybe de magistrate he said "Six cuts". Dat's nothin'. If you cry, for every one you get two. An' dose cops who give de lashes, dey train for you, dey pick up weightlifting for you, dey grip a grip all day for you. Den when de other cops got you on de bench, an' you can't move, an' you don't want to cry, de lashing cop he takes de cane, he swishes it over his head, one-two-three, whish! De tattoo jumps up on your buttocks.

'Dey say, he den goes to sit down, lights a sigareete, and talks with de other cops. Den he comes again. One of de cops holding you turns your head so you can see de lashing cop coming. He swishes de cane, one-two-three, whish!' Nother tattoo comes up, dis time with blood. Red blood from your buttocks. He goes for 'nother puff at his cigarette, or maybe he looks for his tea dis time.

'He comes again. Dis time he sneezes his nose on your buttocks, and makes jokes how black buttocks is tough. He swishes the cane one-two-three, whish! If you don't cry, maybe you get your six lashes straight. But if you cry, only just *Maye Babo*—oh-ho-ho! . . .

'An dey say, sometimes after you get lashes, six days, two weeks, you can't sit in de bus, you give your seat to de aunties. Hai, dat cane dey keep in de salt water when nobody get lashes!'

By that time the horror of the prospect had seeped through every delinquent soul. It was Macala who spoke first.

He said determinedly, "me, I'm not going home tonight.'

But Boy-Boy did not like the idea. He knew that his mother would not rest until she had found out where he was. Worse still, she might even go ask the police to help her find him. 'Naw, Macacix, I'm going home. I don't like cops catching me when my ma is not there. I'm going home.'

As he walked away, the whole little gang suddenly roke up and walked home their different ways. As they scattered, Macala went frantic with panic. With consternation twisted in his face and his arms floating like a blind man's in front of him, he looked half-comic as he stood on that mount of ash.

'Hey, hey, you guys won't leave me alone. We're de boys. . .'

He heard a sound of impatience behind him, 'Aargh! Let them go, Macala.' He turned round and reeled unsteadily a little as he saw Jungle standing there, not looking frightened at all.

'Wh-what you going to do, Jungle?'

Jungle took out his 'gurkha' and scraped it across his palm from left to right, right to left. Then he said, 'I'm going home, Macala,' and that mournful expression crept across his countenance. 'And when de cops come to get me tonight. . .' He made an ugly motion with his knife under his chin. He walked away with the slow lanky movement of that gawky body of his.

By the time Macala decided to leave Maccauvlei, it was get ting dark. But he knew where he was going. Rather unnecessarily, he skulked along the fences of the street, looking this way and that. Now and then, he would petrify at the zoom of a passing car of duck into an alley when headlights bore goldenly through the dark of the street. But ultimately he reaches the open space where Gerty, Bertha, and Toby Streets used to be. He saw the dark building for which he was

headed. He ran forward and stopped in front of it, but this side of the street. Slowly now. Somewhere here there was a night-watchman, a Zulu with a thick black beard and barbell moustache, black uniform and black face that rubbed him out of sight in the dark, and a gnarled knobkerrie known to have split skulls.

But Macala knew where the corrugated-iron fence had snarled out a lip of entrance for him. He went on his hands and knees, and crawled away from the immense double gate towards this entrance. He found it and coiled himself inside. He knew there were stacks of corrugated iron in this timber yard, and if he touched them, the racket would alert the night-watchman. So he did not go far, just nestled himself near his exit.

A little breeze was playing outside, hasting a piece of paper down the street, and now and then a bus or lorry would thunder by. But Macala slept, occasionally twitching in the hidden mechanics of sleep. Far from where he could hear, a woman's voice was calling stridently, 'Mac-a-a-ala! Hai, that child will one day bring me trouble.'

Chapter 56

Mita

by

Casey Motsisi

It was Saturday morning. The sun peeped out slowly from the Easterly womb. Slowly, almost furtively as though it wanted to take Sophiatown by surprise. But Sophiatown cannot be taken by surprise. Sophiatown might go to sleep late in the night, drunk, violent and rowdy. But in the small hours of the morning she wakes up, yawns away her hangover and prepares herself for another uncertain day.

It is a habit. A habit forced upon her by the machinations of the law—the early morning beer raids, pass raids, permit raids. Raids, raids, raids. And yet a habit so nurtured by the very way of life typical in all other locations. A young man knocks at your door. You open it and recognize him as one of your relations. He has news—sometimes good, often bad. ‘father said I must come to let you know that Boikie is dead. The Tsotsis stabbed him last night.’ . . . ‘Uncle, Ma says I must come and find out if sister spent the night here.’ Less often: ‘Father says I must come and tell you that mother has given birth to twins. She wants auntie to come and spend the day with her.’ It is a habit for Sophiatown to wake up early.

Mita was an early riser. About four o’clock she would have the home fires burning and she would stand with her back to the small stove humming her favourite tune: ‘Stormy Weather’. That was at her parents’ home in Western township, just a throw south of Sophiatown. But now she was staying in Sophiatown.

Mita's father, Mr. Rabotho, who ran a small business at the Western Township Municipal Beer Hall, had told her some months back never to set foot in this house until she brought the father of her unborn child.

So Mita went to stay with the young man. Of course, the young man did not take it lying down. He argued. He wrangled. 'How can you be sure it's my child?' But Mita's insistent cry, 'It's yours, it's yours. I know!' finally triumphed.

But for the first time as far as she could remember, the morning Sophiatown sun had caught her napping. It was eight o'clock when she finally woke up. It was the pain. Lord, how can the human body sustain such a torture! She tossed around in bed, her eyes tightly closed, her face meshed with pain. She knew her time had come, but doubt still played around with her mind.

'How can it be, it's hardly eight months,' she kept asking herself. 'But why the pain, the painful pain,' she wondered again. 'Is it because the baby is. . .'

But before her lips could form the word, 'illegitimate', her mind grabbed it and flung it against the cobweb-clustered ceiling.

'Tho-o-mas!' It was an unearthly scream that filtered through Mita's clenched teeth. The scream hesitated at the door, the window, at every little aperture then burst out into the open as though afraid to linger another second in the small dingy room.

But Thomas was not there. At that very moment he was cycling through the maze that is Johannesburg delivering parcels and letters for his firm. . .

'Ma Tladi, one of the yard's shebeen queens, burst through the door. She was just in time to grab Mita and stop her from falling off the bed. The two women grappled like street brawlers on the bed. 'Ma Tladi began screaming too when she felt Mita's teeth slithering into the pudgy wrist, but she fought on gallantly. Her usual weekend clashes with her husband were standing her in good stead. Two other women darted into the room, saw what was happening and automatically gave a hand.

In a few moments it was all over. The fighting, biting, wrestling. All over. The three fleshy women were smiling—an almost holy radiance in their faces. Once more a miracle had come to pass. It was a baby boy!

Mita was crying. But these were extremely beautiful tears, a sight to behold. Tears that are the language of every human soul passing through a moment of boundless ecstasy. Later a doctor was summoned. 'Ma Tladi paid the bill.

It was in the night when Mita heard the door open. A candle was burning in a saucer on the table. Thomas closed the door and stood looking at the bed. He knew that there were two lives in it. 'Ma Tladi had told him when he stopped there to buy a nip of brandy.

'You drunkard of a pig,' she had shouted at him. 'You come here saying "nip, auntie". You rubbish. You had better save that five shillings and go and buy your child clothes and napkins. Get out of here and stop saying "nip, nip, auntie," before I pour boiling water on your face, you drunkard!'

'Leave the boy alone, you dog.' 'Ma Tladi's husband had countered. 'Buy the nip and let's drink, my boy.'

'keep that bablaas bek of yours shut before I bash it in with this pot,'
'Ma Tladi had fumed at her husband and pushed Thomas out of the house. As he tried to talk without a stagger to his room he could hear a commotion behind the locked door.

'Ma Tladi and her husband were clawing at each other's necks again.

Two lives in the bed. 'Ma Tladi had said to buy the baby clothes, but she hadn't said what the baby was. Thomas just stood there, staring, trying hard to appear as one who hadn't touched a drop. But Mita knew that he had been drinking, but she wasn't going to take him to task for it just this once. This was an occasion not to be marred by quarrels.

'It's a boy, Thomas.' Her voice was almost inaudible but Thomas heard her as clearly as if she had shouted the message through a megaphone. Thomas did not say a word. He just moved silently towards the bed and tried to flip the blanket to take a look at the baby. Mita stayed his hand gently and smiled into his face.

'No Thomas, you can't look at the child now. You'll have to wait for ten days before you can see it.' Thomas cursed at that old and stupid African custom. Mita saw the deep hurt in his eyes. She flipped the blanket over. 'But—you may take a little look. I'll close my eyes and pretend I'm asleep.'

Thomas did not take a 'little look'. He looked for a long time at the pinkish piece of life. A smile played upon his lips. 'Why won't he open his eyes and look at me, huh, honey? Boy, it looks just like you. I didn't know you were as pretty as all this until now. Tootsie-tootsie-tootsi-e-e.' But the baby would not be 'tootsied' into opening its eyes.

Thomas talked for a long while. He told Mita all his plans for the baby. He was going to do everything for it—for Mita too. He was going to buy his son a tricycle. Nothing would be too good for him.

Yawning and wondering what a small child like that would do with a tricycle, Mita reminded Thomas that it was late and he should go to sleep.

That night Thomas slept on the saggy sofa. It wasn't very comfortable but he would have to get used to it. He didn't fall asleep immediately. For some time he lay awake thinking of a certain Friday night. It was a party at a friend's place in Toby Street.

He remembered drinking anything that he was offered. He also remembered forcing a young girl whose name he didn't know then to drink too, reassuring her that a 'little drink never did anybody no harm,' whenever the young girl showed signs of refusing.

After that he didn't remember much. But he did remember that the following morning he woke up feeling sick, his tongue thick and gummy. And there was a young girl snoring next to him in the same bed. He had taken a long look at the girl and he faintly remembered seeing her at the party. How he had reached home he could not remember. He remembered shaking her until she was awake.

On waking up the girl had looked around the room as if in a daze and asked where she was. 'In my room,' he told her. 'And how the blazes did you get here?' It had been an awkward situation and both tried to conceal their embarrassment by talking harshly to each other. She had later dressed up and left. He had never thought at that time that things would have turned out like this.

Here he was with the same young girl he had met at the party. The young girl who had mothered that pinkish piece of life.

When Thomas finally fell asleep, he slept like a log. The baby fretted and cried most of the night but Thomas did not hear a sound. In the morning he woke up with a vague feeling that he had dreamed he came home last night to learn that he was the father of a baby which was premature by about two months. A quick look at the bed reassured him that it was no dream.

He woke up and lit the pressure stove. There was a knock at the door and he said, 'Com in!' out of sheer habit. Then he remembered. He rushed to the door to see who it was. It was 'Ma Tladi. Thomas stood aside for her to enter. She greeted Mita and went about filling a kettle with water and placed it on the pressure stove. He sat down on the saggy sofa he had been sleeping on and watched as 'Ma Tladi went about her work. He wondered at this woman. He knew her as a heartless, money-loving woman who never let a chance to fight or swear slip past her if she could help it.

How could a woman like her assume such a motherly role—and so expertly too? Thomas just sat down thinking of something he could do in order to be of help, but he knew that there was nothing he could do.

It was a relief for him when 'Ma Tladi gave him a sixpence and told him to go and buy some more paraffin at the Chinaman's shop. In a minute he was back with the paraffin. But he wanted an excuse to go out again and he said he forget to buy himself cigarettes.

Outside he met two of his friends. One of them asked him to buy them a little drink. He was just about to tell them that he had no money when he remembered that he had not given Mita his paypacket the previous night when he came home. He put his hand in his hip pocket and fingered the money. After a while he said yes,

he would buy them a drink. He was a father and that called for a celebration. . .

They went to a shebeen in Tucker Street and he ordered a bottle of brandy. They drank in silence for a while. When the bottle was half-way through they all began talking with nobody paying attention to anyone.

Fanyana, one of the boys who had asked Thomas to buy them a drink, took out a pound and ordered four bottles of beer. After one bottle had been finished, the three boys talked more, chain-smoked and did very little drinking. They were down to two bottles when two girls walked into the room. Selina and Sponono. They were both about 28 years old, which made them five years Thomas' senior. Thomas had been trying to avoid Sponono ever since he realized he was in love with Mita.

'Ja, Thomas, you tickeyline,' Sponono said. Thomas looked up at his old flame, nodded his head and said, 'Hiya, Spo.' He could not account for the cold feeling that crawled through his stomach at the sight of Sponono.

Sponono sat down next to him on the bench. 'Why don't you buy us some gin, Thomas, or does that little bitch of yours take all your money?' Thomas did not answer. He stood up and said he was leaving. 'If you're going, I'm going too,' said Sponono. She stood up and the two walked out. Selina remained sitting with the other two boys.

Outside, Sponono thrust her hand into Thomas' pocket. It happened too fast for Thomas. Sponono's hand came out clutching at two one pound notes and a ten shilling note, which quickly disappeared between her bodice.

'Give me back my money,' Thomas yelled and took a swing at Sponono's face. It was a wild swing which did not land. Sponono held him close against her body, her eyes two balls of ice.

'Listen here, sonnyboy,' Sponono said. 'I'll give you back your stinking money, but first you're taking me home. Nobody ever gave me the brush-off and you're not going to be the first.' Thomas tried to resist but he knew it was hopeless. Sponono was as big as an ox and just about as strong.

As he walked home during the night, Thomas had lost all sense of time. He knew it was just before midnight from the stream of people chattering and walking briskly along the street. They were people from the bioscope. He decided to take a short cut home. He lurched through the muddy backyards, ducking under a fence here, jumping over a small tree there.

Then suddenly he felt the pain. . . a sharp pain in his head. Three boys were surrounding him, flaying madly at him with fists, kicking at his shins with their shoes. He tried to fight back but it was no use. He was overpowered.

He saw the glimmer of the knife's blade and he tried to ward it off with his hands. The blade sank into his spine and he pitches forward with a deep groan. He felt the hands going deftly through his pockets. In a moment they left him lying there and disappeared into the dark.

Thomas tried to raise his head but it felt as though it had been nailed to the ground. A coldness spread over him, the blood oozed out of him.

Somewhere in the distance, in a small dingy room, a newborn baby cried endlessly. The mother tried to soothe it. 'Daddy's coming home soon, my love, don't cry.'

But the baby continued to cry. . .

Chapter 57

The Park

By

James Matthews

He looked longingly at the children on the other side of the railings; the children sliding down the chute, landing with feet astride on the bouncy lawn; screaming as they almost touched the sky with each upward curve of their swings; their joyful demented shrieks at each dip of the merry-go-round. He looked at them and his body trembled and ached to share their joy; buttocks to fit board, and hands and feet to touch steel. Next to him, on the ground, was a bundle of clothing, washed and ironed, wrapped in a sheet.

Five small boys pursued by two bigger ones, ran past, ignoring him. One of the bigger boys stopped. 'What are you looking at, you brown ape?' the boy said, stooping to pick up a lump of clay. He recognized him. The boy had been present the day he was put out of the park.

The boy pitched the lump, shattering it on the rail above his head, and the fragments fell on his face.

He spat out the particles of clay clinging to the lining of his lips, eyes searching for an object to throw at the boys separated from him by the railing. More boys joined the one in front of him and he was frightened by their number.

Without a word he shook his bundle free of clay, raised it to his head and walked away.

As he walked he recalled his last visit to the park. Without hesitation he had gone through the gates and got onto the nearest swing. Even now he could feel that pleasurable thrill that traveled the length of his body as he rocketed himself higher, higher, until he felt that the swing would upend him when it reached its peak. Almost leisurely he had allowed it to come to a halt like a pendulum shortening its stroke and then ran towards the see-saw. A white boy, about his own age, was seated opposite him. Accordion-like their legs folded to send the see-saw jerking from the indentation it pounded in the grass. A hand pressed on his shoulder stopping a jerk. He turned around to look into the face of the attendant.

'Get off!'

The skin tightened between his eyes. Why must I get off? What have I done? He held on, hands clamped onto the iron attached to the wooden see-saw. The white boy jumped off from the other end and stood a detached spectator.

'You must get off!' The attendant spoke in a low voice so that it would carry to the people who were gathering. 'The council say,' he continued, 'that us Blacks don't use the same swings as the whites. You must use the swings where you stay,' his voice apologizing for

the uniform he wore that gave him the right to watch that little white boys and girls were not hurt while playing.

'There no park where I stay.' He waved a hand in the direction of a block of flats. 'Park on the other side of town but I don't know where.' He walked past them. The mothers with their babies, pink and belching, cradled in their arms, the children lolling on the grass, his companion from the see-saw, the nurse girls—their uniforms their badge of indemnity—pushing prams. Beside him walked the attendant.

The attendant pointed an accusing finger at a notice board at the entrance. 'There. You can read for yourself.' Absolving him of all blame.

He struggled with the red letters on the white background. 'Blankes Alleen. Whites Only.' He walked through the gates and behind him the swings screeched, the see-saw rattled, and the merry-go-round rumbled.

He walked past the park each occasion he delivered the washing, eyes wistfully taking in the scene.

He shifted the bundle to a more comfortable position, easing the pain biting into his shoulder muscles. What harm would I be doing if I were to use the swings? Would it stop the swings from swinging? Would the chute collapse? The bundle pressed deeper and the pain became an even line across his shoulders and he had no answer to his reasoning.

The park itself, with its wide lawns and flower beds and rockeries and dwarf trees, meant nothing to him. It was the gaily painted red-and-green tubing, the silver chains and brown boards, transport to never-never land, which gripped him.

Only once, long ago, and then almost as if by mistake, had he been on something to beat it. He had been taken by his father, one of the rare times he was taken anywhere, to a fairground. He had stood captivated by the wooden horses with their gilded reins and scarlet saddles dipping in time to the music as they whirled by.

For a brief moment he was astride one, and he prayed it would last forever, but the moment lasted only the time it took him to whisper the prayer. Then he was standing clutching his father's trousers, watching the others astride the dipping horses.

Another shifting of the bundle and he was at the house where he delivered the clothing his mother had washed in a round tub filled with boiling water, the steam covered her face with a film of sweat. Her voice, when she spoke, was as soft and clinging as the steam enveloping her.

He pushed the gate open and walked around the back watching for the aged lap dog, which at his entry would rush out to wheeze asthmatically around his feet and nip with blunt teeth at his ankles.

A round-faced African girl, her blackness heightened by the white starched uniform she wore, opened the kitchen door to let him in. She cleared the table and he placed the bundle on it.

'I call madam,' she said, the words spaced and highly-pitched as if she had some difficulty in uttering the syllables in English. Her buttocks bounced beneath the tight uniform and the backs of her calves shone with fat.

'Are you sure you've brought everything?' was the greeting he received each time he brought the bundle, and each time she checked

every item and as usual nothing was missing. He looked at her and lowered his voice as he said; 'Everything there, merrum.'

What followed had become a routine between the three of them.

'Have you had anything to eat?' she asked him.

He shook his head.

'Well, we can't let you go off like that.' Turning to the African woman in the white, starched uniform, 'What have we got?'

The maid swung open the refrigerator door and took out a place of food. She placed it on the table and set a glass of mild next to it.

The white woman left the kitchen when he was seated and he was alone with the maid.

His nervousness left him and he could concentrate on what was on her plate.

A handful of peas, a dab of mashed potatoes, a tomato sliced into bleeding circles, a sprinkling of grated carrot, and no rice

White people are funny, he told himself. How can anyone fill himself with this? It doesn't form a lump like the food my mama makes.

He washed it down with milk.

'Thank you, Annie,' he said as he pushed the glass aside.

Her teeth gleamed porcelain white as she smiled.

He sat fidgeting, impatient to be outside away from the kitchen with its glossy, tiled floor and steel cupboards ducoued a clinical white to match the food-stacked refrigerator.

'I see you've finished.' The voice startled him. She held out an envelope containing the rand note—payment for his mother's weekly struggle over the wash tub. 'This is for you.' A five cent piece was dropped into his hand, a long fingernail raking his palm.

'Thank you, merrum.' His voice hardly audible.

'Tell your mother I'm going away on holiday for about a month and I'll let her know when I'm back.'

Then he was dismissed and her high heels tapped out of the kitchen.

He nodded his head at the African maid who took an apple from a bowl bursting with fruit and handed it to him.

He grinned his thanks and her responding smile bathed her face in light.

He walked down the path finishing the apple with big bites.

The dog was after him before he reached the gate, its hot breath warming his heels. He turned and poked his toes on its face. It barked hoarsely in protest, a look of outrage on its face.

He laughed delightedly at the expression which changed the dog's features into those of an old man.

'See you do that again.' He waved his feet in front of the pug's nose. The nose retreated and made an about-turn, waddling away with its dignity deflated by his affront.

As he walked, he mentally spent his sixpence.

I'll buy a penny drop, the sour ones that taste like limes, a penny bull's eyes, a packet of sherbet with licorice tube at the end of the packet, and a penny star toffees, red ones that turn your spit into blood.

His glands were titillated and his mouth filled with saliva. He stopped at the first shop and walked in.

Trays were filled with expensive chocolates and sweets of a type never seen in the jars on the shelves of the Indian shop on the corner where he stayed. He walked out not buying a thing.

His footsteps lagged as he reached the park.

The nurse girls with their babies and prams were gone, their places occupied by old men, who, with their hands holding up their stomachs, were casting disapproving eyes over the confusion and clatter confronting them.

A ball was kicked perilously close to an old man, and the boy who ran after it stopped short as the old man raised his stick, daring him to come closer.

The rest of them called to the boy to get the ball. He edged closer and made a grab at it as the old man swung his cane. The cane missed the boy by more than a foot and he swaggered back, the ball held under his arm. The game was resumed.

He watched them from the other side of the railings—the boys kicking the ball, the children cavorting on the grass, even the old men, senile on the seats; but most of all, the children enjoying

themselves with what was denied him, and his whole body yearned to be part of them.

'Shit it!' He looked over his shoulder to see if anyone had heard him. 'Shit it!' he said louder. 'Shit on them! Their park, the grass, the swings, the see-saw, everything! Shit it! Shit it!'

His small hands impotently shook the tall railings towering above his head.

It struck him that he would not be seeing the park for a whole month, that there would be no reason for him to pass it.

Despair filled him. He had to do something to ease his anger.

A bag filled with fruit peelings was on top of the rubbish stacked in a waste basket fitted to a pole. He reached for it and frantically threw it over the railings. He ran without waiting to see the result.

Out of breath three streets further, he slowed down, pain stabbing beneath his heart. The act had brought no relief, only intensified the longing.

He was oblivious of the people passing, the hoots of the vehicles whose paths he crossed without thinking. And once, when he was roughly pushed aside, he did not even bother to look and see who had done it.

The familiar shrieks and smells told him that he was home.

The Indian shop could not draw him out of melancholy mood and he walked past it, his five cent piece unspent in his pocket.

A group of boys were playing with tyres on the pavement.

Some of them called him but he ignored them and turned into a short side street.

He mounted the flat step of a two storey-house with a façade that must once have been painted but had now turned a nondescript grey with the red brick underneath showing.

Beyond the threshold the room was dim. He walked past the scattered furniture with a familiarity that did not need guidance.

His mother was in the kitchen hovering over a pot perched on a pressure stove.

He placed the envelope on the table. She put aside the spoon and stuck a finger under the flap of the envelope, tearing it into half. She placed the rand note in a spoutless teapot on the shelf.

'You hungry?'

He nodded his head.

She poured him a cup of soup and added a thick slice of brown bread.

Between bites of bread and sips of soup which scalded his throat, he told his mother that there would not be any washing coming during the week.

'Why? What the matter What I do?'

'Nothing. Merrum say she go away for a month. She let mama know she back.'

'What I do now?' Her voice took on a whine and her eyes strayed to the teapot containing the money. The whine hardened to reproach as she continued. 'Why don't she let me know she going away then I look for another merrum?' she paused. 'I slave away and the pain never leave my back but it too much for her to let me know she go away. The money I get from her keep us nice and steady. How I go cover the hold?'

He wondered how the rand notes he had brought helped to keep them nicely steady. There was no change in their meals. It was, as usual, not enough, and the only time they received new clothes was at Christmas.

'I must pay the burial, and I was going to tell Mr. Lemonsky to bring lino for the front room. I'm sick looking at he lino full of holes but I can forget now. With no money you gat as much hope as getting wine on Sunday.'

He hurried his eating to get away from the words wafted towards him, before it could soak into him, trapping him in the chair to witness his mother's miseries.

Outside, they were still playing with their tyres. He joined them half-heartedly. As he lolled the tyre his spirit was still in the park on the swings. There was no barrier to his coming and he could do as he pleased. He was away from the narrow streets and squawking children and speeding cars. He was in a place of green grass and red tubing and silver steel. The tyre rolled past him. He made no effort to grab it.

'Get the tyre. You sleep? Don't you want to play anymore?'

He walked away ignoring their cries.

Rage boiled up inside him. Rage against the houses with its streaked walls and smashed panes filled by too many people; against the overflowing garbage pails outside doors; the alleys and streets; and against a law he could not understand—a law that shut him out of the park.

He burst into tears. He swept his arms across his cheeks to check his weeping.

He lowered his hands to peer at the boy confronting him.

'I think you cry!'

'Who say I cry? Something in my eye and I rub it.'

He pushed past and continued towards the shop; 'Cry baby!' the boy's taunt rang after him.

The shop's sole iron-barred window was crowded. Oranges were mixed with writing paper and dried figs were strewn on school slates. Clothing and crockery gathered dust. Across the window a cockroach made its leisurely way, antennae on the alert.

Inside the shop was as crowded as the window. Bags covered the floor leaving a narrow path to the counter.

The shopkeeper, an ancient Indian with a face tanned like cracked leather leaned across the counter. 'Yes, boy?' He showed teeth scarlet with betel. 'Come'n, boy. What you want? No stand here all day.' His jaws worked at the betel nut held captive by his stained teeth.

He ordered penny portions of his selection.

He transferred the sweets to his pockets and threw the torn containers on the floor and walked out. Behind him the Indian murmured grimly, jaws working faster.

One side of the street was in shadow. He sat with his back against the wall, savouring the last of the sun.

Bull's-eye, peppermint, a piece of licorice—all lumped together in his cheek. For a moment the part was forgotten.

He watched without interest the girl advancing.

'Mama say you must come'n eat.' She stared at his bulging cheek. One hand rubbing the side of her nose. 'Gimme.' He gave her a bull's eye which she dropped into her mouth between dabs at her nose.

'Wipe your snot! He ordered her, showing his superiority. He walked past. She followed sucking and sniffing.

Their father was already seated at the table when they entered the kitchen.

'Must I always send somebody after you?' his mother asked.

He slipped into his seat and then hurriedly got up to wash his hands before his other could find fault with yet another point.

Supper was a silent affair except for the scrapping of spoon across a plate and an occasional sniff from his sister.

A thought came into his mind almost at the end of the meal. He sat spoon poised in the air shaken by its magnitude. Why not go to the park after dark? After it had closed its gates on the old men, the

children, and nurses with their prams! There would be on one to stop him.

He could think no further. He was lightheaded with the thought of it. His mother's voice, as she related her day to his father, was not the steam that stung, but a soft breeze wafting past him, leaving him undisturbed. Then qualms troubled him. He had never been in that part of town at night. A band of fear tightened across his chest, contracting his insides, making it hard for him to swallow his food. He gripped his spoon tightly, stretching his skin across his knuckles.

I'll do it! I'll go to the park as soon as we're finished eating. He controlled himself with difficulty. He swallowed what was left on his plate and furtively watched to see how the others were faring. Hurry up! Hurry up!

He hastily cleared the table when his father pushed the last plate aside and began washing up.

Each piece of crockery washed was passed to his sister whose sniffing kept pace with their combined operation.

The dishes done, he swept the kitchen and carried out the garbage bin.

'Can I go play, mama?'

'Don't let me have to send for you again.'

His father remained silent buried behind the newspaper.

'Before you go,' his mother stopped him — 'light the lamp and hang it in the passage.'

He filled the lamp with paraffin, turned up the wick and lit it. The light glimmered weakly through the streaked glass.

The moon, to him, was a fluorescent ball; light without warmth—and the stars, fragments chipped of it. Beneath street lights card games were in session. He sniffed the nostril-prickling smell of dagga as he walked past. Dim doorways could not conceal couples clutching each other.

Once clear of the district, he broke into a trot. He did not slacken his pace as he assed through the downtown area with its wonderland shop windows. His elation seeped out as he neared the park and his footsteps dragged.

In front of him was the park with its gate and iron railings. Behind the railings, impaled, the notice board. He could see the swings beyond. The sight strengthened him.

He walked over, his breath coming faster. There was no one in sight. A car turned a corner and came towards him and he started at the sound of its engine. The car swept past, the tyres softly licking the asphalt.

The railings were icy-cold to his touch and the shock sent him into action. He extended his arms and with monkey-like movements pulled himself up to perch on top of the railings then dropped onto the newly-turned earth.

The grass was dam with dew and he swept his feet across it. Then he ran and the wet grass bowed beneath his bare feet.

He ran towards the swings, the merry-go-round, see-saw to chute, hands covering the metal.

Up the steps to the top of the chute. He stood outlined against the sky. He was a bird, an eagle. He flung himself down on his stomach, sliding swiftly. Wheeeeeee! He rolled over when he slammed onto the grass. He looked at the moon for an instant then propelled himself to his feet and ran for the steps of the chute to recapture that feeling of flight. Each time he swept down the chute, he wanted the trip never to end, to go on sliding, sliding, sliding.

He walked reluctantly past the see-saw, consoling himself with pushing at one end to send it whacking on the grass.

'Shit it!' he grunted as he strained to set the merry-go-round into action. Thigh tensed, leg stretched, he pushed. The merry-go-round moved. He increased his exertions and jumped on, one leg trailing at the ready to shove if it should slow down. The merry-go-round dipped and swayed. To keep it moving, he had to push more than he rode. Not wanting to spoil his pleasure, he jumped off and raced for the swings.

Feet astride, hands clutching silver chains, he jerked his body to gain momentum. He crouched like a runner then violently straightened. The swing widened its arc. It swept higher, higher, higher. It reached the sky. He could touch the moon. He plucked a star to pin to his breast. The earth was far below. No bird could fly as high as he. Upwards and onwards he went.

A light switched on in the hut at the far side of the park. It was a small patch of yellow on a dark square. The door opened and he saw a figure in the doorway. Then the door was shut and the figure strode towards him. He knew it was the attendant. A torch glinted brightly as it swung at his side.

He continued swinging.

The attendant came to a halt in front of him, out of reach of the swing's arc, and flashed his torch. The light caught him in mid-air.

'God dammit!' the attendant swore. 'I told you before you can't get on the swings.'

The rattle of the chains when the boy shifted his feet was the only answer he received.

'Why you come back?'

'The swings, I come back for the swings.'

The attendant catalogued the things denied them because of their colour. Even his job depended on their goodwill.

'Blerry whites! They get everything!'

All his feeling urged him to leave the boy alone, to let him continue to enjoy himself but the fear that someone might see them hardened him.

'Get off! Go home!' he screamed, his voice harsh, his anger directed at the system that drove him against his own. 'If you don't get off, I go for the police. You know what they do to you.'

The swing raced back and forth.

The attendant turned and hurried towards the gate.

'Mama, Mama.' His lips trembled, wishing himself safe in his mother's kitchen, sitting next to the still-burning stove with a comic spread across his knees. 'Mama, Mama.' His voice mounted, wrenched from his throat, keeping pace with the soaring swing as it

climbed the sky. Voice and swing. Swing and voice. Higher. Higher. Higher. Until they were one.

At the entrance of the park the notice board stood tall, its shadow elongated, pointing towards him.

Chapter 58

The Departure

by

Peter Clarke

He looked longingly at the children on the other side of the railings; the children sliding down the chute, landing with feet astride on the bouncy lawn; screaming as they almost touched the sky with each upward curve of their swings; their joyful demented shrieks at each dip of the merry-go-round. He looked at them and his body trembled and ached to share their joy; buttocks to fit board, and hands and feet to touch steel. Next to him, on the ground, was a bundle of clothing, washed and ironed, wrapped in a sheet.

Five small boys pursued by two bigger ones, ran past, ignoring him. One of the bigger boys stopped. 'What are you looking at, you brown ape?' the boy said, stooping to pick up a lump of clay. He recognized him. The boy had been present the day he was put out of the park. The boy pitched the lump, shattering it on the rail above his head, and the fragments fell on his face.

He spat out the particles of clay clinging to the lining of his lips, eyes searching for an object to throw at the boys separated from him by the railing. More boys joined the one in front of him and he was frightened by their number.

Without a word he shook his bundle free of clay, raised it to his head and walked away.

As he walked he recalled his last visit to the park. Without hesitation he had gone through the gates and got onto the nearest swing. Even now he could feel that pleasurable thrill that traveled the length of his body as he rocketed himself higher, higher, until he felt that the swing would upend him when it reached its peak. Almost leisurely he had allowed it to come to a halt like a pendulum shortening its stroke and then ran towards the see-saw. A white boy, about his own

age, was seated opposite him. Accordion-like their legs folded to send the see-saw jerking from the indentation it pounded in the grass. A hand pressed on his shoulder stopping a jerk. He turned around to look into the face of the attendant.

'Get off!'

The skin tightened between his eyes. Why must I get off? What have I done? He held on, hands clamped onto the iron attached to the wooden see-saw. The white boy jumped off from the other end and stood a detached spectator.

'You must get off!' The attendant spoke in a low voice so that it would carry to the people who were gathering. 'The council say,' he continued, 'that us Blacks don't use the same swings as the whites. You must use the swings where you stay,' his voice apologizing for the uniform he wore that gave him the right to watch that little white boys and girls were not hurt while playing.

'There no park where I stay.' He waved a hand in the direction of a block of flats. 'Park on the other side of town but I don't know where.' He walked past them. The mothers with their babies, pink and belching, cradled in their arms, the children lolling on the grass, his companion from the see-saw, the nurse girls—their uniforms their badge of indemnity—pushing prams. Beside him walked the attendant.

The attendant pointed an accusing finger at a notice board at the entrance. 'There. You can read for yourself.' Absolving him of all blame.

He struggled with the red letters on the white background. 'Blankes Alleen. Whites Only.' He walked through the gates and behind him

the swings screeched, the see-saw rattled, and the merry-go-round rumbled.

He walked past the park each occasion he delivered the washing, eyes wistfully taking in the scene.

He shifted the bundle to a more comfortable position, easing the pain biting into his shoulder muscles. What harm would I be doing if I were to use the swings? Would it stop the swings from swinging? Would the chute collapse? The bundle pressed deeper and the pain became an even line across his shoulders and he had no answer to his reasoning.

The park itself, with its wide lawns and flower beds and rockeries and dwarf trees, meant nothing to him. It was the gaily painted red-and-green tubing, the silver chains and brown boards, transport to never-never land, which gripped him.

Only once, long ago, and then almost as if by mistake, had he been on something to beat it. He had been taken by his father, one of the rare times he was taken anywhere, to a fairground. He had stood captivated by the wooden horses with their gilded reins and scarlet saddles dipping in time to the music as they whirled by.

For a brief moment he was astride one, and he prayed it would last forever, but the moment lasted only the time it took him to whisper the prayer. Then he was standing clutching his father's trousers, watching the others astride the dipping horses.

Another shifting of the bundle and he was at the house where he delivered the clothing his mother had washed in a round tub filled with boiling water, the steam covered her face with a film of sweat. Her voice, when she spoke, was as soft and clinging as the steam enveloping her.

He pushed the gate open and walked around the back watching for the aged lap dog, which at his entry would rush out to wheeze asthmatically around his feet and nip with blunt teeth at his ankles.

A round-faced African girl, her blackness heightened by the white starched uniform she wore, opened the kitchen door to let him in. She cleared the table and he placed the bundle on it.

'I call madam,' she said, the words spaced and highly-pitched as if she had some difficulty in uttering the syllables in English. Her buttocks bounced beneath the tight uniform and the backs of her calves shone with fat.

'Are you sure you've brought everything?' was the greeting he received each time he brought the bundle, and each time she checked every item and as usual nothing was missing. He looked at her and lowered his voice as he said; 'Everything there, merrum.'

What followed had become a routine between the three of them.

'Have you had anything to eat?' she asked him.

He shook his head.

'Well, we can't let you go off like that.' Turning to the African woman in the white, starched uniform, 'What have we got?'

The maid swung open the refrigerator door and took out a place of food. She placed it on the table and set a glass of mild next to it.

The white woman left the kitchen when he was seated and he was alone with the maid.

His nervousness left him and he could concentrate on what was on her plate.

A handful of peas, a dab of mashed potatoes, a tomato sliced into bleeding circles, a sprinkling of grated carrot, and no rice

White people are funny, he told himself. How can anyone fill himself with this? It doesn't form a lump like the food my mama makes.

He washed it down with milk.

'Thank you, Annie,' he said as he pushed the glass aside.

Her teeth gleamed porcelain white as she smiled.

He sat fidgeting, impatient to be outside away from the kitchen with its glossy, tiled floor and steel cupboards ducoed a clinical white to match the food-stacked refrigerator.

'I see you've finished.' The voice startled him. She held out an envelope containing the rand note—payment for his mother's weekly struggle over the wash tub. 'This is for you.' A five cent piece was dropped into his hand, a long fingernail raking his palm.

'Thank you, merrum.' His voice hardly audible.

'Tell your mother I'm going away on holiday for about a month and I'll let her know when I'm back.'

Then he was dismissed and her high heels tapped out of the kitchen.

He nodded his head at the African maid who took an apple from a bowl bursting with fruit and handed it to him.

He grinned his thanks and her responding smile bathed her face in light.

He walked down the path finishing the apple with big bites.

The dog was after him before he reached the gate, its hot breath warming his heels. He turned and poked his toes on its face. It barked hoarsely in protest, a look of outrage on its face.

He laughed delightedly at the expression which changed the dog's features into those of an old man.

'See you do that again.' He waved his feet in front of the pug's nose. The nose retreated and made an about-turn, waddling away with its dignity deflated by his affront.

As he walked, he mentally spent his sixpence.

I'll buy a penny drop, the sour ones that taste like limes, a penny bull's eyes, a packet of sherbet with licorice tube at the end of the packet, and a penny star toffees, red ones that turn your spit into blood.

His glands were titillated and his mouth filled with saliva. He stopped at the first shop and walked in.

Trays were filled with expensive chocolates and sweets of a type never seen in the jars on the shelves of the Indian shop on the corner where he stayed. He walked out not buying a thing.

His footsteps lagged as he reached the park.

The nurse girls with their babies and prams were gone, their places occupied by old men, who, with their hands holding up their

stomachs, were casting disapproving eyes over the confusion and clatter confronting them.

A ball was kicked perilously close to an old man, and the boy who ran after it stopped short as the old man raised his stick, daring him to come closer.

The rest of them called to the boy to get the ball. He edged closer and made a grab at it as the old man swung his cane. The cane missed the boy by more than a foot and he swaggered back, the ball held under his arm. The game was resumed.

He watched them from the other side of the railings—the boys kicking the ball, the children cavorting on the grass, even the old men, senile on the seats; but most of all, the children enjoying themselves with what was denied him, and his whole body yearned to be part of them.

‘Shit it!’ He looked over his shoulder to see if anyone had heard him. ‘Shit it!’ he said louder. ‘Shit on them! Their park, the grass, the swings, the see-saw, everything! Shit it! Shit it!’

His small hands impotently shook the tall railings towering above his head.

It struck him that he would not be seeing the park for a whole month, that there would be no reason for him to pass it.

Despair filled him. He had to do something to ease his anger.

A bag filled with fruit peelings was on top of the rubbish stacked in a waste basket fitted to a pole. He reached for it and frantically threw it over the railings. He ran without waiting to see the result.

Out of breath three streets further, he slowed down, pain stabbing beneath his heart. The act had brought no relief, only intensified the longing.

He was oblivious of the people passing, the hoots of the vehicles whose paths he crossed without thinking. And once, when he was roughly pushed aside, he did not even bother to look and see who had done it.

The familiar shrieks and smells told him that he was home.

The Indian shop could not draw him out of melancholy mood and he walked past it, his five cent piece unspent in his pocket.

A group of boys were playing with tyres on the pavement.

Some of them called him but he ignored them and turned into a short side street.

He mounted the flat step of a two storey-house with a façade that must once have been painted but had now turned a nondescript grey with the red brick underneath showing.

Beyond the threshold the room was dim. He walked past the scattered furniture with a familiarity that did not need guidance.

His mother was in the kitchen hovering over a pot perched on a pressure stove.

He placed the envelope on the table. She put aside the spoon and stuck a finger under the flap of the envelope, tearing it into half. She placed the rand note in a spoutless teapot on the shelf.

‘You hungry?’

He nodded his head.

She poured him a cup of soup and added a thick slice of brown bread.

Between bites of bread and sips of soup which scalded his throat, he told his mother that there would not be any washing coming during the week.

'Why? What the matter What I do?'

'Nothing. Merrum say she go away for a month. She let mama know she back.'

'What I do now?' Her voice took on a whine and her eyes strayed to the teapot containing the money. The whine hardened to reproach as she continued. 'Why don't she let me know she going away then I look for another merrum?' she paused. 'I slave away and the pain never leave my back but it too much for her to let me know she go away. The money I get from her keep us nice and steady. How I go cover the hold?'

He wondered how the rand notes he had brought helped to keep them nicely steady. There was no change in their meals. It was, as usual, not enough, and the only time they received new clothes was at Christmas.

'I must pay the burial, and I was going to tell Mr. Lemonsky to bring lino for the front room. I'm sick looking at he lino full of holes but I can forget now. With no money you gat as much hope as getting wine on Sunday.'

He hurried his eating to get away from the words wafted towards him, before it could soak into him, trapping him in the chair to witness his mother's miseries.

Outside, they were still playing with their tyres. He joined them half-heartedly. As he lolled the tyre his spirit was still in the park on the swings. There was no barrier to his coming and he could do as he pleased. He was away from the narrow streets and squawking children and speeding cars. He was in a place of green grass and red tubing and silver steel. The tyre rolled past him. He made no effort to grab it.

'Get the tyre. You sleep? Don't you want to play anymore?'

He walked away ignoring their cries.

Rage boiled up inside him. Rage against the houses with its streaked walls and smashed panes filled by too many people; against the overflowing garbage pails outside doors; the alleys and streets; and against a law he could not understand—a law that shut him out of the park.

He burst into tears. He swept his arms across his cheeks to check his weeping.

He lowered his hands to peer at the boy confronting him.

'I think you cry!'

'Who say I cry? Something in my eye and I rub it.'

He pushed past and continued towards the shop; 'Cry baby!' the boy's taunt rang after him.

The shop's sole iron-barred window was crowded. Oranges were mixed with writing paper and dried figs were strewn on school slates. Clothing and crockery gathered dust. Across the window a cockroach made its leisurely way, antennae on the alert.

Inside the shop was as crowded as the window. Bags covered the floor leaving a narrow path to the counter.

The shopkeeper, an ancient Indian with a face tanned like cracked leather leaned across the counter. 'Yes, boy?' He showed teeth scarlet with betel. 'Come'n, boy. What you want? No stand here all day.' His jaws worked at the betel nut held captive by his stained teeth.

He ordered penny portions of his selection.

He transferred the sweets to his pockets and threw the torn containers on the floor and walked out. Behind him the Indian murmured grimly, jaws working faster.

One side of the street was in shadow. He sat with his back against the wall, savouring the last of the sun.

Bull's-eye, peppermint, a piece of licorice—all lumped together in his cheek. For a moment the part was forgotten.

He watched without interest the girl advancing.

'Mama say you must come'n eat.' She stared at his bulging cheek. One hand rubbing the side of her nose. 'Gimme.' He gave her a bull's eye which she dropped into her mouth between dabs at her nose.

'Wipe your snot! He ordered her, showing his superiority. He walked past. She followed sucking and sniffing.

Their father was already seated at the table when they entered the kitchen.

'Must I always send somebody after you?' his mother asked.

He slipped into his seat and then hurriedly got up to wash his hands before his other could find fault with yet another point.

Supper was a silent affair except for the scrapping of spoon across a plate and an occasional sniff from his sister.

A thought came into his mind almost at the end of the meal. He sat spoon poised in the air shaken by its magnitude. Why not go to the park after dark? After it had closed its gates on the old men, the children, and nurses with their prams! There would be on one to stop him.

He could think no further. He was lightheaded with the thought of it. His mother's voice, as she related her day to his father, was not the steam that stung, but a soft breeze wafting past him, leaving him undisturbed. Then qualms troubled him. He had never been in that part of town at night. A band of fear tightened across his chest, contracting his insides, making it hard for him to swallow his food. He gripped his spoon tightly, stretching his skin across his knuckles.

I'll do it! I'll go to the park as soon as we're finished eating. He controlled himself with difficulty. He swallowed what was left on his plate and furtively watched to see how the others were faring. Hurry up! Hurry up!

He hastily cleared the table when his father pushed the last plate aside and began washing up.

Each piece of crockery washed was passed to his sister whose sniffing kept pace with their combined operation.

The dishes done, he swept the kitchen and carried out the garbage bin.

'Can I go play, mama?'

'Don't let me have to send for you again.'

His father remained silent buried behind the newspaper.

'Before you go,' his mother stopped him—'light the lamp and hang it in the passage.'

He filled the lamp with paraffin, turned up the wick and lit it. The light glimmered weakly through the streaked glass.

The moon, to him, was a fluorescent ball; light without warmth—and the stars, fragments chipped of it. Beneath street lights card games were in session. He sniffed the nostril-prickling smell of dagga as he walked past. Dim doorways could not conceal couples clutching each other.

Once clear of the district, he broke into a trot. He did not slacken his pace as he assed through the downtown area with its wonderland shop windows. His elation seeped out as he neared the park and his footsteps dragged.

In front of him was the park with its gate and iron railings. Behind the railings, impaled, the notice board. He could see the swings beyond. The sight strengthened him.

He walked over, his breath coming faster. There was no one in sight. A car turned a corner and came towards him and he started at the sound of its engine. The car swept past, the tyres softly licking the asphalt.

The railings were icy-cold to his touch and the shock sent him into action. He extended his arms and with monkey-like movements pulled himself up to perch on top of the railings then dropped onto the newly-turned earth.

The grass was damp with dew and he swept his feet across it. Then he ran and the wet grass bowed beneath his bare feet.

He ran towards the swings, the merry-go-round, see-saw to chute, hands covering the metal.

Up the steps to the top of the chute. He stood outlined against the sky. He was a bird, an eagle. He flung himself down on his stomach, sliding swiftly. Wheeeeeee! He rolled over when he slammed onto the grass. He looked at the moon for an instant then propelled himself to his feet and ran for the steps of the chute to recapture that feeling of flight. Each time he swept down the chute, he wanted the trip never to end, to go on sliding, sliding, sliding.

He walked reluctantly past the see-saw, consoling himself with pushing at one end to send it whacking on the grass.

'Shit it!' he grunted as he strained to set the merry-go-round into action. Thigh tensed, leg stretched, he pushed. The merry-go-round moved. He increased his exertions and jumped on, one leg trailing at the ready to shove if it should slow down. The merry-go-round dipped and swayed. To keep it moving, he had to push more than he rode. Not wanting to spoil his pleasure, he jumped off and raced for the swings.

Feet astride, hands clutching silver chains, he jerked his body to gain momentum. He crouched like a runner then violently straightened. The swing widened its arc. It swept higher, higher, higher. It reached the sky. He could touch the moon. He plucked a star to pin to his breast. The earth was far below. No bird could fly as high as he. Upwards and onwards he went.

A light switched on in the hut at the far side of the park. It was a small patch of yellow on a dark square. The door opened and he saw a figure in the doorway. Then the door was shut and the figure strode towards him. He knew it was the attendant. A torch glinted brightly as it swung at his side.

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The attendant came to a halt in front of him, out of reach of the swing's arc, and flashed his torch. The light caught him in mid-air.

'God dammit!' the attendant swore. 'I told you before you can't get on the swings.'

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'Why you come back?'

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'Mama, Mama.' His lips trembled, wishing himself safe in his mother's kitchen, sitting next to the still-burning stove with a comic spread across his knees. 'Mama, Mama.' His voice mounted, wrenched from his throat, keeping pace with the soaring swing as it climbed the sky. Voice and swing. Swing and voice. Higher. Higher. Higher. Until they were one.

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Chapter 59

The Lemon Orchard

by

Alex La Guma

The men came down between two long, regular rows of trees. The winter had not passed completely and there was a chill in the air; and the moon was hidden behind long, high parallels of cloud which hung like suspended streamers of dirty cotton-wool in the sky. All of the men but one wore thick clothes against the coolness of the night. The night and earth was cold and damp, and the shoes of the men sank into the soil and left exact, ridged foot prints, but they could not be seen in the dark.

One of the men walked ahead holding a small cycle lantern that worked from a battery, leading the way down the avenue of trees while the others came behind in the dark. The night close around was quiet now that the crickets had stopped their small noises, but far out others that did not feel the presence of the men continued the monotonous creek-creek-creek. Somewhere, even further, a dog

started barking in short high yaps, and then stopped abruptly. The men were walking through an orchard of lemons and the sharp, bitter-sweet citrus smell hung gently on the night air.

“do not go so fast,” the man who brought up the rear of the party called to the man with the lantern. “It’s as dark as a kaffir’s soul here at the back.”

He called softly, as if the darkness demanded silence. He was a big man and wore khaki trousers and laced-up riding boots, and an old shooting jacket with leather patches on the right breast and the elbows.

The shotgun was loaded. In the dark this man’s face was invisible except for a blur of shadowed hollows and lighter crags. Although he walked in the rear he was the leader of the party. The lantern-bearer slowed down for the rest to catch up with him.

“Its cold, too, Oom,” another man said.

“Cold?” the man with the shotgun asked, speaking with sarcasm. “Are you colder than this verdomte hotnot, here?” And he gestured in the dark with the muzzle of the gun at the man who stumbled along in their midst and who was the only one not warmly dressed.

This man wore trousers and a raincoat which they had allowed him to pull on over his pyjamas when they had taken him from his lodgings, and he shivered now with chill, clenching his teeth to prevent them from chattering. He had not been given time to tie his shoes and the metal-covered ends of the laces clicked as he moved.

“Are you cold, hotnot?” the man with the light jeered.

The colored man did not reply. He was afraid but his fear was mixed with a stubbornness which forbade him to answer them.

“He is not cold,” the fifth man in the party said. “He is shivering with fear. Is it not so, hotnot?”

The colored man said nothing, but stared ahead of himself into the half-light made by the small lantern. He could see the silhouette of the man who carried the light, but he did not want to look at the two who flanked him, the one who had complained of the cold, and the one who had spoken of his fear. They each carried a sjambok and every now and then one of them slapped a corduroyed leg with his.

“He is dumb, also,” the one who had spoken last chuckled.

“No, Andries. Wait a minute,” the leader who carried the shotgun said, and they all stopped between the row of trees. The man with the lantern turned and put the light on the rest of the party.

“What is it?” he asked.

“Wag’n oombikkie. Wait a moment,” the leader said, speaking with forced casualness. “He is not dumb. He is a slim hotnot; one of those educated bushmen. Listen, hotnot,” he addressed the colored man, speaking angrily now. “When a baas speaks to you, you answer him. Do you hear?” The colored man’s wrists were tied behind him with a riem and the leader brought the muzzle of the shotgun down, pressing it hard into the small of the man’s back above where the wrists met. “Do you hear, hotnot? Answer me or I will shoot a hole through your spine.”

The bound man felt the hard round metal of the gun muzzle through the loose raincoat and clenched his teeth. He was cold and tried to prevent himself from shivering in case it should be mistaken for

cowardice. He heard the small metallic noise as the man with the gun thumbed back the hammer of the shotgun. In spite of the cold little drops of sweat began to form on his upper lip under the overnight stubble.

“For God’s sake, don’t shoot him,” the man with the light said, laughing a little nervously. “We don’t want to be involved in any murder.”

“What are you saying, man?” the leader asked. Now with the beam of the battery-lamp on his face the shadows in it were washed away to reveal the mass of tiny wrinkled and deep creases which covered the red-clay complexion of his face like the myriad lines which indicate rivers, streams, roads and railways on a map. They wound around the ridges of his chin and climbed the sharp range of his nose and the peaks of his chin and cheekbones, and his eyes were hard and blue like two frozen lakes.

“This is mos a slim notnot,” he said again. “A teacher in a school for which we pay. He lives off our sweat, and he had the audacity to be cheeky and uncivilized towards a minister of our church and no notnot will be cheeky to a white man while I live.”

“Ja, man,” the lantern-bearer agreed. “But we are going to deal with him. There is no necessity to shoot him. We don’t want that kind of trouble.”

“ I will shoot whatever hotnot or kaffir I desire, and see me get into trouble over it. I demand respect from these donders. Let t hem answer when they’re spoken to.”

He jabbed the muzzle suddenly into the colored man’s back so that he stumbled struggling to keep his balance. “Do you hear, jong? Did I not speak to you?” The man who had jeered about the prisoner’s fear

stepped up then, and hit him in the face, striking him on a cheekbone with the clenched fist which still held the sjambok. He was angry over the delay and wanted the an to submit so that they could proceed. "Listen you hotnot bastard," he said loudly. "Why don't you answer?"

The man stumbled, caught himself and stood in the rambling shadow of one of the lemon trees. The lantern-light swung on him and he looked away from the center of the beam. He was afraid the leader would shoot him in anger and he had no wish to die. He straightened up and looked away from them.

"Well?" demanded the man who had struck him.

"Yes, baas," the bound man said, speaking with a mixture of dignity and contempt which was missed by those who surrounded him.

"Yes there," the man with the light said. "You could save yourself trouble. Next time you will remember. Now let us get on." The lantern swung forward again and he walked ahead. The leader shoved their prisoner on with the muzzle of the shotgun, and he stumbled after the bobbing lantern with the other men on each side of him.

"The amazing thing about it is that this bliksem should have taken the principal, and the meester of the church before the magistrate and demand payment for the hiding they gave him for being cheeky to them," the leader said to all in general. "This verdomte hotnot. I have never heard of such a thing in all my born days."

"Well, we will give him a better hiding," the man, Andries said. "This time we will teach him a lesson, Oom. He wont' demand damages from anybody when we're done with him."

“And afterwards he won’t be seen around here again. He will pack his things and go and live in the city where they’re not so particular about the dignity of the volk. Do you hear, notnot?” This time they were not concerned about receiving a reply but the leader went on, saying, “We don’t want any educated Hottentots in our town.”

“Neither black Englishmen,” added one of the others.

The dog started barking again at the farm house which was invisible on the dark hillside at the other end of the little valley. “It’s that Jagter,” the man with the lantern said. “I wonder what bothers him. He is a good watchdog. I offered Meneer Marais five pounds for that dog, but he won’t sell. I would like to have a dog like that. I would take great care of such a dog.”

The blackness of the night crouched over the orchard and the leaves rustled with a harsh whispering that was inconsistent with the pleasant scent of the lemons. The chill in the air had increased, and far-off the creek-creek-creek of the crickets blended into solid strips of high-pitched sound. Then the moon came from behind the banks of cloud and its white light touched the leaves with wet silver, and the perfume of lemons seemed to grow stronger, as if the juice was being crushed from them.

They walked a little way further in the moonlight and the man with the lantern said, “This is as good a place as any, Oom.”

They had come into a wide gap in the orchard, a small amphitheater surrounded by fragrant growth, and they all stopped within it. The moonlight clung for a while to the leaves and the angled branches, so that along their tips and edges the moisture gleamed with the quivering shine of scattered quicksilver.

Chapter 60

Looking for a Rain God

by

Bessie Head

It is lonely at the lands where the people go to plough and sow crops. These lands are vast clearings in the wild bush and the wild bush is lonely too. All these seven years gone by only a teaspoonful of rain has fallen. People live off crops but for two years now they have all returned from the lands just with their rolled-up skin blankets and cooking utensils.

Oh, this is exquisite, beautiful country. In some parts the underground water is very near the surface: there you find parallel strips lush tangled trees and delicate gold and purple wild flowers. There was moss under the stones and wild fig-trees. The leaves of the Mopani are like butterfly wings, split down the centre and twined at the base to a short stem. But even here, by mid-summer, the leaves curl up and wither, the moss is dry and hard and under the tangled shade of the trees the ground is black and white because there is no rain.

There are many gods of this earth and there should be a rain-god somewhere too. Only people have forgotten how to evoke a response from the gods. Their memory is always with us deep and hidden. In

times of great stress, we think of them and call to them with a blind despairing wail. That is why charlatans and incanters and witch-doctors make a pile of money in years of drought. They are always giving people little talismans and herbs to rub on the plough for the crops to grow. But somehow the incanters haven't the right memory to evoke the sympathy of the rain-god. And the god of Christianity is uninterested in making rain. So many prayers have been made to him already.

Last year there was an awful tragedy at one of these lonely places in the bush. Two children were killed and two men were hanged this year for the death of the children. The people at this place had only been looking for a rain-god but now two children, little girls, and two men are dead.

They were a big family and with the relatives and old people they totaled fourteen. They left early in November for the lands, to plough. There was a promise of good rain and the men and women cleared the land of thorn bush and then hedged the vast area with this same thorn bush to protect the future crop from the goats. The earth was soft with the good rain of November and there was a rich growth of devil-thorn on which the goats grazed. There was mild too from the goats to eat with the porridge. They had a well dug too and hedged about with thorn bush so that the children and goats should not fall inside and be drowned. The well is just a hold in the earth and the water is always muddy but at the lands that is the only kind of water you can get and you have to drink it.

There had been so much hope that the rain would fall. The land was ready and ploughed, waiting for the crops. At night the earth was alive with insect noises. Then suddenly the rain fled away, the rain-clouds fled away and left the sky bare. The sun danced dizzily in the

sky with a strange cruelty. Each day the land was covered in a haze of mist as the sun sucked up the last drop of moisture out of the earth. The family sat down in despair waiting and waiting. It was impossible to plant the corn-seeds, the maize, the pumpkin, the watermelon in the dry earth. They sat and even stopped thinking, for rain had fled away.

It was the women of the family who finally broke down under the strain of waiting for the rain. It was really the women of the family who were responsible for the death of the children. Each night they started a weird, high-pitched wailing song, calling to the rain-god. A strange song that began on a low mournful note and shipped up to a frenzy. They would stamp their feet and shout as though they had lost their heads. The men couldn't stand it. Men are just reasonable creatures and try to maintain their self-control at all times. The wailing of the women and their terrible, weird song became a torture to the men, became an unbearable torture. They did not know that the women were only seeking release. Women see thousands of years ahead and the women of the family were haunted by the starvation and suffering of the coming year.

Finally, one of the very, very old men of the family was stirred by a faint memory. And slowly, because of the wailing of the women at night, this memory became a strong conviction. He called all the men of the family together and consulted with them and because his memory had become a strong conviction he spoke to them with unshakeable authority. There was, he said, a certain rain-god who accepted sacrifice of the bodies of children. There were two little girls in the family, pretty and innocent and very shy. They could run like the wind and fetch water from the well. But the men were beyond caring and agreed with the old man that the two little girls should be sacrificed to this terrible rain-god. Then the crops would grow. The old man said the crops would grow and the rain would fall. Since the women were half demented by this time and the intense heat was

even destroying the wild devil-thorn on which the goats grazed, they too agreed to sacrifice the children.

After it was all over and the bodies of the two little girls had been spread across the land, the rain did not fall. Instead, there was a deathly silence at night and the devouring heat of the sun by day. A terror, extreme and deep overwhelmed the whole family. They packed, rolling up their skin blankets and pots and fled back to the village. But the deaths of the two little girls had made them outcasts. People in the village noted their ashen, terror-stricken faces and a murmur arose. Where were the children? What had happened to the children? Soon the police came round. The family tried to confuse the police inventing conflicting stories to protect each other. But the mother of the children eventually broke down and told everything. Two men, the father of the little girls and the brother who had cut up the bodies of the children were arrested and hanged this year.

Who is the rain-god? People are looking for a rain-god. Every man and woman in Africa is a farmer because people have lived off crops for as long as they can remember. But life has always been a desolation of suffering and deprivation and sorrow. People have always gone to the lands to plough but they are minute specks in the vastness of the land. They have no tools, no knowledge, only a depth of courage that makes them leave each year for the terror and loneliness of the wild, unconquered bush. In years of long drought, even this courage fails them and they have nothing. Is the new rain-god knowledge, progress and machines, and if so, how and when is this to be communicated to people who have courage but little education?

Chapter 61

Grieg on a Stolen Piano

by

Ezekiel Mphahlele

Those were the days of terror when, at the age of fifteen, he ran away from home and made his way towards Pietersburg town. Driven by hunger and loneliness and fear he took up employment on an Afrikaner's farm at ten shillings a month plus salted mealie-meal porridge and an occasional piece of meat. There were the long scorching hours when a posse of horsemen looked for him and three other labourers while they were trying to escape. The next morning at dawn the white men caught up with them.

Those were the savage days when the whole white family came and sat on the stoep to watch, for their own amusement, African labourers put under the whip. Whack! Whack! Whack! And while the leather whip was still in the air for the fourth stroke on the buttocks, he yelled *Ma-oeee!* As the arm came down, he flew up from the crude bench he was lying on, and, in a manner that he could never explain afterwards, hooked the white foreman's arm with his two, so that for a few seconds he dangled a few feet from the ground. Amid peals of laughter from the small pavilion, the foreman shook him off as a man does a disgusting insect that creeps on his arm.

Those were the days when, in a solo flight again towards Pietersburg, terror clawed at his heart as he traveled through thick bush. He remembered the stories he had so often listened to at the communal fireplace; tales of huge snakes that chased a man on the ground or leapt from tree to tree; tales of the giant snake that came to the river at night to drink, breaking trees in its path, and before which helpless people lay flat on their stomachs wherever they might be at the time; none dared to move as the snake mercifully lifted its body above them, bent over, drank water and then, mercifully again, turned over

backwards, belly facing up, rolling away from the people; stories that explained many mysteries, like the reason why the owl and the bat moved in the dark. Always the theme was that of man, helpless as he himself was in the bush or on a tree or in a rock cave on a hill, who was unable to ward off danger, to escape a terrible power that was everywhere around him. Something seemed to be stalking him all the time, waiting for the proper moment to pounce upon him.

But he walked on, begged and stole food and lifts on lorries, until he reached Thswane—Pretoria.

There was the brief time in 'the kitchens', as houses of white people are called where one does domestic work, as if the white suburbs were simply a collection of kitchens. There were the brutal Sundays when he joined the Pietersburg youth, then working in the kitchens, on their wild march to the open ground just outside Bantule location for a sport of bare fisticuffs. They marched in white shorts on broad slabs of feet in tennis shoes and Vaseline-smearred legs, now crouching, now straightening up, now wielding their fists wrapped in white handkerchiefs. One handkerchief dangled out of a trouser pocket, just for show. The brutal fisticuffs: months flushed with blood, then the white mounted police who herded them back to the kitchens; the stampede of horses' hooves as the police chased after them for fun. . .

Those were the days when chance lifted him like a crane out of the kitchens and out of the boxing arena, and deposited him in Silvertown location. This was when his aunt, having been alerted by her brother, had tracked him down.

There was regular schooling again. At twenty he began teacher-training at Kilnerton Institution nearby. There were the teaching days, during which he studied privately for a junior secondary school certificate.

Those were the days, when, as the first black man in the province to write an examination for, he timidly entered a government office for the first paper. The white stared at him until he had disappeared into the room where he would write in isolation. And those were the days when a black man had to take off his hat as soon as he saw a white man approach; when the black man had to keep clear of street pavements.

Then the return home—the first time in seven years—as a hero, a teacher. The parents bubbled over with pride. Then the feast. . .

It was one of those hot sub-tropical nights when Pretoria seems to lie in its valley, battered to insensibility by the day's heat; the night when a great friend of his was tarred and feathered by white students of the local university at Church Square. Mr. Lambeth, a British musician who had come to teach at Kilnerton and there discovered this black young man's musical talent. He had given his time free to teach him piano. Many were the afternoons, the nights, the weekends that followed of intensive, untiring work at the instrument. What else had Mr. Lambeth done wrong? he asked himself several times after the incident. The Englishman had many friends among African teachers whom he visited in their locations: he adjudicated at their music competitions.

This black young man was my uncle. He is actually a cousin of my late father's. So, according to custom, my father had referred to him as 'my brother'. As my father had no blood brothers, I was glad to avail myself of an uncle. When my father died, he charged my uncle with the responsibility of 'helping me to become a man'. It meant that I had someone nearby who would give me advice on a number of things concerned with the problem of growing up. My mother had died shortly after. Uncle has seven children, all but one of whom are earning their living independently. The last-born is still in school.

Uncle is black as a train engine; so black that his face often gives the illusion of being bluish. His gums are a deep red which blazes forth when he smiles, overwhelming the dull rusty colour of his teeth. He is tall and walks upright. His head is always close-shaven, because, at sixty, he thinks he is prematurely graying, although his hair began to show grey at thirty. He keeps his head completely bald because he does not want a single grey hair to show.

His blackness has often led him into big-big trouble with the whites, as he often tells us.

'Hei! Jy!'

Uncle walks straight on, pretending not to see the bunch of them leaning against a fence. He is with a friend, a classmate.

'Hei! Jy! Die pikswart een, die bobbejaan!' — the pitch-black one, the baboon.

One of them comes towards the two and pushes his way between them, standing in front. They stop dead.

A juvenile guffaw behind sends a shiver through Uncle. He breaks through his timidity and lunges at the white boy. He pommels him. In Pietersburg boxing style he sends the body down with a knee that gets him on a strategic place in the jaw. The others are soon upon them. The Afrikans take to their heels. . .

A new white clerk is busy arranging postal orders and recording them. The queue stretches out, out of the post office building. The people are making a number of clicking noises to indicate their impatience. They crane their necks or step out of the queue in order to see what is happening at the counter.

Uncle is at the head of the queue.

'Excuse me,' he ventures, 'playtime will soon be over and my class will be waiting for me, can you serve us, please?'

The clerk raises his head.

'Look here,' he says aggressively, 'I'm not only here to serve Kaffirs, I'm here to work!'

Uncle looks at him steadily. The clerk goes back to his postal orders. After about fifteen minutes he leaves them. He goes to a cupboard and all the eyes in the queue follow each movement of his. When he comes back to the counter, he looks at the man at the head of the queue, who in turn fixes his stare on him. The white man seems to recoil at the sight of Uncle's face. Then, as if to fall back on the last mode of defence, he shouts, 'What are you? What are you? —just a black Kaffir, a Kaffir monkey, black as tar. Now any more from you and I'll bloody well refuse to serve the whole bloody lot of you. Teacher—teacher, teacher *to hell!*'

Irritation and impatience can be heard to hiss and sigh down the queue.

Uncle realizes he's being driven into a corner and wonders if he can contain the situation. Something tells him it is beyond him. The supervisor of posts comes in just then, evidently called in by his junior's shout.

'Ja?' he asks. '*Wat is dit?*'

'Your clerk has been insulting me — calling me a Kaffir monkey.'

The clerk opens his mouth to speak, but his superior leads him round a cubicle. After a few moments the clerk comes back, ready to serve but sulky and mute.

Uncle says that throughout, the white clerk seemed to feel insulted at the sudden confrontation of such articulate human blackness as thrust itself through the wire mesh of the counter.

This time, Uncle had the satisfaction of causing the removal of the white clerk after a colleague, who had been an eye-witness of the incident in the post office, had obtained support from fellow-teachers at Silverton to petition a higher postal authority against the clerk.

'Can you see that happening today?' he asked. 'No, man, I'd have been fired at once on a mere allegation out of the clerk's important mouth.'

Years later, Uncle was promoted to the post of junior inspector of African schools (the white man being always senior). He went to live in the western Transvaal. This is where his wife died while giving birth. He really hit the bottom of depression after this. The affection he had for his wife found a perverse expression in drink and he took to his music with a deeper and savage passion which, as he puts it, was a kind of hot fomentation to help burst the boil of grief inside him. He kept his children with him, though. Each one had the opportunity to go to an institution of higher education. Here he was lucky. For although all of them were mediocre, they used what they had profitably and efficiently. One did a degree in science; another played the saxophone in a band; another was a teacher and 'pop singer'; another became a librarian for an institute of research into race relations; one daughter went in for nursing, and a son and a daughter were still in secondary school.

There were nights of sheer terror when their father failed to return home, and they knew he must be in some drinking orgy somewhere. Then they got to know that he was doing illicit diamond-buying. As he visited schools in his circuit, he sold or bought small stones. But he was always skating near the edge. Once he had the bitter experience of discovering that he had bought a few fakes for £50 from an African agent.

Then there was the day he says he'll never forget as long as he lives. The C.I.D., after crossing his path several times and picking up and losing trails, finally came to the converging point—Uncle. They found him in a train from Johannesburg to Kimberley. They took him to the luggage van and questioned him. Nothing was found on him and he wouldn't talk. When eventually they realized they might have a corpse on their hands, they put him out on a station platform, battered, bleeding and dazed. His suitcase was thrown in his direction.

Uncle was transferred to Johannesburg, but not without incident. A white educational officer wanted him to carry his typewriter—heavy table model—to his car outside. Uncle told him he wouldn't. He had before refused to wash the official's car when asked to do so. As the educational authorities had a high opinion of his work, after serving several years in the department, they engineered a transfer for him. If you ask him how he managed to keep his post, he will tell you. 'I made more or less sure I don't slip up that side, and besides whites don't like a correct black man, because they are to corrupt themselves.'

Each time after some verbal tiff with a white man Uncle say as he felt his extra blackness must have been regarded as an insult b those who found themselves working in the shadow it seemed to cast around him.

His arrival in Johannesburg was like surfacing. He went slow on his drinks, and even became a lay preacher in the Methodist church at Orlando. But he started to go to the races and threw himself into this kind of gambling with such passion that he resigned as preacher.

'I can't keep up the lies,' he said. 'There are people who can mix religion with gambling and the other things, but I can't. And gamble I must. As Christ never explained what a black man should do in order to earn a decent living in this country, we can only follow our instinct. And if I cannot understand the connection, it is not right for me to stand in the pulpit and pretend to know the answers.'

The 'other things' were illicit diamond dealing and trading as a traveling salesman, buying and selling soft goods, mostly stolen by some African gang or other that operated in the city. There were also workers who systematically stole articles from their employers' shops and sold them to suburban domestic servants and location customers. While he was visiting schools, he would call this man and that man round the corner or into some private room to do business.

Uncle married again. He was now living with three of his children, two of whom were still in secondary school. A cloud descended upon his life again. His wife was an unpleasant, sour woman. But Uncle woke up to it too late. She sat on the stoep like a dumpling and said little beyond smiling briefly a word of greeting and giving concise answers to questions. The children could not quarrel with her, because she said little that could offend anyone. But, her ant-heap appearance was most irritating, because she invited no one's co-operation and gave none beyond fulfilling the routine duties of a wife. She did not seem to like mothering anyone.

Once she succeeded, perhaps in all innocence, in raising a furor in the house.

'You must find out more about the choir practice your daughter keeps going to every week,' she said to Uncle in the presence of the other children. They had stopped calling her 'Ma' because she insisted on referring to them as 'your daughter' or 'your son' when she talked to their father about them.

'It's a choir practice,' Uncle said brusquely.

'*Wai-i-i!* I know much about choir practices, me. A man's daughter can go to them without stopping and one-two-three the next time you look at her she has a big choir practice in her stomach.'

The girl ran into her bedroom, crying. Soon tongues were let loose upon her. But she continued to sit like an ant-heap, her large body seeming to spread wider and wider like an overgrown pumpkin. Her attitude seemed to suggest much Uncle would have liked to know. What *was* she hiding?

'What do you do with such a woman?' Uncle sighed when he told me about the incident.

He was prepared to go through with the 'companionship', to live with her to the end of his days. 'I promised I'd do so in church,' he remarked. 'And I was in my full senses, no one forced me into the thing.'

Another time he threatened, 'One day I'll get so angry, Neph', I'll send her away to her people. And at her station I'll put her on a wheelbarrow like a sack of mealies and wheel her right into her people's house if I've to bind her with a rope.'

I knew he was never going to do it.

Uncle could only take dramatic decisions which were not going to leave him any need to exercise responsibility either to revoke them or fall back on them. He made decisions as a man makes a gamble: once made, you won or lost, and the matter rested there. It was the same with his second marriage, I think. He met the woman during a church conference, when he was by chance accommodated in her house in Randfontein together with two other delegates, according to the arrangements of the local branch. His wife had been dead twelve years. He had decided that his children were big enough not to look so helpless if a second marriage soured the home atmosphere by any chance. His personal Christian belief would not permit him to get out of a marriage contract. This was the kind of responsibility he would want to avoid. If there was a likely chance that he might have to decide to revoke a step later, he did not take it.

There was in Uncle a synthesis of the traditional and the westernized African. At various periods in his life he felt that ill luck was stalking him, because misfortune seemed to pour down on him in torrents, particularly in money matters, family relations, and relations with white educational authorities. At times like these, Uncle went and bought a goat, slaughtered it, and called relations to come and eat the meat and mealie-meal porridge with their bare hands, sitting on the floor. He then buried the bones in the yard. At such times his mind searched the mystery of fate, groping in some imagined world where the spirits of his ancestors and that of his dead wife must be living, for a point of contact, for a line of communion.

After the feast, he felt peace settle inside him and fill his whole being until it seemed to ooze from the pores of his body as the tensions in him thawed . . . Then he would face the world with renewed courage or with the reinforced secure knowledge that he was at peace with his relations, without whom he considered he would be a nonentity, a withered twig that has broken off from its tree.

Twice, when I was ill, Uncle called in an African medical doctor. But when my migraine began and often seemed to hurl me into the den of a savage beast, he called in an African herbalist and witchdoctor. The man said he could divine from his bones that I had once—it didn't matter when or where—inhaled fumes that had been meant to drive me insane, prepared by an enemy. So he in turn burned a few sticks of a herb and made me inhale the smoke. It shot up my nasal cavity, hit the back of my skull, seeming to scrape or burn its path from the forehead to the nape of my neck. Each time, after repeated refusals to be seen by a witch-doctor my resistance broke down. I felt temporary relief each time.

So he was going to keep his wife, rain or shine. When her behaviour or her sullenness depressed him, he went back to his whisky. Then he played excerpts from Grieg's piano concerto or a Chopin nocturne, or his own arrangement of Mohapeloa's *Chuchumakhala* (the train) or *Leba* (the dove) and others, vocalizing passages the while with his deep voice. He loved to evoke from his instrument the sound of the train's siren *Oi-oi-i-I* while he puffed *chu-chu, chu-chu*.

'If she knew this piano was lifted out of a shop,' he thought often, 'this dumpling would just let off steam about the fact, simply to annoy me, to make me feel I'm a failure because she knows I'm not a failure and she wants to eat me up and swallow me up raw the way she did her first husband.'

He had lately disposed of his twenty-year-old piano.

The keyboard felt the impact of these passionate moments and resounded plaintively and savagely. Self-pity, defiance, despite, endurance, all these and others, played musical chairs in his being.

'Look, Neph', Uncle said one day when he was his cheerful, exuberant self again, 'look, here's an advertisement of an African beauty contest in *Afric*.'

'Oh, there is such a rash of beauty contests these days we're all sick of them. It's the racket in every big town these days. Haven't they learned that a woman is as beautiful as your eyes make her?'

'You're just too educated, that's all. You know nothing, my boy, wait till I tell you.'

'Is it a new money-catching thing again? Don't tell me you're going to run a gambling game around the winning number.'

Uncle and beauty queens simply did not dovetail in my mind. What was behind that volume of blackness that frightened so many whites? I was curious to know.

'Better than that, Neph'. If you want to co-operate.'

'In what?'

'Now look at the prizes: £500, £250, £150 and consolation prizes. One of these can be ours.'

'But this is a beauty contest, not a muscle show.'

'Don't be so stupid. Now, here. I know a lovely girl we can enter for this contest.'

I felt my curiosity petering out.

'I go and fetch the girl—she's a friend's daughter living in the western Transvaal, in a village. Just the right kind of body, face, but

she needs to be brought up to market standard. The contest is nine months away still, and we've time.'

'But-- --'

'Now listen. You put in £25, me the same. We can keep the girl in my house—no, your aunt will curdle again—not let me think—yes, in my friend Tau's house: his wife has a beautiful heart. The money will go to feeding her and paying for her lessons at Joe's gym. Your job will be to take her out, teach her how to smile when she's introduced; how to sit—not like a brooding hen; how to stand in public—not like an Afrikaner cow. You've got to cultivate her in her sense of public attention. Leave the body work to Joe. If she wins, we give her £100, and split £400.'

Joe was one of these people who know just when to come in for profit. He set up his gym in a hired hall with the express aim of putting candidates through 'body work'.

For my part, I simply did not like the idea at all. Beauty on a platform; beauty advertised, beauty mixed up with money; that is how the thing seemed to me, a person with the simple tastes of a lawyer's clerk. To what extent Uncle had assimilated these jazzy urban habits, I couldn't tell.

'Thought about it yet, Neph? We can't wait too long, you know.'

'Yes, Unc', but I just don't see the point of it. Why don't we leave beauty queens to the—er—experts?' I actually meant something much lower than experts. 'Like Joe, for instance.'

'Joe's just a spiv,' Uncle replied. 'He just loves to rub shoulders with top dogs, that's all. We are investing.'

'But I've only £30 in the post office savings; if I take out £25 I shall be almost completely out.'

'A black man never starves if he lives among his people, unless there is famine. If the worst comes to the worst, you would have to be content with simply having food, a roof over your head, and clothing.'

'That's rural thinking. The extra things a man wants in the city I can't afford.'

'Two hundred pounds can give you the extras.'

I paused to think.

'No, Unc', gambling is for the rich, for those who can afford to lose, not for people like us.'

'You think I'm rich? Don't be silly, you mean to say all those hunchbacked, dried-up, yellow-coloured whites you see at the races and betting booths are rich?'

I relented after a good deal of badgering. Who knows, I thought, we may just win. What couldn't I do with £200 if it came to me!

What a girl!

Her face was well shaped all right: every organ on it was in place, although she had a dry mouth and an unpleasant complexion. She could not have been well fed in the western Transvaal. Her bones stuck out at the elbows, and her buttocks needed plumping a good deal.

'What is your name?' I asked her.

'Tryphina.' I almost giggled, thinking: what names people have!

"That name won't do, Unc', I said to him at the house, affecting a tough showmanship. 'I can't imagine the name coming out of the mouth of the M.C. when he calls it out.'

'Call her 'Try' of 'Phina' or 'Tryph', he said indifferently.

'No, they sound like syllables in a kindergarten reading class. Just as bad as 'Jemima' or 'Judida' or 'Hermina' or 'Stephina'.'

'Let's use her Sesotho name, she should have one I'm sure.'

"Torofina,' she said.

'No, not the school name spoken in Sesotho, I mean your real Sotho name. you see, in things like a beauty competition, people like an easy name that is smooth on the tongue (I meant *sweet to the ear*). They may even fail you for having a difficult name.'

Didn't I loathe *Afric's* cheap, slick, noisy journalism!

'Oh, Kefahililoe,' she said sweetly, which means 'something has got into my eye.' 'That is what they call me at home.'

'Nice,' I commented, meaning nothing of the sort. 'But you don't have a shorter Sesotho name?'

'No.' She was still all innocence and patience.

'Well—er—may be you can—er—think of an English name. Just for the contest, you see, and for the newspapers and magazines. Our picture is going to appear in all the papers. We'll call you Kefahiloe—

a person's name is her name, and there's nothing wrong in it. Do not hurry, you can tell us the name you've chosen later. Is it all right? She nodded. Things never seemed all wrong with her. Sometimes there was something pathetic about her pliability, sometimes irritating.

The next day she gave it to us, with a take-it-or-leave-it tone: Mary-Jane.

The first three months showed a slight improvement. Her weight was going up, her paleness was disappearing, the lips moistening and softening, her small eyes taking on a new liveliness and self-confidence. Joe was doing the body work efficiently. I felt then, and Uncle agreed, like one who had known it all along, that there was something latent in the girl which we were going to draw out in the next few months.

She had finished her primary schooling and done part of secondary school, so she was all right on that side.

I took her to the bioscope on certain Saturdays, especially musicals, which appealed to her more than straight drama or bang-bang movies. I took her to Dorkay House in Eloff Street where African musicians go each Saturday afternoon for the jazz improvisations. There we found other boys and girls listening eagerly, ripples of excitement visibly traveling through the audience as now and again they whistled and clapped hands. The girls were the type called in township slang 'rubber-necks', the ostentatiously jazz type. We found the same type at parties.

Mary-Jane was drinking it all in, I noticed.

I invited her to my room to listen to my collection of jazz records. She took in small doses at a time, and seemed to digest it and her bodily movements were taking on a city rhythm.

Uncle and I shared entertainment expenses equally. We went for cheap, but good entertainment.

After six months, Uncle and I knew we were going to deliver a presentable article of good healthy flesh, comportment, and luscious charm. Charm? Strange. Through all this I did not notice the transformation that was taking place in this direction. She was close on twenty-one, and at the end of the next six months, I was struck by the charm that was creeping out of her, seeming to wait for a time, not far off, when it would burst into blossom. She was filling up, but her weight was in no danger of overshooting the mark. Her tongue was loosening up.

I was becoming aware of myself. I felt a twinge of guilt at treating her like an article that should be ready against a deadline. Before I could realize fully what was happening, the storm set in.

The thing was too delicate; I would have to go about it carefully. Particularly so because I had sensed that she was innocent and untutored in a rustic manner about things like love. And one didn't want the bird to take fright because one had dived into the bush instead of carefully burrowing in. Besides, I am a timid fellow, not unlike my uncle in other things.

Uncle had expensive photographs taken of Mary-Jane for the press. Publicity blazed across the African newspapers, and the air was thick with talk about *Afric's* beauty contest at which Miss Johannesburg would be selected; who was going to be the £500 consignment of beauty dynamite? The journal screamed. . .

I heard a snatch of conversation in the train one morning amid the continuous din of talking voices, peals of laughter and door-slamming.

'Hey man, see dat girl's picture in *Afric*?'

'Which?'

'De one called Mary-Jen—er—Tumelo?'

'Ja-man, Jesus, she's reely top, ech!'

'God, de body, humm', de curves, de waist, dis t'ings!' (Indicating the area of the breasts).

'Ach, man, data's number one true's God jealous down.'

I warmed up towards the boys and wished they could continue.

'I've seen the three judges,' Uncle said.

'The judges? But *Afric* hasn't published the names!'

'They don't *do* such things, you backward boy.'

'How did you know them?'

'I've my contacts.'

'But we don't do such things, Uncle!' I gasped

'What things?'

'Talking to judges about a competition in which you have vested interests.'

'Don't talk so pompously. You're talking English. Let's talk Sesotho. Now all I did is took photographs of Mary-Jane to each one at his house, paid me respects with a bottle of whisky and asked them if they didn't think she's a beautiful girl. What's wrong with just talking?'

'What did they think?'

'What are you talking, Neph'! Each one almost jumped out of his pants with excitement.'

I wanted badly to laugh, but wanted also to show him that I disapproved.

'I didn't suggest anything to the. I just said she is my niece and I was proud to see her entering the contest. They swore they hadn't seen such beauty so well photographed among all the pictures they had seen in the papers. We're near the winning-post, Neph'. I can see the other side of September the fifteenth already—it's bright. Those judges caught my hint.'

I continued to sit with my eyes fixed on the floor, wondering whether I should feel happy or alarmed.

'By the way, Neph', do you realize you have got yourself a wife, home-grown and fresh? Anything going on between you two?'

'What do you mean?' I asked, without wanting an answer. His eyes told me he was impressed by my affectation. He waited for me to crawl out of it.

'I haven't thought of it,' I lied. After a pause, 'Was this also on your mind when you thought of her as a beauty queen, Uncle?'

'Yes, Neph'. I got to liking her very much while I visited her people during my inspection trips. It was sad to think that such a bright pretty girl would merely become another villager's wife and join the rest who are scratching the soil like chickens for what good there still remains in those desolate places. Her father and me are like twin brothers, we were at school together.'

'But the contest? Surely you could obtain a husband for her without it? And you're not so sure she'll win, either.'

He was silent.

'Nor are we sure she'll like me for a husband.'

'Her father knows my plans. He has told her since she came here.'

'But the contest, why that?'

Silence.

'It's too difficult to explain. All I ask you is to trust me enough to know that I'm not simply playing a game with Mary-Jane for my own amusement.'

During the next few days vanity blew me up. I abstracted the whole sequence of events from their setting and the characters who acted them out. Gradually I built up a picture of myself as someone who needs to be independent and around whom a hedge was being set up, a victim of a plot. I regarded myself as a sophisticate who couldn't willingly let others choose a sweetheart or wife for me. But in fact I sensed that the real reason for my resentment was that I was

actually in love with Mary-Jane but could not face the prospect of living with someone I had presumed to raise to a level of sophistication for reasons of money. I had often been moved by films in which the hero eventually married the less-privileged, artless and modest girl rather than the articulate, urbanized girl who goes out to get her man. Now I had the opportunity of doing the same thing, and I couldn't. In either case, I realize now, one saw a different version of male vanity at work.

Another disturbing element was my uncle's motive for doing what he did by throwing Mary-Jane into a beauty contest when he could arrive at his other objective without going into all the trouble. Although he declined to say it, I think it was his gambling urge that pushed him to it. I wondered what Mary-Jane herself thought about all this; the manner in which she was simply brought to the city and put through a machine to prepare her for a beauty competition, probably without her opinion being asked. Did she perhaps take it that this was how townspeople did things, or one of the things country people were bound to do when they came to the city? I still wonder.

Mary-Jane had to enter the competition in spite of our vanities. She looked forward to it with zest and a certain vivacity which one would not have guessed she was capable of about nine months before. Yes, she was charming, too. How I wished I had found her like this or it had arrived as if through someone else's efforts and planning!

Uncle himself infected me with his high spirits. We decided to have an Indian dinner at the Crescent, after the event.

That night came.

The lights went on full beam, washing out every bit of shade from every corner of the hall. The Jazz Dazzlers stuck up 'September in the Rain'. Masses of faces in the packed hall looked up towards the rostrum. The music stopped. The M.C.'s voice cut through the noise in the hall and the people held their breaths, unfinished words and sentences trailing off in a sigh.

It came to me with a metallic mockery — the announcement that *Afric* had decided that this was going to be a you-pick-the-winner show. The queen and the other two prize-winners would be chosen by popular vote. There were hilarious applause and whistling from the crowd of what must have been about two thousand people. The M.C. explained that as the people filed out of the hall after the contest, each person would, in the presence of supervisors at the door, drop two tickets each into a box fixed at every one of the four exits. One ticket would bear the numbers of the winners of the three prizes in evening dress, and the other card numbers in beach attire. The categories were indicated on the cards. These and pencils were distributed while the band played.

I looked at Uncle next to me. He kept saying, 'Stupid! Hoodlums! Cheats! Burn the bloody *Afric*! Nothing ever goes right in things organized by the Press. You take my word for it, Neph'. Ah!'

'Anything happens in beauty competitions,' I said, for lack of a stronger remark to match my sagging mood.

'Anyway, Neph', Uncle said his face cheering up, 'two thousand people looking with two eyes each must be better than three men looking with two eyes each, with the possibility of a squint in one of them.'

This really tickled me in spite of myself. It gave me hope: who could be sure that all these judges knew a lovely bust from the back of a bus

or a bag of mealies? We could at least enjoy our Indian dinner and leave the rest in the hands of fate.

What use would it be to describe Mary-Jane's superb performance?

We had two couples—friends—with us at dinner. Mary-Jane was most relaxed. Her ingenuous abandon and air of self-assurance went to my head. The dinner proved worth waiting for. That went to my stomach and made me feel what a glorious thing it is to have a healthy receptacle for such exquisite food.

During our twelve-mile trip by car to Orlando, I felt the warm plush body of Mary-Jane press against me slightly, and I was glad to have things in contact like that. She, in turn, seemed to respond to something of what was radiating from me.

'Are you worried about the results?' I ventured to ask, merely for the sake of saying something to relieve the drowsy full-bellied silence in the car.

'No,' she replied warmly. 'Not a bit. But I'm glad it's all over.'

We lost.

Mary-Jane wasn't in the least worried. Uncle regarded it simply as a match that was lost and couldn't be replayed. For my part, I suspected that I had often heard a faint whisper within me telling that I should be better off if we lost. So I did not know what I ought to feel.

On a Sunday I went to Uncle's house for a casual visit. I found his wife in one of her sour moods. She greeted me with the impatience of one who waves off a fly that hovers the face and hinders

conversation. She was actually talking alone, in a querulous mood. Her right elbow was resting on her huge breast and in the cup of the left hand, the right hand stroking her cheek and nose.

I passed hastily on to the room where Uncle played and sang an excerpt from Grieg's piano concerto. He saw me as I went to seat myself but continued to play. At the end of a passage he said casually, 'She is gone,' and continued playing. I shrugged my shoulders, thinking, 'That's beyond me.'

'She left me a note,' he said. 'Did you receive one?'

His eyes told me that he had just visited his whisky cupboard. I realized that he wasn't talking about his wife.

'Who? Are you talking about Mary-Jane?'

He nodded. 'Who do you think I mean—Vasco da Gama's daughter-in-law?' The he shouted, 'Ja. Gone with Joe!'

He went back to some *crescendo* passages of Grieg, picking them up and dropping the in turn. Then he suddenly stopped and came to sit by me.

'How's everybody in the house?' I asked.

'Still well. Except your aunt. That stupid native boy who sold me this piano comes here and finds your aunt and tells her this is a stolen piano. Just showing off, the clever fool. *Setlatla sa mafelelo*—fool of the last order. His mother never taught him not to confide everything in woman. Kind of lesson you suck from your brother's breast. The native! Now your aunt thinks all the house money goes out for the piano. Nothing can convince her that I'm paying £30 only, and in bits, too. So you see she's staging one of her boycotts.'

Uncle did not even pretend to lower his voice. Has it gone this far—no bother about what she thinks? I asked myself. No, he did care. He was too sensitive not to care. Always, when he told me about her, he spoke with a sense of hurt. Not such as a henpecked husband displays. Uncle had tremendous inner resources and plenty of diversions and could not buckle up under his wife's policy of non-collaboration, the way a henpecked man would do. This 'speaking up' was just a bit of defiance.

'She worried about a stolen piano,' Uncle continued, lying back on the divan, his eyes looking at the ceiling, his thumb playing up and down under his braces. 'She forgets she sleeps between stolen sheets; every bit of cutlery that goes into her mouth was stolen by the boys from whom I bought it; her blouses are stolen goods, her stockings.' And then, looking at me he said, 'Don't we steal from each other, lie to each other every day and know it, us and the whites?'

I said, *Ja*, and looked at my tie and shoes. But I considered this superfluous explanation.

'You know, Neph', he continued in rambling fashion, 'a few days ago I had a sickening experience involving a school I've been inspecting. A colleague of mine—let's call him J.M.—has been visiting the school for oral tests. At no time when his white superior calls him or asks him a question does J.M. fail to say "Yes, baas," or "No, baas," or "I'll get it for you, baas." Now, during lunch break, some of the staff say to him in the staff-room, they feel disgraced when a black man like him says, "baas, baas" to the white man. They say they hope he'll stop it—just a nice brotherly talk, you see. Guess what J.M. goes and does? He goes and tells his white superior that the staff members of such-and-such school don't want him to call him "baas"! Guess what the white man does? He comes and complains to me about the bad conduct of those teachers. Now I ask you; what

chance do you or I stand against idiots like these two who have so much power? We don't all have the liver to join the Congress Movement. So we keep stealing from the white man and lying to him and he does the same. This way we can still feel some pride.

As I rose to go, I said, 'So Mary-Jane's gone off with Joe, eh!' as though her image had not been hovering over me all the time since Uncle had announced her 'flight'.

'Yes, because I've a stupid timid nephew. Are you going to wait till horns grow on your head before you marry?'

I laughed.

'Any country girl who starts off with Joe had made a real start in town-living, Neph'.'

As I went out, the woman in the lounge was saying: 'Kiriki, Kiriki— who do they say he is— Kiriki with the stolen piano. Me, I cannot eat Kiriki, I want money for food. He can take the Kirikinyana and Mohapeloanyana of his, put them in the lavatory bucket.'

By saying 'He can take. . .' she clearly wanted me to listen. The use of the diminutive form for the names of the musicians was meant for his ears.

'What do you do with your aunt, Neph', if she does not understand Grieg and cannot like Mohapelo?''

If you had picked me with a pin as I was going out, I should have punctured, letting out a loud bawl of laughter which I could hardly keep back in my stomach.

Chapter 62

The Prodigal

by

937

Simiso Ngwane

Sophiatown had rarely known such a storm before. It raged with a fury which could snap nerves of steel. A streak of lightning flashed through the large window of Zacharias Memela's sitting room with the glare of a million candles—then a deafening crash. It was as if the whole house had been shaken to the ground. In another second, it was all over.

Memela rose from the floor and rubbed the parts of his body bruised by the wall by the side of which he had fallen. His eyes were blinded for a while by the lightning. He groped about the room until he tumbled on a sofa.

"That was a bad one. . ." said a voice from the direction of the door. It was a very familiar voice; but it sounded terribly frightened.

'Were you hurt, Mr. Memela?'

"No, doctor." His instincts told him to rise to his feet. That was the correct thing to do when spoken to by a Whiteman. "I was at the window reading the afternoon paper. I saw a dazzling light over my shoulder. Heard a peal of thunder. All I remember after that is that I was hurled against the wall as though I had been blown by a gust of wind."

The effects of the flash cleared from his eyes. "I was frightened," he confessed, trying to smile. "Pray take a seat, doctor." He collected the scattered pages of the "Courier" as he spoke.

"I thought I'd be first with the news. . ." cried the Whiteman. "I see you already have the paper."

“Which news, doctor?”

“Haven’t you seen the examination results. They’re in the paper you were reading.”

Memela was skeptical. His large and sad eyes, trained not to look a Whiteman in the face, stared into space. Dr. Sherlock Chalmers laughed. Memela did not laugh. For some time he had gone about with a long face—it had been as if he was depressed by a sense of impending disaster. Dr. Sherlock Chalmers, head of the American-owned mission hospital, had sensed the trouble coming over Memela and had decided to go out of his way to create an atmosphere where the worst would not turn into the very worst. Whenever he had the time, he called on Memela—to cheer him up.

“Sihe has passed!” he exclaimed. “I came in to congratulate her.”

“She has not returned as yet from town, doctor. How did I miss her name? I went through the list of passes line by line.”

“I am sure it is there.”

The American missionary picked up the paper and spread it before Memela.

“St. Monica’s. . . . St. Monica’s Secondary School. There you are. First Class. There.....there. Sihe Memela with distinctions in Zulu, English, History and Music. She did exceptionally well.”

Memela’s face brightened.

“She did well. Now I know how I missed her name. I looked for it among the third class passes.”

“You were not fair to her. She did not deserve a third class.”

“I have grown to expect anything from bad to worse from the younger generation. Things are so different. In my younger days little boys did not go about with knives robbing their own mothers and sisters. You never heard of the ghastly crimes reported in the papers every day today. There was peace in the land. True, we were not paid well. But things were not so bad.”

“Of course you should not expect society to stand still. The human personality is a strange thing. When a child is born you cannot predict precisely what it will be. I do not think anybody can. That goes for each generation of the human species. All that can be said is that both the child and the new generation adapt themselves to conditions in your time were quite different and they produced decent men and women. I am not sure though that the generation to which you and I belonged had a monopoly of virtue. We plunged the world in two horrible wars and wiped out Hiroshima – possibly because it was not a White town. . .”

“You are speaking of the White races. We Africans had nothing to do with all that.”

“True. But human behaviour follows similar lines no matter what your colour is. If you had been free people I have no doubt in my mind that you would have behaved as other human beings did in your time.”

“But your boys and girls do not roam the streets as ours do.”

“Oh! That’s because we have decent homes, Mr. Memela.”

“I don’t think the younger generation cares much for decent homes. My experience is teaching me that if you give your child a decent

home you invite disappointment. The child lets you down; turns against you or stabs you in the back. Who are the worst rogues in Sophiatown? And the worst drunkards? The sons of well-to-do father, of course. The sons of persons who worked themselves to the bone to give their children security and comfort. The sons and the daughters of the poor distinguish themselves everywhere—in the professions, in the Church, in business, in politics; everywhere they are at the top. Our sons are in the shebeens.”

“By decent I don’t mean material comfort only. I mean that the mere possession of a White skin is a passport too privilege and entities one to the best things in life That is why our children do not roam the streets. The day you are free men like the Whiteman your boys and girls will not roam the streets. The environment in which they will grow then will incline them in the direction of responsible citizenship.”

“I have lost hope, Mfundisi. What sort of citizen will a fellow like my son make? You know the story. He quarreled with his headmaster and refused to be called Chalmers Memela. I droop my head in shame when I think of it. Chalmers, he protested, was a Whiteman’s name and he would not have it because he was an African. How it made me sick. Then, he said, he would not go to a school where lies and perfidy were taught. Dingane was being mirrored as the incarnation of all that is base in the human nature while Piet Retief epitomized shining virtue. He was not going to stand that nonsense anymore, he said. Who is he to say that? I wanted him to qualify as a surveyor; the first African to be so qualified. I wanted him to go to the university. I was willing to see him through everything. He insisted on having things his own way. Today he belongs to the streets. I long to see what will come of it all.”

“He might still become a surveyor.”

“Not if he follows his present ways. Mind you surveying was not my choice. It was his. I merely wanted to help him along. Naturally, since I was to pay, I had to lay down the conditions. . .”

“Give Sihe a chance. She’s entitled to it.”

“I thought she would realize how much pain her brother’s behaviour gave us. I thought she would try to do something to please us. Now she comes along and says she wants to train as a singer. A singer! What future is there for an African singer? In this South Africa? When wolves and cads prowl around every music hall? It is madness. Who ever lived on singing? How many singers have stable homes? Don’t we read of many of them involved in nasty situations? But then, if she wants to go to the streets like her brother, let her please herself. After all they are twins.”

Memela sank back into his chair. The dark cloud of gloom descended on him again. For a while he was silent, depressed by the sense of impending disaster which haunted him.

The rain had stopped falling outside. Sihe and her brother, Fanyana, jumped out of a taxi near the gate and ran up to the house.

“Hello, doctor,” she exclaimed.

“Hello, Sihe! You were lucky to escape the storm on the way. . . and hearty congratulations!”

“Oh. . .er. . .are the results out?”

“You did very well. A first class pass and some distinctions. You don’t get very many White girls doing so well.”

“Oh! Doctor! Thank you for the congratulations. Fanyana! Where’s he? I thought he was following me? Have you heard how I passed Fanyana?”

Her brother’s voice came I a low rumble up the passage from the direction of the kitchen. He clearly was not talking to her. She made for the door.

“I must tell this to mother myself! Excuse me doctor!”

She ran down the passage into the kitchen. Fanyana and his mother were engaged in a violent exchange of words—in muffled tones. She stopped suddenly at the door. The noise she had heard while in the lounge—she knew now what it had all been about. Her heart beat faster, not because of the things her mother and her brother were saying to each other but because she wondered what would happen if Dr. Chalmers left the house at that moment and thus freed her father to join in the drama going on in the kitchen. There was a lot of trouble in the Memela household those days. The central figure in all this was her brother. He had clashed violently with his father. The spectacle had made her tremble. She dreaded to think what would happen this time if father and son collided again. Her heart beat faster and faster until she started trembling.

II

Sihe’s mother took no notice of her by the door; nor did her brother Fanyana.

“It was very rude of you to do that,” her mother was saying, “Just the sort of thing I won’t stand in this house.”

She broke her silence. In a tone she laboured hard to keep neutral. She asked: "What has he done, mama? What have you done, Fanyana?"

Neither bothered to pay attention to her. The mother continued her attack "Sihe did the correct thing; what a well-mannered human being should have done. She is not any the worse for saying 'Good afternoon' to Dr. Chalmers."

"I'm not a Whiteman, mama. We do not say 'Good afternoon' in Africa."

"Don't raise your voice, Fanyana. Father might hear you," whispered Sihe.

"I don't care if he does. It's these very White folks who came with the Bible, told our ancestors to look to heaven while they filched away our land and our independence. You say I should go to them and say what a good afternoon I have when I think of that? Not me!"

"Fanyana!" exclaimed the sister.

"Fanyana!" shouted the infuriated mother. "How dare you say that in my house?"

"I thought this was an African's house?"

"I thought this was an African's house?"

"How dare you say such a thing about the people who made you what you are?"

"The slave that I am. . ."

"Ungrateful slanderer!"

"There's the evidence of history."

"You want to make everybody unhappy in this house with your superficial learning. You're over-doing it. You'll hit yourself against a stone wall one of these days."

"I shall gladly pay the price. This would be a terrible world to live in if everybody conformed. The evil which crushes us every day of our lives derives its strength from the decent men and women who want to conform who want to be thought of as good; who will blind their eyes to injustice and suppress the voice of conscience instead of raising it in protest, even if that leads to the gallows."

"I thought you would have learnt one or two lessons by now."

"I have learnt them, certainly. The most important of them is that I no longer have fear for the Whiteman's gaol."

"Say that again?"

"I didn't come to you for help when the police beat me up and locked me in the stocks for a whole week for painting resistance slogans on the walls of one of the gaols!"

"You dare do it again."

"I'll do it again, mother, when need arises. I'll always do it until either I die or the wicked evil of race oppression has been wiped off the face of the land of my fathers."

"There's something wrong in your head."

"I only hate oppression."

"A long term is gaol will do you a lot of good."

"The oppressor hopes to keep me his slave by threatening me with the prospect of going to gaol."

"Would you call your mother an oppressor?"

"I would be constrained to call her the handmaid of the oppressor if she instilled in me the fear of being gaoled."

"I thought you had better sense than that."

"You remember I told you and father that I would not change any of my views about the White oppressor; not before I was a free man. Rather than do that, I said, I would always choose to walk out of this house. I could always find a place for myself anywhere."

"And you went to the slums at Pimville. The worst imaginable. I wonder how you could have slept in that filth."

"I went there by choice. You came and shed tears and begged me to return to this glass house."

"A glass house? His mother was screaming."

"What is a slave's wealth? If you are a slave you are a slave with all your money. To shield your conscience you must live in a glass house. I am sorry that in a moment of weakness I returned to conform and obey and stand up with my hat in hand in front of a Whiteman; to tremble when a Whiteman frowned—to worship your tin gods, Hindemann, Llewellyn and other oppressors of my fellowmen. I loathed such a life. I did not want to live in false comfort—for a slave

is always a slave no matter how rich he might be. I lathed your false values. I hated to be a prisoner by consent; bound for ever to press publicity, to parties at Hindemann's, to expensive curtains, to parqueted floors to varnished pieces of wood, cut glass and dazzling lights. I wanted a life of struggle; the hard life which gave the oppressor of his fellowmen no rest by day or by night. I wanted the dangerous life—the only manly life; the only satisfying life for a human being presumed a criminal just because God created him black.

I wanted to fight and die fighting. I wanted to fight by day and to fight by night. I wanted to fight by fair means and by foul means until the chains which kept me a slave fell off my ankles."

"You should not have come back. . ."

"I must confess I succumbed to a weakness I had never conquered—to comply when you shed tears."

Then don't lecture me about the folly of returning home."

"Very well, mama. Africa is wide and Africa is great of heart. If you do not wish to be lectured to on the evils of slavery it is because you no longer belong to suffering Africa. You are afraid to venture; you are afraid to take any risks to break the shackles which bind you; you are afraid to be true to yourselves lest Hindemann thinks ill of you; lest the bank manager thinks ill of father; lest your names no longer appear in the columns of the White Press; lest you lose your front seats in public gatherings."

"You are free to return to Pimville!"

“I was very happy there. I lived with honest men and women. With people whom oppression had moulded into heroes. I did not live with snobs and canting hypocrites. . .”

“Call us snobs and canting hypocrites? Your own parents?”

“Mama, give me the chance to speak my mind for once. How many times have you and father called me by uglier names in this house? Not because I was a drunkard; not because I ran with bad women— but simply because I refused to be bullied by any Whiteman; because I refused to tremble when a Whiteman frowned; because I associated with boys and girls who revolted against the hypocrisy, the acceptance of slavery, the cowardice and the cruelty of the times. You called me a thug, a scoundrel, a loafer, a dirty beggar, a parasite, a renegade. Oh, if I was as well-educated as father is I would have consulted a dictionary to check the meaning of some of the choice names you gave me.”

“You anger me too much you ungrateful child.”

“I’ll always thank you for having brought me to earth but I shall never forgive you for having been afraid to make this a better world for me.”

“Don’t speak like that to me!”

“But you asked for it, mama.”

“Get out of my sight!”

A tense stillness descended over the kitchen. The front door creaked.

“Please think seriously about what I said about Sihe,” said the Whiteman.

"That I will do, doctor."

"Good night, Mr. Memela."

"Good night, doctor."

The door creaked again. Memela walked heavily down the passage to the kitchen. The silence was still unbroken.

"Why are you all so quiet," he asked. Nobody replied. He looked inquiringly at his wife. An angry tear raced down her cheek. She wiped it quickly. He understood. He turned to Sihe: "What have you been doing to your mother?"

"I have just come in, father, I was in the lounge with you. I found mother and Fanyana. . . talking."

"Oh? It is you again? That is what you returned here to do? Your slum airs and manners again?"

"You do me wrong, father. I wish you tried to find out what the trouble was all about."

"I know. It's always your insolent manners. You're always too big; too important to greet a distinguished visitor in my house."

"I should not do it if it is against my conscience."

"Your conscience?" Mrs. Memela was furious. "What conscience does a renegade like you have?"

"To love my friends and hate my enemies."

“You’re getting to big for your shoes, my boy, I suppose you imagine you can take over from me.”

“I am a slave, father, and wealth is meaningless to me.”

Tears rolled down Mrs. Memela’s eyes again. She burst: “He calls us snobs and canting hypocrites and this a glass house!”

III

Memela’s joy knew no bounds when at last Sihe agreed to go to the medical school. Everybody who mattered in his opinion was told about it. He was going to have a marathon tea party—the costliest Sophiatown had ever seen—where his friends could come to bid his daughter farewell. It would be the first of its kind. He laid great stress on the word fun! His daughter was going to be the first woman doctor in Sophiatown. It gave him prestige to have been the first to do this and that. And Memela yearned for more and more prestige; it made him more acceptable in White company and enhanced his own community’s respect for him. It thrilled him to know that he would be the first to throw out a party to be attended by the White lords of the gold mines.

Those sections of the African Press which thought highly of him knew precisely what to do. They played up the coming party. It was going to be one of the finest Sophiatown had ever known; one of the most exclusive. They spoke of everything only in superlatives; superlatives came readily to men trained to carry out orders and not to use their brains. A notable feature of the party, they said, would be the number of important personalities who would be present. Mr. Bram Hindemann (his name was printed in heavy type), the chairman of the Alto-Bohemian Gold Mining Corporation would come along. So would Mr. Aldwych-Llewellyn, chairman of the Adelphi Publishers, who owned the ‘Daily Courier.’

Everything concerning the Memelas was news along the Reef. The African gossip writers started letting out secrets of Sihe's dress for the occasion. The front pages were full of Sihe's pictures; of the wonder girl from Sophiatown who had got four distinctions in her Matriculation Examination. Llewellyn saw to it that the "Courier" did its bit to place Sihe across the White side—to show his goodwill towards the African people.

Memela was pleased with both preparations for Sihe's farewell party as well as the publicity it got. So was his wife. It was their greatest ambition to remain at the top of Sophiatown's social ladder. They fought with deoniacal fury to crush rivals anywhere on the horizon. It gladdened their hearts to see their names in the Press. One way to kill their rivals was to tip those sections of the Press which sided with them. And then, of course, there was not anything more fatal in Sophiatown to damage a man's name than to spread whispers about the scandals in his family; to cast doubt on his morals and—even to reveal one or two details about his financial trouble.

Frail human beings, created of flesh and earth saw their names smashed to dust to the left and the right of the Memela's. In the cut-throat bid to "shine" Memela and his wife had no rivals. That, in the social atmosphere of those times was indeed an achievement. It brought rewards which gladdened their hearts. Their names appeared frequently in the White Press. They had the rare privilege of entertaining the great in the land. All that added luster to that transient possession they had—prestige.

Everything in their lives was ordered to enhance their prestige. In Church, Memela topped the contribution lists to keep up his prestige. At the Alto-Bo, as Hindemann's gold mine was popularly called, he tolerated insults from White juniors—just to keep the peace and retain his job. It gave him a lot of prestige to be compound manager

at the Alto-Bo—the first African to hold this responsible position. If Sihe did well at the medical school, the family's prestige would soar to heights none had ever attained at Sophiatown. And this is precisely what old Memela wanted out of his daughter.

He was intensely happy she had given up her dreams of a musical career. He was proud she had obeyed his orders. A venerable old man who ran about the Alto-Bo carrying out orders issued by White juniors felt proud when somebody obeyed him. Only Dr. Chalmers, the superintendent of the Chalmers Memorial Hospital, a very close friend of the Memelas, now and then struck a discordant note. Too much pressure had been put on the girl to force her to take up medicine, he told his wife. Sihe was not interested in thermometers and hypodermic syringes. She wanted to express herself—in the personal and creative way of the true artist. She had its requisite gifts: the voice, the personality and the capacity for hard work.

Sihe was pleased with the clothes she was getting from her father. She had never known him in a more generous mood. There seemed no end to his desire to please her. He bought her everything she wanted; all money could buy. It made her hope she might forget music, her life's dream; she hoped it would be deluged by the gifts and the love showered on her.

She would lie awake on her bed for hours at night trying to plan out her new life. That strained her and made her unhappy. It was not that she could not go to the university and pull through the medical course. The point was: she was keenly aware that she was taking a new direction in her life. That meant recasting her whole attitude to people and events. It meant traveling along an unfamiliar route. She did not know if she had the faith to go along it to the end. Yes, her parents loved her; but about that time she was beginning to feel that their intensified devotion to her was a form of pressure and she was the exploited party. She had no stomach for being the first to see

human beings at birth and the last at death. Each time she tried to measure herself against the demands of her new calling she suspected they were more than she could bear over the years. But she was still young, she told herself; there was no reason to give up hope.

She wrote a secret letter to her brother—begging him to attend her farewell party. He had cut himself completely from the family. He avoided them on the streets. She begged him for her sake to come. He promised to come, if he found the time.

The guests of honour sat on a dais facing the large mixed audience beneath the trees in Memela's yard. African and White pressmen sat immediately below the dais.

Bram Hindemann was a big man in the mining world. He was the principal speaker. The Press attached a special importance to his views and the people with whom he associated. Word went round the White clubs of the Rand that he had enough money in South Africa, London and New York to buy up the city of Johannesburg itself. He was the confidant of Cabinet Ministers and the friend of key personalities in the capitals of Europe and America.

Along the Reef he was known more for his philanthropy and liberal views on the colour question than for his money. He was one of the most progressive mine magnates in the country and made honest endeavours to treat his employees as valuable human beings and not just units of production.

“Mr. Chairman,” he began, “I feel honoured to address an audience such as we have this afternoon. Europeans and Africans have gathered to congratulate the brilliant daughter of a distinguished father and to send her away with their good wishes. In itself her achievement reminds me of the loss South Africa suffers by barring

the door to opportunity against millions like Mr. Memela's brilliant daughter. . ."

The mixed audience cheered wildly. Thousands of the uninvited Africans had gathered on the road and around the gate outside the low brick wall. They cheered wildly too.

"Our coming together has a deep significance for men. By coming together as we have done we emphasize our essential oneness as South Africans; we affirm our faith in a united nation made up of people who believe the same things though with diverse cultural and racial backgrounds. . ."

The large and exclusive audience on the lawn cheered again. Press cameras clicked. The thousands massed on the street cheered. Sihe clapped her hands. But a look of anxiety was on her face. She had not seen her brother among the crowds. Had he decided not to come? Had he not found time to come, after all? She dismissed these disturbing thoughts. She consoled herself with the hope that he might come in the end.

"I am particularly happy to see you all here," continued Hindemann, "because Mr. Memela is an old friend of mine; a man I am proud to call a friend. We started the Al o-Bohemian with him as a young man, fresh from Natal. He saw me through good times and bad. But it was not my personal liking for him which raised him to the position of responsibility he holds on the mine today. He got there by sheer merit; though hard work, constancy of purpose, loyalty and a strong sense of duty. I might add I am proud of the fact that ours is the only organization of its type which has elevated a qualified African to the post of compound manager."

The audience cheered again. Old Memela sat with his eyes to the ground overwhelmed by the tributes paid to his ability. He occasionally turned his eyes to the pressmen and was pleased to see

them scribble down the things Hindemann said about him. The hour of his greatest victory had come. A smile from Hindemann was a great thing. It pleased him to know that his greatest victory had come in his own life time. It even made him toy with the idea of being a little more magnanimous—he even thought of forgiving his enemies some of the cruel things they said about his being a “good boy.” The audience was still cheering. Press cameras were clicking up down the lawn. The only people who were not cheering were the masses behind the low brick wall on the street. Their eyes were all on the police van which was making its way slowly through the crowds. It stopped in front of Memela’s gate. Four uniformed policemen jumped out of it, followed by Fanyana Memela. Their sergeant opened the gate and led the way. Fanyana came after him. The remaining three policemen made up the rear.

Under his arm Fanyana carried a parcel which emitted a very strong smell. Those who know said it was dagga. All five marched up to the front door of Memela’s house. The eyes of the mixed audiences were on them; so were those of the masses of humanity outside the gate.

Memela rose quietly from behind Hindemann and tip-tosed to the police.

“Are you Zacharias Memela?”

“Yes sergeant.”

“Do you know this young man?” pointing to Fanyana.

“Yes. He is my son.”

“This is your house?”

“Yes.”

“He lived with you until a short while ago?”

“Yes,” Memela was feeling outraged. He raised his voice and started waving his arms in mid air: “I chased him out of my house because I could not stand his evil ways.”

“That is alright. We have brought a search warrant. We are looking for a revolver we suspect he sometimes carries with him.”

“Fanyana!” shouted Memela. “Who taught you the habit of carrying revolvers!”

“Suffering.”

“Did I teach you that?”

“Now is not the time to ask that, father.”

“What?” The old man clenched his fist. “I am ashamed of you. To say that after you have disgraced me? You would be better off dead than alive. Imagine how your mother feels where she is. And your sister too. And all the people who respect me. . . Oh, God, have mercy on me.” He broke down and covered his eyes with a large white handkerchief.

“Alright Mr. Memela,” cried the sergeant, “we shall go quietly into the house. If you will cooperate we shall finish our business with the minimum of delay and trouble.”

“Come in, gentlemen,” groaned the old man. He led the way into Fanyana’s room. The police turned everything upside down but did not find the revolver. They tore the mattress open—in vain.

“Were they great friends with his sister?”

“Yes.”

“Then we shall go into her room.”

“Why not tear this pillow cushion with a knife and pulled out an automatic. The sergeant turned to Memela: “Can you explain this?”

“I know nothing about things in this room. Nobody has used it ever since this boy left the house.”

“It uses the type of bullet we found on your son’s clothes.”

“I have nothing to add, sergeant. Let the law have its course.”

“You will have to come to the police station to make a statement. Not now. I see you have all these important people about here. As soon as you are through, come over to see us.”

“I shall do as you say.”

The sergeant led the way to the door. Fanyana, his hands still handcuffed, followed. The crowd outside the gate had trebled itself. They all hid their eyes on Fanyana.

That evening Zacharias Memela sat up alone in his study—late into the night. A legal-looking document lay in front of him.

“. . . final and irrevocable,” he wrote. The ink had not dried on the paper. Somehow the words did not seem to convey the full force of his feelings. He opened the voluminous Oxford dictionary on his desk and fingered its pages with the grave mien of a Supreme Court judge.

“Irrevocable. . .” he read, “Unalterable. . . gone beyond recall.’ That is, the correct word.” He signed and laid the document in a wire basket marked: “For Mr. Ginsberg” —his lawyer.

IV

Sihe’s letters home did not display much enthusiasm for anatomy or hygiene or any of the prescribed subjects. To her father she often complained of her difficulties—the lecturers with whom she quarreled and the people at the university who taunted her with her father’s wealth.

The letters to her mother were more cheerful. She mentioned the things she liked best at school. She was thrilled with the dances. She never tired to write of her singing at school concerts. And then, there was always the inevitable—the question about Fanyana. She always asked about Fanyana.

The reference to Fanyana churned up a host of conflicting emotions in Mrs. Memela’s bosom. Fanyana had been convicted of burglary; and the illicit possession of firearms and opium and had been sentenced to five years in gaol without a fine. Mention of Fanyana received other memories. She remembered the great farewell party had been ruined. But the bitterest of all the memories was the emphasis laid by the anti-Hindemann Press in the white community on Fanyana’s emergence under police escort. It had given her family damaging publicity. Her enemies had gloated on it at every street corner; before and after Women’s Prayer meetings in every church hall along the Reef. Everywhere her friends had been thrown on the defensive—and that it putting it mildly.

She loved to read and re-read Sihe’s letters. She would take her pen and cross out the passages referring to Fanyana. She did not have the

courage to tell Sihe not to mention him. Although he had been formally disinherited and disavowed by his father, he was still her brother.

The schools closed and Sihe returned home for the winter vacation. She did not look too happy. She was inclined to avoid the company of her parents and spent most of her time in her bedroom. Memela bought her a small car, to keep her busy. She was kept busy — away from home.

Memela would wake up in the quietude of the night.

“Are you in a deep sleep, Liza?” he would ask his wife.

“No.”

He would be quiet for a while.

“You should be asleep.”

“I am thinking, Liza.”

“Do that by day and rest when in bed my dear.”

“There are things I worry about.”

She would turn on her side and face him.

“Why does Sihe look so unhappy?”

“I don’t know why. I have asked her about it several times. She will not tell me.”

“And she is losing weight. I am afraid, Liza.”

“She will be alright when she settles down to university life.”

“Do first year students come into contact with TB patients?”

“I can’t say. But you are going too far. Sihe is quite healthy. I lost a lot of weight when I first went to boarding school.”

“Those were other days. The food was bad and the accommodation poor. Sihe swims in the best of everything.”

“Perhaps she does not find her studies interesting.”

“It is all for her own good. A woman with no profession these days is doomed. I mean a respectable profession. What future is there for our daughter with the cads around every corner in town? The number of eligible young men shrinks from year to year as the ratio of highly educated girls rises. Competition for better-class men will be very keen in the years to come. We must plan ahead for Sihe’s security.”

“Yes, but she might have other ideas. We might be forcing something down her throat which she might never accept. It would not make her happy. A woman must love her work to be happy doing it.”

“Are you deserting me now? Are you now with those who feel that we should allow our children to do as they please?”

“How can you say such a thing? Desert you? You hurt my feelings. Must we not learn from our mistakes? We tried to make Fanyana an ideal son. . . and broke him.”

“You are wrong. We did every thing possible to build him up. At least I did. It was his own pigheadedness which broke him. Not me?”

"You loose your temper quickly."

"It I the way you refuse to see reason. It gets on my nerves."

"May we not try other methods on Sihe?"

"What? Withdraw her from the medical school? To flirt in dirty music halls with the scum of the earth? Never! I am master of the home here. It is my job to see to it that my will is done. If she wants to give up medicine, I'll disinherit her as I did her brother. I'll chase her out of this house."

He would turn away from her and give his back to her.

"Zacchy!" she would whisper. He would be silent.

"Zacchy!" she wold call again.

"What is it you want now?" His voice would be angry and his tone impatient.

"Are you already angry? With me?" He would not answer. She would lie awake for the rest of the night. It went on like that, night after night. She wept when Sihe returned to school; she cried bitterly, like a child. Sihe did not look well; she was too unwell for words.

V

Dr. Chalmers came out of the examining room. His face was drawn. Memela cast a glance at him. He turned away, as if to avoid their eyes meeting.

"I hope you don't mind waiting here for a few minutes while Mrs. Memela comes in with me. Do you, Mr. Memela?"

“Not at all, doctor.” He rose and bowed. They went through the examining room to Dr. Chalmers’ private office.

“Take a seat here, Mrs. Memela.”

The woman held her breath.

“There is nothing much wrong with your daughter.” He tried to smile.

“I am relieved to hear that, doctor. It is nearing the end of the year and we want her to write her examinations. We would like to see her fit for the tests.”

“You must be ready for a disappointment. . .”

“Will she be out of class for many weeks?”

“Yes.”

“That’s bad.”

“The position is she is expecting a baby. . .”

The woman suppressed a cry of anguish.

“Try and understand. Take the news calmly. Your husband’s health is on the delicate side. If you break down worse might happen to him. That is why I called you in. . . to tell this to you quietly. . . so that you should prepare him for the shock. . .”

She was still dazed. She rose and staggered to the door.

"I'd like to have a word with Sihe before she goes. Don't wait for her."

"Alright, doctor."

She almost collapsed when she went through the examining room. Sihe sat behind a screen. Mrs. Memela saw only her daughter's shoes. She felt like calling Sihe by name; to say something angry; something to express the pain of wounded pride. Dr. Chalmers opened the door for her. She coughed as if something had stuck in her throat and then went through. The air outside was cooler and fresher. It brightened her a little. The sigh of her husband huddled in uneasy expectation near the door returned her to the world of reality. Everything had been so much like a cruel nightmare.

Memela rose when he saw her. He read from the expressions on her face that there was serious trouble.

"Where's Sihe?"

"She'll follow later. We need not wait for her."

"Why?"

"Dr. Chalmers wants to talk to her."

"What's wrong with her? You took a long time coming out."

"I am afraid that child is going to give us a lot of trouble."

"She is in safe hands. . ."

"Not that exactly. . ."

“Well?”

“I’ll tell you when we get home.”

She led the way through the hospital gate to the car waiting on the street.

They drove him to all his farms; to Natal, the Cape and back to Sophiatown. They thought a change of atmosphere might do him some good. He continued to lose weight; he was weaker each month and complained of a depressing fullness in the head.

Dr. Chalmers decided to keep him under observation for a long time in hospital. He gave him the best treatment money could buy. One day he called on Mrs. Memela.

“I am unhappy with the course taken by your husband’s illness.”

“I understand, doctor.”

“You have proved yourself a courageous woman. You have survived shocks which would have broken very many people. I know you will receive next with equal courage. . .”

“The blows our children gave him were more than he could bear. That has given me the strength to be ready for anything.”

“That is the spirit; to be ready for all eventualities. Our husband is developing serious brain trouble. . .”

“Insanity?”

“Well, not that as yet. In the end it will be. The specialists tell me that he requires very careful nursing. He must receive no shocks or

excitement. That sounds very much like asking the impossible of human beings. But it seems to me that he is heading for very serious trouble. You will realize, Mrs. Memela, that we have done all we could to save him. Unfortunately for us, he is no longer young."

"That is a very cruel blow. . ."

"Cruel indeed, Mrs. Memela."

They sat together for a long time, talking about other things. Then the missionary rose to leave.

'Excuse me, doctor. What do you propose doing with him?'

"Just what suits you best. If you like we can keep him in hospital. If you think he'll be better off here we can treat him here. Keeping him in hospital would certainly shield him from shocks. But he is a difficult case to keep in hospital. He longs to be with his family. He is very unhappy in hospital."

"I would be happier myself to be free to drive him into the country, sometimes for long holidays. He likes life on the farms. That would keep him happy."

"Alright, we shall bring him home. I'm sure you'd look after him better than we can ever hope to do in the hospital."

They brought him home and drove him from one farm to another. That seemed to do him some good. But the Memela who had come out of hospital was a different man. He did not like company. He was happiest when alone. He did the same on the farms and the same in Sophiatown. He would sit on the veranda for hours and staring into space as though he saw infinity with the naked eye.

The people outside the brick wall walked up and down the street by day and by night. Some raised their hands and greeted him as they went past. Some did not. Others whispered ribald jokes All that did not matter to Memela. He knew that for him the normal life hung on a thin thread that could snap any moment. Life had been good to him and he loved to live. He had sort of subjected himself to an almost philosophic discipline which enabled him to live as what happened in the streets had no meaning for him.

As the years rolled by Sihe's child had grown—in body and beauty. Memela doted on her. Sihe had been married to the father of the child and both were at the medical school. Nobody mentioned Fanyana. Sihe visited him secretly with her husband on Sunday afternoons. His name was taboo in the Memela homestead. His photographs had been removed from the family album and everything associated with him in the house had either been sold or destroyed. There was that compulsory peace in Memela's house. When a friend died they kept him ignorant and drove him into the country. They did not give him all the papers to read. In any case everyone of them had to be checked first before he read it.

The community cooperated in giving Memela the peace he needed to keep his senses normal. Over the years the giggling stopped on the street when he sat on the verandah. A younger generation was growing up which did not know him for a "good boy" but which saw in him a venerable old man struggling heroically for survival.

One morning a stranger got out of a taxi in front of Memela's gate. He wore a Bachelor of Science's cap and hood of the University of South Africa. He walked up the steps to the old man.

"Good morning, father," he cried. Memela had been staring into space when the young man came up. When he turned his eyes to the

figure in front of him he saw his son—Fanyana. He did not speak. He turned again and stared into space.

“I have come back from prison, father, a better man. . .”

“You. . . .”

“Yes, father. To tell you I have made good through suffering. I made wise use of my spare time in jail and am something now; a graduate of the University of South Africa and a qualified surveyor. . . .”

“. . . . lay an egg?”

“Why an egg, father?”

“They have wings; they fly as you lay them.”

“Father, I am in earnest. I am in a hurry to go to work.”

“There’s one before you!”

The old man rose with a jump.

“What, father?”

“A snake!”

Fanyana looked around. He saw no snake.

“Father, won’t you be serious?”

The old man stared vacantly into space. The truth dawned slowly to Fanyana. . . the thin thread had snapped at last.

Chapter 63

Kaffer Woman

by

Arthur Maimane

“No. *Baas!* No—I can’t!”

“C’mon, Maggie! C’mon. . . . Alright, you greedy bitch! I give you a pound then!”

“But Bass. . . .”

Fourie’s tortured and exasperated face jerked quickly nervous over his shoulder. Nobody around. But I’ve stayed too long already, dammit! I better move.

“Think it over—tell me tomorrow!” he growled and stomped away. His boots crunched in the gravel that covered the small, circular clearing round the windmill; the crunching subsided to a muffled pad as he bulldozed through the knee-high grass beyond the clearing and towards a clump of trees. He would emerge from the trees at a point where no person at the farmhouse would think he had been near the windmill.

He did not glance back at the raggedy young woman who leant heavily against the stone-built circular dam fed by the windmill. Her eyes were wide with wonder and fear. She trembled convulsively; bit her lower lip nervously hard.

How could he think of such a thing?, . . . And why me? I'm only fit for Swart Jerry. I'm black!. . . I'm dirty; my clothes are torn—patched. I'm black! Why me? I must—no!. . . I can't tell Jerry: he gets jealous; and he gets drunk. He can cause trouble.

What must I do? Aaahhh! Don't think of it. He was only joking! That's it—an old man's joke, that's what it was! And he's white. . . . Yes; he was only joking. A moment of lust.

She adjusted the old, ill-fitting dress round her voluptuous young body. There was nothing more she could try to do about the frayed hole over the nipple of her left breast. Nor about the old manner the baggy dress had of hanging low behind her, swaying like the fat tail of a frisky ewe.

She walked slowly towards the cluster of mud-walled thatched huts where the black labourers—Fourie's "boys" and "girls" lived.

"More coffee, Gert?"

"No—No thank you, *skat*."

"You've been fidgety the whole evening, *liefling*," she said looking anxiously at Fourie across the kitchen table. "Something wrong? Or" —she laughed harshly— "is old age catching up with you too at last?"

Ah, he thought wearily, looking at the heaving and quivering mass on which her still-pretty-but-puffed face was perched. Her bosom spilled over the table's edge as she leaned towards him. It caught up with *you* a long time ago, my dear wife! What a filly you were then when you first said yes those many years ago. . . Now. . . If only you could guess! Ah, if only you knew what I have in mind! To rid myself of the frustrations forced on me by your blown-up, jelly-mass old age. . . What a filly that one is!

Aloud he laughed and agreed that perhaps she might be right.

She rose from her seat, resting short, pudgy arms on the table and levering herself up on them; grunting. A short, fat woman; her whole body aquiver with the effort; from her many chins and jowls to the thickened, heavily-veined legs he remembered with a shudder. She walked slowly, with a slight, arthritic limp.

He watched her with tender longing, keeping his eyes on her face alone. She's a good wife and companion. She was a good mother. If only the companionship was not limited to incessant chatter. If only there was still a flicker of the old fire. If only her boy was not—Must I suffer so for not having grown old as quickly as you have?

And now that stinking little kaffer *meid* has to try and make me suffer too. Playing hard to get! What check from a black bitch! I know she'll take the money—they'll all take it. She can't be scared—not because of her Swart Jerry: not even married too, the sinning black bastards! Looks a wanton. One who likes it. Can't be faithful with all those womanless Nyasa boys living around her. . . .

"Gertjie?. . . Gert!"

He looked quickly up "*Ja, skat?*"

"I'm feeling like going to be, *liefiag*, she said laughing. Her eyes looking coyly at him through the heavy folds around them. "I think you and I should go to bed, eh!" She giggled and turned her head away in a manner that would have been girlish if it had not been impeded by the fat.

The insides of his thighs went cold and goose-pimply. Oh no!—Not tonight! The thought of just watching her going through her bedroom ritual sickened him. Years ago it had made him feel hot and weak to watch her undress. But now the bulges, the flabbiness, the wrinkles. . .! And she looks at me like that.

"Yes, my darling," he heard himself say, "But I tell you what you go ahead and warm up the bed like a good little girl, eh? I got to go out and check that old generator first—think there is something wrong with the dynamo!"

Three days later, he finally manoeuvred Maggie into a lonely corner of the farm-yard. She had been scurrying away from him every time there had been a possibility of their being alone. His breath came with tortured difficulty through his hairy nostrils, and his eyes itched at the corners as they watched the firm young body carry on its perpetual fight out of the rags covering it.

"So. . ." and the breath whistled out of his mouth. "What you say now!" He wanted to sound gentle and persuasive; friendly. But the urgency and impatience rasped his voice.

"*Baas. . .*" It was half pleas and half rebuke. She was still frightened: but not as much as the first time. He thought he saw a suspicion of confidence in her bearing.

"C'mon! C'mon! Tonight!"

"Why me, *Baas*?"

"Can't *you* see? You're young? You're—oh, hell! Do *I* have to flatter you now? C'mon! Don't try those silly tricks with me, you kaffer bitch!" His breath came in short gasps. "You want to stay on this farm?—or any other farm within a hundred miles of here? I can make it damn hard for you and that big black bastard of yours! I can seize his pass so he can't get another job! I can. . . ."

"Oh no, *Baasie*. . . . Don't do that—please! I didn't know you so serious,, *my Baasie*. Give me time to think, *Baasie*. Just time, *Baas*. . . ."

"No! you've had enough—more than! And you damn well know I never go about joking with stinking kaffers! At the windmill—tonight! Nine o'clock, you hear? If you aren't there—trouble!"

Her eyes glistened with tears as she stared mutely up at him.

"Don't try and give me that innocent look, you! You've done it often enough, haven't you? Anyway"—the harshness in his voice softened a little—"anyway, I'll give you the pound. I don't break my word. Now, go—And have a bath!"

He watched her half-running away from him. Not frisking your fat tail today, hey? Well, I'm going to flatten it for you tonight—just you wait! You'll know you've been had, my girl. He laughed and turned away.

He was at the windmill fifteen minutes early. Too excited to stand still; but he felt too weak in the knees to move much. Why doesn't she come? He jammed his hand into a pocket and pulled out his watch. Where *is* the bloody kaffer? He flipped the lid open and briefly scanned the luminous dial. Where? He jammed the watch back into the pocket and kicked at a tuft of grass growing out of the

gravel. *She* ought to wait for *me*! He jammed both hands into pockets. As if she'd care if she did! He pulled his hands out and rubbed his face; then the backs of his thighs.

Without any warning the voice came out of the nearby darkness: "*Baas. . . .?*" His head jerked convulsively towards the sound. She was only a darker darkness. The blood was pounding painfully in his temples. His neck was hot; his thighs tingled; his palms were suddenly clammy.

"Come!" he hissed, stumbling towards her, grabbing her arm and making her wince. He dragged her towards the deeper shadows.

Later he walked home slowly. He was pleasantly exhausted and wanted to sit down: with his back against a tree, his legs stretched out before him. Apart. No it would be better if I lay flat on my back; stretch out slowly and luxuriously.

Oh, the tart! The bitch! The whore! How she rutted! They ought all to remain that savage!. . . How they love it!

His wife was wheezily asleep when he entered the bedroom. He undressed quietly and quickly, feeling uncomfortably guilty. He slipped into the huge bed, trying to keep as far away from her gross body as he could. If she touched him that relaxed feeling would vanish. And he did not want to tarnish her; while it was still fresh and damp on him. A *black* woman! *Here God*, what depths can one sink to?

As he lay there beside her, she turned slowly over in her sleep and her arms, from years of habit, fell limply over his stomach. A shudder cringed through his body as he felt the fat, flaccid arm weighing down on him. This is my wife! He scolded himself in the darkness. I

love her! How can I feel this disgust when she touches me—and all because of a black, rutting kaffer? This is wrong!

But the kaffer spread like a canker through his body. When he saw her the next morning, he suddenly felt the blood coursing through each of his veins. She gave him a fleeting, timidly teasing look that was also a challenge. The overhand of her dress behind her seemed to swish and switch more defiantly.

Now the little kaffer thinks she's as good a white and can look at me that way! He cursed with cold disgust—and a tingle of expectation as he started planning their next assignation.

Maggie felt different—not white: more equal to Fourie and all other whites. The awe of someone white that had been with her all her life—most of it had been washed away by the sensuous torrent of the night before. She knew the white man now. He was no different from all the black men she had known. And by knowing him thus, something new and as yet undefinable was growing in her: a feeling of contempt and pity for white women.

She was no longer, she felt, an anonymous black woman, scurrying humbly round the farmhouse and yard like the other black woman. The confidence she had always felt at the cluster of mud-walled huts where everyman's eyes were always trying to undress her—this confidence had spread to the rest of the farm. Into the farmhouse. She was as good as Missus now, wasn't she?—No! Better!—That's why he had to come.

As she switched away from him, Fourie was overcome by a sullen incompleteness. There was something missing. What had been a satisfying experience the night before was turning hollow and empty. What's the matter? he asked himself irritably. What's gone wrong now?

He could not put his finger on it until late that afternoon when he met Swart Jerry: shiny-black face forever slashed by the gleaming-white of his permanent, village-idiot grin. Fourie smiled back; but the smile died. This was a “good” kaffer: he knew his place and never made trouble. Always smiling and listening eagerly to orders. Strong and industrious too. But this afternoon he felt a disgust and shame as Jerry bowed, scraped and scratched his head before him.

Strong!—yes, for her. . . . This is her man, a voice thundered in his head. This is the man she belongs to. Always at his beck and call. Strong—no wonder he’s strong! Doesn’t have to sneak into the trees to have her, hurrying nervously through the ecstasy. He has her all night and every night! And you—you pay only for his leavings. A kaffer’s leavings! Ugh!

That evening he was late for supper. “Where have you been, *liefling*? I sent the kitchen-boy to look for you and he couldn’t find you anywhere.”

“Oh, I went for a walk”, he replied wearily. Thought I’d get some exercise into these ageing bones while I could.” He tried to smile.

The joke tasted stale and flat. The walk flashed through his muddled mind, eyes looking blankly at his wife. What to do? He had asked himself with every step. He was unhappy; worried. He had meant to have her only once then forget it. He had asked her on the spur of an unfulfilled moment—when he had seen her at the windmill and he had suddenly been overwhelmed by the empty promise of his bed and nights. But when he saw her this morning: he had begun planning to have her again....and that would lead to wanting her still more, he knew. What to do? Then there was Black Jerry. Jealous of a kaffer! To share a woman with a black man! (That the woman herself was black did not seem odd to him.)

I must get rid of them! That was the resolution in his mind as he had turned back towards the farmhouse. I must sack them both—tomorrow! And then? He had stopped and scratched through his grizzly beard. That won't get rid of the desire—might even get worse! Then I'd have to find another Maggie. And she might not be as good. . . .

He was morose, weary and disgusted with himself when he entered the farmhouse.

"From restlessness last night to brooding today!" his wife said, anxiously trying to tease him out of his gloom. "What's the matter, Gertjie? What's worry you, hey? Something wrong on the farm? Come on now, Gertjie: I've always shared your troubles before—why not now?"

"Nothing's wrong, Lisa? Just don't worry. I'm alright. I've always been, haven't I?"

She was hurt and worried. She remained silent for a long, speculative minute. "How are the cattle at Brakwater?" she asked.

Brakwater! The name excited him. His mind grasped around for the cause of the excitement. Brakwater—Yes! I've got it! Got the bloody solution! Fine! Grand! Marvellous!

He smiled with relief and looked up at his wife. "You must be a mind reader, *skat*," he told her fondly. "That's what's been worrying me—the cattle at Brakwater. Got a report today from the headman there. Kleinbboi. Says three of the young bulls are missing."

"Oh, Gert! Why didn't you tell me earlier, silly? We must do something about them, mustn't we? We must send one or two of the

boys immediately to Brakwater—to help those lazy Nyasas find the bulls!”

After a pause she spoke again: “Gert?”

He was trying so hard to suppress his glee he could not speak for the moment.

“Yes. We must send them to Brakwater. I’ll send Swart Jerry—first thing in the morning!”

Brakwater was fifteen miles from the farm: a few acres of pastureland rented from another farmer. Jerry would have to remain there until he was called back. He could not return to the farm without permission from himself. He would keep him there as long as he could.

Fourie was up early. He sent for the big, black and smiling Jerry and gave him his instructions. Fourie could afford to smile kindly as for once the idiot grin slipped off the black mask. “Don’t look so sad, my boy,” he said, patting the muscular back. “I won’t keep you there too long—just a few weeks. And your *maid*—Maggie, eh? –won’t run away: I’ll make sure of that!”

With a fond kick and a wink he sent the cuckold on his way.

That afternoon he walked past Maggie as she worked behind the farmhouse. His whisper was heavy with excitement: “Same place—tonight!”

A low, teasing and knowing chuckle rumbled out of her throat.

She was on time. And he had again been early and gone through the same impatient ritual as the first time.

"I want more money this time, *Bass*," she said. "you sent my man away." She tried to speak calmly and with confidence, but her voice quivered with frightened uncertainty.

"You're mad!" he exploded. "Crazy bitch! You think you're a woman—hey?"

"Then the *Bass* must go to the white woman."

"What did you say!"

"I said then the *Bass* must not bother with me."

"Oh, all right! I'll give you more. Now c'mon! C'mon!"

When they parted he kissed her clumsily and whispered:
"Tomorrow!"

As she melted into the darkness he rubbed his lips in furious disgust. Now what the hell did I have to do that for—kissing her smelly black mouth!

And every night at nine o'clock he grabbed her arm and growled
"C'mon! C'mon!"

And every morning Maggie arrived at the farmhouse feeling more equal to the Missus. She did not do anything to assert her new feeling. She did not behave towards him in any manner that he could particularly object to. But he felt her growing confidence and lessening respect for white authority. She was becoming cheeky. She was losing the cowed quality that had made him want her so much again after the first night: the awe and restrained emotion at the beginning, bursting into gasping, uninhibited passion as the

sensuous flood overwhelmed the inborn fear of White. Now she was treating him like he was just any man—a black man! But he still wanted her; more now.

He looked after her with remorse. I'll have to get rid of her—rid myself of her—someday soon. It was becoming difficult for him to think clearly about what he wanted and how he felt about it. He was always ashamed when he tiptoed into his bedroom where the mound that was his wife slept. And he woke up in the mornings thinking of the evening's nine o'clock.

He understood the risk he was taking That he was liable to a term of imprisonment if he was found out was still not his biggest worry. He was more frightened of the reactions of his wife and friends if he was ever found out. A kaffer woman! I'd die from the shame. . . .But what can I do now?

After two weeks he had to recall Jerry. Every labourer who went near Brakwater had brought back the same message from the big, grinning back man: I miss my children, *Bass*. . . .There is no work for me here. . . .And I want to work for you, *Bass*. . . .Hard.

The day after Swart Jerry returned Fourie whispered the urgency of the time and place to Maggie. She tried to say she could not but he growled—“Last night was enough for that black bastard! You be there—you know what I'll do if you're not!”

But she did not come. He waited until eleven. Two tortured hours. Impotently furious at the end. Stumbled towards the farmhouse in a red haze of frustrated lust and hurt pride. Broken. Mind whirling for an escape out of its own trap. He did not bother to be particularly quiet—a defiant disregard of caution—as he sneaked the big, shining car out of the garage beside the stables and rocketed it out of the farmyard gates, pointing it towards the town twenty miles away.

He had often heard, when he went into the town on Saturday mornings, some of his farmer friends make lewdly suggestive remarks about a widow who lived alone in a large, pretentious house on a quiet back street. . . .The big car screeched and slithered to a stop in a cloud of midnight-coloured dust outside the house. He climbed stiffly out of the car, suddenly timid. With a resolute shake of the head he crossed the street and opened the white gate.

He returned to the farm a little before dawn. He left the car half out of the garage, kitchen door open—and slumped into a sofa in the seldom-used living room. He would rest there for a moment before going upstairs to the bedroom. But he was snoring on the sofa when his wife found him in the morning. With beads of saliva in his beard and a dried splotch of it on his khaki work shirt.

She was shocked. It was the first time she had ever seen him drunk. And he did not say anything to her when she woke him—no explanation, no excuse.

He was still queasy and dizzy from the hang-over later in the morning when he found Maggie. When he was near enough he lunged at her with a big, calloused fist. The hang-over saved her a broken jaw. She sprawled equally wordlessly on the ground and he lifted a boot to kick her. He changed his mind. It was too much trouble; it was making his headache worse.

“Try that again you trollop and I’ll kill you!” he hissed at her. “You better be there tonight!”

Maggie was frightened. The throbbing pain in her temple was a remote nuisance as she staggered to her feet, absent-mindedly brushing dust off her dress. What was she to do? Jerry was a big, strong and virile man. Two nights had not made up for his two

weeks of enforced celibacy. And now the *Bass*—also being impossible. What was she to do? Which of these devils was she to give preference?

She was on time at the windmill. He was rough and much more demanding than he had ever been. She was surprised, frightened; and flattered. She walked back to her hut in contented bemusement. There Swart Jerry was not satisfied with her excuse—that the Missus had asked her to remain after supper to help with her sewing. There was no logical reason for his suspicions—this had happened in the past too, the order from the Missus. He should have been satisfied. But this evening the slow fire that scorched his loins—a sensation that made him awkward and clumsy when she came near him—made him sullenly suspicious.

And because Fourie was even more demanding the following evening, they remained in the hollow their bodies had made in the tall grass even longer. Long enough to be suddenly petrified in their sensuous abandon by the yellow, blinding light of a powerful torch.

There was a gasp from the dazzling darkness behind the torch. Fourie sprang to his feet. The torch wavered and fell, flickering wildly over Lisa's pudgy, tortured face before hitting the ground: now illuminating Lisa and big Swart Jerry beside her.

Lisa turned on the black man in her fury and beat a futile tattoo with her tiny, flabby fists on his broad, muscular chest; cursing him for the malicious cheek of luring her to such a place—such a den of sin and iniquity! Luring her to the scene of her greatest humiliation.

Maggie fled. Swart Jerry stepped back from the reviling fists and floundered after his woman. Lisa stood gasping and sobbing. Fourie fell to his knees before her, mumbling an agonized, incoherent penance. Lisa calmed down.

In a low, dead voice she spoke to him: "I could kill you, Gert Fourie. Unfaithful to me—that I could forgive, perhaps. But with a—with—with a stinking, kaffer woman! A black bitch! . . . But I will not touch you. I would defile my hands if I did."

She stumbled off into the darkness. He remained on his knees, still mumbling.

When he reached the farmhouse the big, gleaming car that he had been so proud of was reduced to two, dust-filmed red little stars bumping rapidly into the blanket of night; growing tinier with every bump. The red winks disappeared beyond a bend in the farm road. She was gone.

The police arrived two hours later. They found him sitting in the same sofa—almost in the same position—that his wife had found him in at dawn a few days earlier. His face was tranquil, his eyes closed as in sleep. There were no saliva beads in his beard, no dried stains on his khaki shirt.

There was only a big, red splotch on the white-washed wall behind his head. And the back of his head was missing. His favourite rifle looked up at him from between his knees.

Chapter 64

Machado

by

Alfred Hutchinson

Machado, Machado. The word cracked like a fire in the steadily falling drizzle. It caught me and impelled me onward; caught the others, too, so that they broke into a shuffle with the luggage on their heads. Then I stopped, breaking free from the ubiquitous, anxious magic. I stood in the rain—my paper bags sodden. The old man shuffled on with Mveli dragging himself behind too the cavernous iron structure that was the waiting-room.

I was free. I was wet. I went to find the cloakroom and thereafter to look for Nyasa House. The magic that I had fought and conquered was in the soaking streets, leaping with the droplets on the puddles. I had heard the word somewhere, I thought.

I stopped a tall barefooted African and asked him for Nyasa House.

“You want Machado?”

“No. Nyasa House.”

I saw the old man plodding and muttering to himself. He came to me with vague eyes.

“Come,” said our self-appointed guide. “Machado Store. . . and then Machado. . . .”

I barked at him. I didn’t want any of his Machados—I wanted Nyasa House. He ignored me and strode forward, skirting the puddles of water. He was pressing forward and the old man had difficulty keeping up with us. I stopped and the tall man stopped too.

“Look, I’m going to find Nyasa House. . . .Here’s a shilling.” He moved on, dragging the old man with him.

Someone pointed out Nyasa House at the foot of a hill, three-quarters of a mile away. I thanked him and set off towards it. The tyres of cars sang and an occasional police car slid ghost-like up or down the street. Cyclists swept round the corner like an anxious line of army ants. This was Salisbury, I kept thinking, reminding myself, as if I did not know.

“Is Mr. Chungwa in?” I asked.

“No, he hasn’t come yet. Probably the rain. Any message?”

“No. I’ll wait.”

I descended the steps. Things were not right. A police car stopped opposite where I stood and I walked on. I tried to picture how Chungwa would look in case he passed by. At the end of about half an hour I returned to the building. Chungwa had arrived.

“I am Alfred, George Hutchinson’s brother,” I said to the short untidy man with protruding teeth.

Something collapsed inside me. I felt with a conviction that he could not help me. We shook hands and I babbled my business to him. I was on my way to Nyasaland and wanted a permit to travel through Portuguese territory.

“Machado? That’s at the Machado office. These people are going that way now.”

Outside Nyasa House I ran into the old man again. He was with a group of other Nyasas and one of them had a guard’s cap on his head. We swung back to the town in the steadily falling rain.

Suddenly I had lost my city poise. We trotted across the streets, narrowly missing being hit by cars. We stood huddled and fearful at street corners. The silent panic infected me. The man with the guard’s cap led the way, lifting and sniffing like a suspicious buck testing the wind. We swung from street to street and doubled on our tracks. We were lost. I was annoyed but helpless.

Machado Store. . Machado Store. The words passed from lip to lip as we swung and twisted, beating robots; bringing smiles to the passers-by.

I confronted the leader.

“Ask man. Ask someone. What do you want?”

“Machado Store. . . Our things are there. . . .”

“You bought things and now you don’t know where the store is. . . .”

The man sniffed and snorted. He set off dragging us along. I asked someone for the Machado Store. We struck out in that direction. I asked another. And we struck out in the opposite direction. We stood wavering at street corners. We were lost and our leader was magnificent, heroic almost in our lostness.

We staggered up a flight of stairs past the first floor and stood outside the open door of an office. An African couple sat inside—waiting. Two African clerks made entries. I moved forward. Yes, this was the Machado office. A line formed behind me. I didn’t care that this was not the store.

The clerk said something unintelligible in Portuguese. I took a shot in the dark. I gave him my name. He wrote it on a form and banded it with a rubber stamp. I handed him a half-crown. “Next,” he said. I should have got a sixpence back in change. But it did not matter.

Alone, my city poise came back to me. Motor cars, robots—the whole paraphernalia of a city, held no terrors for me. I had lost my bearings but there was no cause for alarm. Two schoolboys walked with me towards Nyasa House where Chungwa had told me to meet him at twelve o’clock.

“Ready,” Chungwa said, locking his office. “Lots of work.”

I had expressed a desire to meet Nyirenda about whom George had spoken in the warmest terms. Cyclists swept past us towards the location. We walked on, hoping to find a taxi, and presently one came. We piled into it heading for Highfield.

Nyirenda had moved and the new occupants did not know where he had gone. But Chungwa thought he would find the new home. We walked through the streets of Highfield which was just another Meadowlands, with neat, hive-like, tedious little houses. . . .

“George’s elder brother. He looks younger.” The smiling pretty woman, Mrs. Nyirenda, led us to a bare room containing a table and two chairs. “Our things are at the storage. This perpetual shifting... .”

Blackmore Nyirenda had not returned from work. He had been returning late during the past few days and spoke of straightening the firm’s accounts. Would I wait? Yes, the Umtali train would only be leaving at 8:30 p.m. How was George? Did he know they were married? Au, George’s brother! She disappeared into the kitchen to prepare some lunch.

Machado, Chungwa explained, had been a Portuguese consul who had issued permits to Myasa returning home to enable them to pass through Portuguese territory. Machado was now the name of the permit. And the Machado Store? The consul ran a store and the Amajoyini were induced to touch the store before going to the office. After buying something from the store, the permit was sort of assured.

We had lunch and set out to find a telephone. The full name of the township was Highfield Village Settlement and it was seven miles from town. The trouble, Chungwa explained, was transport. Buses were few and the fares high. Except for Alexandra Township I had not seen so many bicycles before.

When we eventually found a telephone, Chungwa did not know Nyirenda’s number. We returned to the house to wait.

Blackmore Nyirenda stepped into the house as night fell over Highfield. He was a tall and handsome young man.

“George’s brother’s here,” I heard his wife saying.

“But I heard you were in the Treason Trial.”

“And still am, as a matter of fact.”

“You’re spending a few days with us?”

“I wish I could, but you understand—I must keep moving.”

He was glad to meet me and so was I to meet him. We warmed to each other like old friends. He did not know what to do for me. He ordered beer from a nearby shebeen, and more came. How was George? Fine, very much alive. We mellowed. Chungwa became light-headed and laughed. And we all laughed with him.

Nyirenda radiated warmth. He was solid without being stodgy. He held the post of accountant with a big Salisbury firm and was doing further studies. He gave me an address in Ghana. When he looked at his watch it was time to leave for the station. He packed some beers in my paper bag and pressed me to accept one pound pocket money.

The dilapidated Morris banged to the station. At every bump it threatened to fly to pieces. Chungwa laughed. I laughed. I still had to collect my things from the cloakroom and buy my ticket. But there was no urgency.

The train is about to pull off and Chungwa is at the window. “It sounds like a story from a book. . . . Escape and all that. . . .” And I admit that perhaps it does sound like one. A man comes into the compartment. This is the Umtali train? No. It’s the Bulawayo train

and we had better hurry. Hell, man, I say laughing. I nearly woke up in Bulawayo. Lucky that chap came in. But his one is the Umtali train. There can be no doubt about it.

The gong sounds. It's like a story from a book, Chungwa is saying, as he clasps my hand and walks along the slowly moving train. He will send a telegram to two chaps to meet me at Blantyre—my "cousins".

I look about the compartment and promise myself a good night's sleep. Panic seizes me. Supposing I had returned to Bulawayo, supposing that chap had not come into the compartment. I have deserted the old man and Mweli who are traveling in a fourth-class compartment, packed and sweating.

When I awoke the following morning the train had gone dead. There was no sign on it. Then someone came in carrying a broom. The train had been in Umtali a long time and was getting ready for the return journey. I opened the last bottle of beer and gave the cleaner a drink.

I am back with the old man and Mweli again. About five hundred of us are sitting in the waiting room. Some are sitting on railway sleepers, others on rails and a few are in the waiting room, a huge filthy shed. It is the hold scene. The scene that I know so well: the eternal luggage in front, the people standing, talking, eating. Children have joined us and their mothers are feeding them. I spot some of my friends who got me lost in Salisbury and cannot help laughing at the man in the guard's cap.

A group of W.N.L.A. stalwarts rise and there is a murmur of admiration and whispers of Mzilikazi. They form into an Indian file. We rise, too, and join the file as it stumbles past. The twisting burdened line is looped into sections. Forward. We jump down from

the platform and on to the rails and struggle into sickly reddish brown carriages. I look for the old man and Mveli but they are nowhere to be seen. I realize now what the old man and Mveli have come to mean to me, after the long journey that has brought us so far.

We are jammed tight in the compartment. The whole train is a monstrosity: brown, filthy, wooden bunks and drinking water in the latrines. Gone is the short-lived comfort of last night. From Umtali to Blantyre the third class and fourth class are one.

We dip to the east. The hills are covered in dense bush and I rest my head on the brown steel table and think. I have traveled west to get to the east. Must I zigzag across Africa to reach Ghana? Weariness is taking hold of me. I am tired of being pushed about: tired of the filth, the constant lining up, tired of not being able to protest in any way. And I tell myself that since I have joined the bedraggled trail I must be truly one of it, live it. There must be no complaining, no protest. I must submit and take whatever comes.

I think I see things now. I think I see something which I did not see before. In Johannesburg I had known a disturbing sympathy for these people as they trotted like frightened animals with bundles on their heads across the streets, or stood trembling at a street corner waiting for the W.N.L.A. escort to take them across. Then I was an outsider. Now I am one of them.

We are dipping to the east, to the coast. Beira is some two hundred miles away.

Perhaps I should have joined in the assault of the W.N.L.A. *matshingilane* (police-boy) that time in Johannesburg outside the Metro Cinema and have struck a blow for these people and myself. Instead I had stood and watched, giving the assailants only my moral support. Why hadn't I got angry like the so-called tsotsis who had

punched and kicked the police-boy and trampled on his W.N.L.A. cap? For surely the policeman had been wrong to hit the poor bewildered chap who had narrowly missed being hit by the car. "This is your brother," the tsotsis had said in English for the benefit of the Europeans, as they punched and kicked the police-boy—a middle-aged man.

Now we are at Machipanda in Portuguese territory. It is in the cup of the mountains, mountains whose tops are in the clouds. Homesteads peep through the bush and African kraals are grey spots in the shades of green. The village is below the station whose platform has borders of flaming flowers.

An Indian is sitting on a box on the platform. In front of him are two four-gallon tins, a stack of enamel plates and two large baskets, one containing bananas. African boys are shouting the wares.

We get off the train and stumble across the rails to the platform. What is it again? What is it? Our things are to be searched. But why? Nobody knows. We form a double line on the platform, but are driven away down a slope off the platform. There are about five hundred of us: men, women and children—but mostly men. We form two rows facing each other. Red-fezzed, barefooted African policemen walk up and down the lines. And a Portuguese in short sleeves and grey flannels surveys us from the top of an earthwork and faces the magnificent mountain to the south. He is stocky, with a bull neck and a shrunken mouth as if arched by cruelty. The flag of Portugal flies from the top of the station building.

We spread our things for inspection on the damp brown soil. Hazel's poor bag. . . if it could have known that one day it would travel like this. . . . The red-fezzed policemen dig into cases and fling things about and pass on. And those who have been searched begin to pack, to stuff things back into the cases. One with more temerity than the

rest of us asks a policeman what he is looking for. And the policeman replies that we know.

My policeman is old and perfunctory. He takes one dig into the bag and passes on. And while stuffing things back into the bag I ask Mweli and the old man: Will it happen again? They don't know — perhaps it will; perhaps it won't.

"S'wali, when I get home," says Mweli, "I'll tell them that the way to Nyasaland is hard. . . ." And he looks sorrowfully at his crushed, expensive green hat.

The Portuguese on the earthworks barks an order in a surprisingly thin voice. We lift our things on to our heads and stumble back to the train and I make sure not to lose my friends again. Mweli is having difficulty with his case, and I take it and give him my things to carry.

"S'wali, this illness has finished me."

The heat drives us out of the compartments into the corridors and those who have found a space at the windows hang limply over. Others walk along the rails near the train and some others have vanished, probably to the village. Men in vests show the bulges of rock muscles gained in the months underground. Nobody knows when the train will leave and nobody believes the Indian who says that it will only be leaving in the late afternoon. The latrines at the end of the corridors begin to stink and big, bright green flies buzz noisily. Through the window, a white building shows its head with BAR written in bold black letters on its forehead.

The Indian is perched on his box under the windows of the train. In front of him are his two tins of soup and tea, and his baskets of rice and bananas. Tea is being sold at twopence a mug, but I pay a tickey. It is too hot for an argument or for bargaining. I take a sip and throw

the tea on to the rails, hoping that he will see me. It tastes like no tea I have drunk. I buy a plate of rice and soup for two shillings but cannot swallow the mush.

A change was coming over the old man. I saw it coming and dreaded it. A seed of confidence was germinating, had taken root in fact. His nips of snuff from the Royal Baking Powder tin were marked with confidence and his silences were charged with self-importance. But as the old man's confidence increased, so did Mweli become more critical of him. "Kehla (old man) is funny," Mweli would say, not caring whether the old man heard him or not.

The old man was giving me a preview of Nyasaland: "You'll see, S'wali, you'll see Nyasaland. . . We are British. . . British. . . Not this Portuguese. . ." the old man flung a deprecating arm over the entire territory. "We are British, British. . ."

"Ag, you and your British, British!" said Mweli scornfully. "Do you hear Kehla, S'wali? Now he's talking like a real Nyasa. . . A real Brak Scosh. . . Did you ever see people so black and yet they call themselves Scotsmen!" The old man was looking out of the window through his wire spectacles. "S'wali, you never saw anything more stupid than a Nyasa. . . All we know is to chase after women. Did you ever hear a Nyasa tell a woman: Thatha Zonke, shiya lopasi kuphela. . . Take everything, leave only the pass. . ." Mweli sniffed. "British! British!"

"You'll see for yourself, S'wali," said the old man, returning from surveying the country-side. "The trains are driven by us Blacks. . . yes, you and me. . . there isn't all the nonsense about passes. . . no tsotsis. . . you can get drunk, S'wali, and sleep in the road and no one will trouble you. . . Yes, we buy European liquor from the stores. . . People rule in Nyasaland. . ."

“If Nyasaland is so wonderful, ask him what he wanted to South Africa all these years, S’bali, ask him. S’bali, there are no greater fools than we Nyasas. . . .There are only two things we know: chase after women and buy swanky clothes. . . .Blacker than itch and still call themselves Scotsmen. . . .British! British!”

The price of rice and soup had fallen. Boys walked up and down the corridors carrying plates and shouting: “Ninepence rice! Ninepence rice!” The sun was dipping to the west. The heat was terrific. Clouds were piling over the mountains. The lavatory stank. The flies buzzed, noisier than before.

“Look at them, S’bali. Look what I have been telling you.” I followed Mweli’s gaze in the direction of the town.

Some of our chaps were returning to the train. They were hot. They were drunk. They swayed and stumbled over the rails, their hobnailed boots crunching the cobbles. One or two collared bottles. Another broke into a futile song while yet another twanged a no-tune on a home-made guitar. The leader wore is wire spectacles on his squashed mean hat.

There was a look of triumph in Mweli’s sick eyes. But the old man was again looking out of the window. “The biggest fools on earth,” said Mweli finally and conclusively.

The train shunted and banged into trucks. We rocked; we laughed. The old man broke ecstatic Xhosa. . . . “Tshini Mfondini. (Gee, fellow!).” He let out feeble shouts of “Nyasaland! Nyasaland!” Mweli looked at him pityingly and shook his head.

Night. A lovely night in some Portuguese village. Night and Thonga girls with breasts as hard as unripe mangoes. The moon has shot the clouds into heavenly milk and the trees stand dreaming. Crickets have taken possession of the night; crickets and strident bull-frogs. A fellow goes plucking a no-tune on the home-made guitar—for the girls with breasts like unripe mangoes. . . .

The compartment is an oven. Mweli isn't feeling too good and is sprawled on the sticky brown bunk. The old man sits ruminating, thinking, perhaps, of the son he will meet after fourteen years. I lie on the top bunk and think. . .think in images of heavenly milk and Thonga girls with mango breasts. . . .

Chapter 65

The Bench

by

Richard Rive

“We are part of a complex society further complicated by the fact that the vast majority of the population is denied the very basic privileges of citizenship. Our society condemns a man to an inferior status because he is born black. Our society can only retain its social and economic position at the expense of a large black working-class.”

Karlie was concentrating hard while trying to follow the speaker. Something at the back of his mind told him that these were great and true words, whatever they meant. The speaker was a huge black man with a rolling voice. He paused to sip water from a glass. Karlie sweated. The hot October sun beat down mercilessly on the gathering. A burning sky without the slightest vestige of cloud over Table Mountain. The trees on the Grand Parade, drooping and wilted, afforded hardly any shelter. His handkerchief was already soaking where he had placed it around his neck. Karlie looked cautiously at the sea of faces. Black, brown, olive, a few white faces and scattered red fezzes of Muslims. Near a parked car two detectives were taking notes. On the raised platform the rolling voice started again.

“It is up to every one of us to challenge the right of any law which willfully condemns any person to an inferior position. We must challenge the right of any people to segregate any others on grounds

of skin colour. You and your children are denied rights which are yours by virtue of your being South Africans. But you are segregated against politically, socially and economically?"

Karlie felt something stirring deep inside him, something he had never experienced before, had never known was there. The man on the platform seemed to be rolling out a new religion which said that he, Karlie, had certain rights, and his children would have certain rights. What sort of rights? Like a white man for instance? To live as well as Oubaas Lategan at Bietjiesfontein? The idea took shape and started developing. A rush of feeling and an insight he had never explored before. To sit at a table in the café and Bietjiesfontein. Nellie and himself ordering steak and eggs and coffee. Sitting downstairs in the local bioscope with the other farmers, and going out at interval to buy drinks at the Panorama. His children attending the Hoerskool and playing rugby and hockey against visiting teams. This was a picture that frightened but at the same time seduced. Now what would Ou Klaas think of that? Ou Klaas who always said that God in his wisdom made the white man white and the coloured man brown and the black man black. And they must know their place. What would Ou Klaas say to such things? Those ideas coming from the platform were far from Ou Klaas and Bietjiesfontein, but in a vague way they made sense.

Karlie knitted his brow while trying to make it all out. There were many others on the platform, black and white and brown. And they behaved as if there were no difference in colour. What would Ou Klaas say when he told him about it? Oubaas Lategan? A white woman in a blue dress offering a cigarette to the previous speaker who was a black man? He had been introduced as Mr. Nxeli, a trade-union leader who had often been in jail. A white woman offering him a cigarette. Karlie also felt like smoking and took out a crumpled packet of Cavalla.

Imagine if Ou Klaas offered Annetjie Lategan a suck at his pipe. What would her father say? Oubaas Lategan would most probably get his gun and shoot him on the spot. The idea was so ludicrous that Karlie burst out laughing. One or two people looked round inquiringly. In a fit of embarrassment he converted the laugh into a cough and lit the mangled cigarette. But his mind refused to give up the picture. And Annetjie was nowhere near as pretty and had no such blue, shop-bought dress. When the lady on the platform moved, her dress was tight around her. He saw that when she offered Mr. Nxeli a cigarette.

If all the things the speaker said were true, it meant that he, Karlie, was as good as any other man. His mouth played with the words, "even a white man," but he quickly dispelled this notion. But the speaker seemed to be emphasizing just that. And why should he not accept those ideas? He remembered being shown a picture torn out of a newspaper of those people who defied laws which they said were unjust. He had asked Ou Klaas about it but the old man had merely shrugged his shoulders. The people in the newspaper were smiling as they went to prison. These things were confusing and strange.

The speaker with the rolling voice continued and Karlie listened intently. He seemed so sure and confident of himself as the words flowed out. Karlie felt sure that he was even greater than Oubaas Lategan or even the domineer of the whites-only church in Bietjiesfontein. The lady in the blue dress spoke next. The one who had given Mr. Nxeli a cigarette. She said that one must challenge all discriminatory laws. It was one's duty to do so. All laws which said that one person was inferior to another. "Sit anywhere you wish, whether in a train or a restaurant. Let them arrest you if they dare." The white detectives were very busy taking notes. Why should she be telling them this? She could go to the best bioscopes, swim off the best beaches, live in the best areas. What made a white woman who

could have everything say such words? And she was far more beautiful than Annetjie Lategan and had hair that gleamed with gold in the sun.

He had been worried before he left Bietjiesfontein that things would be different in Cape Town. He had seen the skollies in Hanover Street but they no longer held any terror for him, although he had been frightened at first. He now lived off Caledon Street near Star Bioscope. He had very few friends, one in Athlone whom he was going to visit when he saw the meeting on the Grand Parade. District Six proved a bit of a let-down, but no one, not even Ou Klaas, had warned him about the things he was now hearing. This was new. This set the mind racing. The lady emphasized that they should challenge these laws and suffer the consequences. Yes, he must challenge. The resolve started shaping in his mind but still seemed far too daring, far too ridiculous. But as the lady continued, a determination started creeping over the vagueness. Yes, he must challenge. He, Karlie, would challenge and suffer the consequences. He would astound Oubaas Lategan and Ou Klaas and Annetjie and Nellie when they saw his picture in the newspaper. And he would smile. He would even astound the lady in the blue dress. With the fervency of a new convert he determined that he was going to challenge, even if it meant prison. He would smile like those people in the newspaper.

The meeting passed a resolution, then sang 'Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika' and they all raised their hands with the thumbs pointing up and shouted "Afrika!" And then the crowd dispersed. Karlie threaded his way through the mass to get the station. His friend would be waiting for him in Athlone. The words of all the speakers still milled in his head. Confusing somehow but at the same time quite clear. He must challenge. This could never have happened at Bietjiesfontein, or could it? The sudden screech of a car as brakes were applied. Karlie jumped out of the way just in time. A head was angrily thrust through the window.

“Look where you’re going, you bloody baboon!”

Karlie stared dazed, momentarily too stunned to speak. Surely the driver could not have seen the white woman offering Mr. Nxeli a cigarette? She would never have shouted at him like that and called him a baboon. She had said one must challenge. These things were all so confusing. Maybe best to catch a train and get to his friend in Athlone and tell him all about it. He had to speak to someone.

He saw the station through the eyes of a fresh convert. A mass of human beings, mostly white but with some blacks and a few browns like himself. Here they pushed and jostled but there seemed a cocoon around each person. Each one in his own world. Each moving in a narrow pattern of his own manufacture. But one must challenge these things the woman had said. And the man with the rolling voice. Each in his own way. But how did one challenge? What did one challenge?

Then it dawned on him. Here was his chance. The bench. The railway bench with the legend WHITES ONLY neatly painted on it in white.

For a moment it symbolized all the misery of South African society. Here was his challenge to his rights as a man. Here it stood. A perfectly ordinary wooden bench like the hundreds of thousands of others all over South Africa. Benches on dusty stations in the Karoo; under ferns and subtropical foliage in Natal; benches all over the country each with its legend. His challenge. That bench now had concentrated in it all the evils of a system he could not understand. It was the obstacle between himself and his manhood. If he sat on it, he was a man. If he was afraid, he denied himself membership as a human in human society. He almost had visions of righting the system if only he sat on that bench. Here was his chance. He, Karlie, would challenge.

He seemed perfectly calm as he sat down, but his heart was thumping wildly: Two conflicting ideas now seeped through him. The one said, 'You have no right to sit on the bench?' The other questioned, 'Why have you no right to sit on the bench?' The first spoke of the past, of the life on the farm, of the servile figure of his father and Ou Klaas, his father's father who had said, 'God in his wisdom made the white man white and the black man black.' The other voice had promise of the future in it and said, 'Karlie, you are a man. You have dared what your father would not have dared. And his father. You will die like a man.'

Karlie took out a Cavalla from the crumpled packet and smoked. But nobody seemed to notice him sitting there. This was also a let-down. The world still pursued its nature way. People still lived, breathed and laughed. No voice shouted triumphantly, 'Karlie, you have conquered!' He was a perfectly ordinary human being sitting on a bench on a crowded station, smoking a cigarette. Or was this his victory? Being an ordinary human being sitting on a bench?

A well-dressed white lady walked down the platform. Would she sit on the bench? And the gnawing voice, 'You should stand up and let the white woman sit. This bench is not for you.' Karlie's eyes narrowed as he pulled more fiercely at his cigarette. She swept past with scarcely a glance at him. Was she afraid of challenging his rights to be a human being? Or couldn't she care less?

Karlie now realized that he was completely exhausted. He was used to physical work but this was different. He was mentally and emotionally drained. A third conflicting thought now crept in, a compensatory one which said, 'You do not sit on the bench to challenge. You sit here because you are tired, therefore you are sitting here.' He would not move because he was tired. He wanted to rest. Or was it because he wanted to challenge?

People were now pouring from the Athlone train that had pulled in at the platform. There were so many pushing and jostling one another that nobody seemed to have time to notice him. When the train pulled out it would pass Athlone. It would be the easiest thing in the world to step into it and ride away from all this. He could rest because he was tired. Away from challenges, and benches one was not allowed to sit on. And meetings on the Grand Parade. And a white lady offering Mr. Nxeli a cigarette. But what would be giving in, suffering a person defeat, refusing to challenge. In fact it would be admitting that he was not a human being. . .

He sat on smoking another cigarette and allowing his mind to wander. Far away from the station and the bench. Bietjiesfontein and that talk he had had with his grandfather when he had told Ou Klaas what he had on his mind. The glittering lights of Cape Town and better jobs and more money so that he could send some home. Ou Klaas had looked up quizzically while sucking at his pipe. Ou Klaas was wise and had lived long. He always insisted that one must learn through traveling. He had lived in Cape Town as a young man and would spit and laugh slyly when he told of the girls in District Six. Beautiful, olive-skinned and doe-eyed. Ou Klaas knew everything. He also said that God in his wisdom made the white man white and the black man black. And each must keep his place.

"You are sitting on the wrong seat." Karlie did not notice the person speaking. Ou Klaas had a trick of spitting on the ground and pulling his mouth slyly when he made a strong point, especially about the women he had had.

"This is the wrong seat."

Karlie whipped back to reality. He was going to get up instinctively when he realized who he was and why was sitting there. He

suddenly felt very tired and looked up slowly. A thin, gangling, pimple-faced white youth lugging an enormous suitcase.

"I'm sorry but you on the wrong seat. This is for whites only."

Karlie stared at him saying nothing.

"Are you deaf? You are sitting on the wrong bench. This is not for you people. It is for white people only."

Slowly and deliberately Karlie puffed at his cigarette and examined it exaggeratedly. This was the test, or the contest? The white youth was sizing him up.

"If you don't move now you can get into serious trouble."

Karlie maintained his obstinate silence. The youth was obviously not going to take the law into his own hands. For Karlie to speak now would be to break the spell, the supremacy he felt he was gaining.

"Well, you asking for it. I will have to report you."

Karlie realized that the youth was brazening it out, afraid to take action himself. He went off leaving his suitcase on the bench next to Karlie. He, Karlie, had won the first round of the bench dispute.

He took out another cigarette. Irresolution had now turned to determination. Under no circumstances was he going to give up his bench. They could do what they wanted. He stared hostilely at the suitcase.

"Come on, you're sitting on the wrong bench. There are seats further down for you people." The policeman towered over him. Karlie

could see thin red hairs on his neck. The white youth stood behind the officer. Karlie said nothing.

"I'm ordering you to move for the last time."

Karlie remained seated.

"All right. Then I want your name and address and you will come with me." Karlie maintained the obstinate silence. This took the policeman unawares. The crowd started growing and one joker shouted "Afrika!" and then disappeared among the spectators.

"I will have no place you under arrest. Come on, get up."

Karlie remained seated. The policeman grabbed him by the shoulders, assisted by the white youth. Karlie turned to resist, to cling to the bench, to his bench. He hit out wildly and then felt a dull pain as a fist rammed into his stomach. He rolled onto the ground grazing his face against the rough tarmac. Then his arms were twisted behind him and handcuffs bit into his wrists. Suddenly he relaxed and struggled to his feet. It was senseless fighting any longer. Now it was his turn to smile. He had challenged and felt he had won. If not a victory over them, then one over himself. Who cared about the consequences? The white youth was dusting his trousers.

"Come on," said the policeman forcing Karlie through the crowd.

"Certainly," said Karlie for the first time, and stared at the crowd with the arrogance of one who had dared to sit on a WHITES ONLY bench.

Section IV:

Novels

Chapter 70

Cry, The Beloved Country

by

Alan Paton

FROM Ixopo the toy train climbs up into other hills, the green rolling hills of Lufafa, Eastwolds, Donnybrook. From Donnybrook the broad-gauge runs to the great valley of the Umkomaas. Here the

tribes live, and the soil is sick, almost beyond healing. Up out of the valley it climbs, past Hemu-hemu to Elanskop. Down the long valley of the Umsindusi, past Edendale and the black slums to Pietermaritzburg, the lovely city. Change here to the hreatest train of all, the train for Johannesburg. Here is a white man's wonder, a train that has no engine, only an iron cage on its head, taking power from iron ropes stretched out above.

Climb up to Hilton and Lion's River, to Balgowan, Rosetta, Mooi River, through hills lovely beyond any singing of it. Thunder through the night, over battlefields of long ago. Climb over the Drakensberg, on to the level plains.

Wake in the swaying coach to the half-light before the dawn. The engine is steaming again, and there are no more ropes overhead. This is a new country, a strange country, rolling and rolling away as far as they can see. There are new names here, hard names for a Zulu who has been schooled in English. For they are in the language that was called Afrikaans, a language that he had niver yet heard spoken.

--- The mines, the cry, the mines. For many of them are going to work in the mines.

Are these the mines, those white flat hills in the distance? He can ask safely, for there is no one here who heard him yesterday.

--- That is the rock out of the mines, umfundisi. The gold has been taken out of it.

--- How does the rock come out?

--- We go down and dig it out, umfundisi. And when it is hard to dig, we go away, and the white men blow it out with the fire-sticks. Then we come back and clear it away; we load it on to the trucks; and

it goes up in a cage, up a long chimney so long that I cannot say it for you.

--- How does it go up?

--- It is wound up by a great wheel. Wait, and I shall show you one.

He is silent, and his heart beats a little faster, with excitement and fear.

--- There is the wheel, umfundisi. There is the wheel.

A great iron structure rearing into the air, and a great wheel above it, going so fast that the spokes play tricks with the sight, Great buildings, and steam blowing out the pipes, and men hurrying about. A great white hill, and an endless procession of trucks climbing upon it, high up in the air. On the ground, motor-cars, lorries, buses, one great confusion.

--- Is that Johannesburg, he asks.

But they laugh confidently. Old hands some of them are.

--- That is nothing, they say. In Johannesburg there are buildings, so high---but they cannot describe them.

--- My brother, says one, you know the hill that stands so, straight up, behind my father's kraal. So high as that.

The other man nods, but Kumalo does not know that hill.

And now the buildings are endless, the buildings, and the white hills, and the great wheels, and streets without number, and cars and lorries and buses.

--- This surely is Johannesburg, he says.

But they laugh again. They are growing a little tired. This is nothing, they say.

Railway-lines, railway-lines, it is a wonder. To the left, to the right, so many that he cannot count. A train rushes past them, with a sudden roaring of sound that makes him jump in his seat. And on the other side of them, another races beside them, but drops slowly behind. Stations, stations, more than he has ever imagined. People are waiting there in hundreds, but the train rushes past, leaving them disappointed.

The buildings get higher, the streets more accountable. How does one find one's way in such a confusion? It is dusk, and the lights are coming on in the streets.

One of the men points for him.

--- Johannesburg, umfundisi.

He sees great high buildings; there are red and green lights on them, almost as tall as the buildings. They go on and off. Water comes out of a bottle, till the glass is full. Then the lights go out. And when they come on again, the bottle is full and upright, and the glass empty. And there goes the bottle over again. Black and white, it says, black and white, though it is red and green. It is too much to understand.

He is silent, his head aches, he is afraid. There is this railway station to come, this great place with all its tunnels under the ground. The train stops, under a great roof, and there are thousands of people. Steps go down into the earth, and here is the tunnel under the ground. Black people, white people, some going, some coming, so

many that the tunnel is full. He goes carefully that he may not bump anybody, holding tightly on to his bag. He comes out into a great hall, and the stream goes up the steps, and here he is out in the street. The noise is immense. Cars and buses one behind the other, more than he has ever imagined. The stream goes over the street, but remembering Mpanza's son, he is afraid to follow. Lights change from green to red, and back again to green. He has heard that. When it is green, you may go. But when he starts across, a great bus swings across the path. There is some law of it that he does not understand, and he retreats again. He finds himself a place against the wall, he will look as though he is waiting for some purpose. His heart beats like that of a child, there is nothing to do or think to stop it. *Tixo* [God], watch over me, he says to himself. *Tixo* [God], warch over me.

* * * * *

A young man came to him and spoke to him in a language that he did not understand.

--- I do not understand, he said.

--- You are a Xosa, then, umfundisi?

--- A Zulu, he said.

--- Where do you want to go, um fundisi?

--- To Sophiatown, young man.

--- Come with me then and I shall show you.

He was grateful for this kindness, but half of him was afraid. He was glad the young man did not offer to carry his bag, but he spoke courteously, though in a strange Zulu.

The lights turned green, and his guide started across the street. Another car swung across the path, but the guide did not falter, and the car came to a stop. It made one feel v confidence.

He could not follow the turnings that they made under the high buildings, but at last, his arm tired beyond endurance by the bag, they came to a place of many buses.

--- You must stand in the line, umfundisi. Have you your money for the ticket?

Quickly, eagerly, as though he must show this young man that he appreciated his kindness, he put down his bag and took out his purse. He was nervous to ask how much it was, and took a pound from the purse.

--- Shal I get your ticket for you, umfundisi? Then you need not lose your place in the line, while I go to the ticket office.

--- Thank you, he said.

The young man took the pound and walked a short distance to the corner. As he turned it, Kumalo was afraid. The line moved forward and he with it, clutching his bag. And again forward, and again forward, and soon he must enter a bus, but still he had no ticket. As though he had suddenly thought of something he left the line, and walked to the corner, but there was no sign of the young man. He sought courage to speak to some one, and went to an elderly man, decently and cleanly dressed.

--- Where is the ticket office, my friend?

--- What ticket office umfundisi?

--- For the ticket for the bus.

--- You get your ticket on the bus. There is no ticket office.

The man looked a decent man, and the parson spoke to him humbly. I gave a pound to a young man, he said, and he told me he would get my ticket at the ticket office.

--- You have been chated, umfundisi. Can you see the young man? No, you will not see him again. Look, come with me. Where are you going, Sophiatown?

--- Yes, Sophiatown. To the Mission House.

--- Oh yes. I too am an Anglican. I was waiting for someone, but I shall wait no longer. I shall come with you myself. Do you know the Reverend Msimangu?

--- Indeed, I have a letter from him.

They again took the last place in the line, and in due time they took their places in the bus. And it in its turn swung out into the confusion of the streets. The driver smoked carelessly, and it was impossible not to admire such courage. Street after street, light after light, as though they would never end, at times at such speed that the bus swayed from side to side, and the engine roared in the ears.

They alighted at a small street, and there were still thousands of people about. They walked a great distance, through streets crowded with people. His new friend helped to carry his bag, but he felt confidence in him. At last they stopped before a lighted house, and knocked.

The door opened and a young tall man in clerical dress opened to them.

--- Mr. Msimangu, I bring a friend to you, the Reverend Kumalo from Ndotsheni.

--- Come in, come in, my friends. Mr. Kumalo. I am glad to greet you. Is this your first visit to Johannesburg?

Kumalo could not boast any more. He had been safely guided and warmly welcomed. He spoke humbly. I am much confused, he said. I owe much to our friend.

--- You fell into good hands. This is Mr. Mafolo, one of our big business men, and a good son of the Church.

--- But not before he had been robbed, said the business man.

So the story had to be told, and there was much sympathy and much advice.

--- And you are no doubt hungry, Mr. Kumalo. Mr. Mafolo, will you stay for some food?

But Mr. Mafolo would not wait. The door shut after him, and Kumalo settled in a big chair, and accepted a cigarette though it was not his custom to smoke. The room was light, and the great bewildering town shut out. He puffed like a child at his smoke, and was thankful. The long journey to Johannesburg was over, and he had taken a liking to this young confident man. In good time no doubt they would come to discuss the reason for this pilgrimage safely at an end. For the moment it was enough to feel welcome and secure.

Chapter 66

Maru

by

Bessie Head

The moon was so bright that few stars appeared in the sky. Moleka walked along the footpath, his hands in his pockets, deep in thought. He had an appointment with one of his innumerable girl friends, but being in an absent-minded mood he walked right past her hut. His

thoughts so absorbed him that he even continued past the outskirts of the village and into the bush. A full yellow moon rose high into the sky. He paused at last and looked around him. Perhaps it was only this—the light in the sky and the quietly glittering beauty of the earth—which matched a portion of his body that felt like a living, pulsating sun.

Alone now, he slowly raised his hand to his heart. How was it? Something had gone ‘bang!’ inside his chest, and the woman had raised her hand to her heart at the same time. It was not like anything he had felt before. Dikeledi was the nearest he’d ever come to loving a woman and yet, even there, Dikeledi made his bloodstream boil by the way she wore her skirts, plainly revealing the movement of her thighs. With Dikeledi it was a matter of the bloodstream. And what was this? It was like finding inside himself a gold mine he’d not known was there before. Et he could have sworn that he was totally unaware of the woman until she spoke. Something in the tone, those soft fluctuations of sound, the plaintive cry of one who is always faced with the hazards of life, had abruptly arrested his life. With Dikeledi it was always distractions. She was too beautiful, physically. With the woman there were no distractions at all. He had communicated directly with her heart. It was that which was a new experience and which had so unbalanced him.

He shook his head and sat on a rock.

‘It’s adness,’ he thought. ‘I hardly know her.’ What were her legs like? He could not say. All the force of her life was directed to her eyes, as though that were the only living part of her. Something killed the old Moleka in a flash and out of one death arose, in a flash, a new Moleka. It was the first time he had spoken to a woman in humility, but not the first time he had felt humbled by some quality in another living being. He screwed up his eyes, puzzled. Some other person had prepared him for his encounter with the woman. There

was something eluding him and he could not immediately remember the other person. There was someone like her, someone who walked into a room and made no impact but, when you turned around again, they owned your whole life.

“I have come to the end of one road,’ he thought, ‘and I am taking another.”

He’d lived like a spendthrift millionaire. There was something about him, or in him, that made people walk into a room and turn their heads: ‘Ah, there’s Moleka.’ He took that physical fascination and traded it all on women. There was always enough and some to spare. Maybe he grew accustomed to having a shadow next to him.

“Moleka,” the shadow would say, shyly, “I’d like you to introduce me to so-and-so.”

Moleka would have been just on the point of making a proposal to Miss so-and-so, but he would immediately hold out his hand.

“Of course, Maru,” he’d say. “I shall arrange everything.”

They were the words of a millionaire. There were also ramifications and ramifications. When had he and Maru not lived in each other’s arms and shared everything? People said: “Oh, Moleka and Maru always fall in love with the same girl.” But they never knew that no experiences interrupted the river and permanent flow of their deep affection. It was Moleka, so involved in this river, who never had time to notice the strange and unpredictable evolution of his friend. He never knew about the gods in the heart and the gods in the earth but he could always see the light of their conversation in his friend’s eyes. It was the light that Moleka was so devoted to. He never asked whether he might have a light of his own or that he might be a startling personality in his own right. His face was always turned to

what he saw as the most beautiful person on earth. Thus it was that thousands of people noted the dramatic impact of Moleka, but he would always cast his eyes across the room to see if all was well with Maru.

It was only Maru who saw their relationship in its true light. They were kings of opposing kingdoms. It was Moleka's kingdom that was unfathomable, as though shut behind a heavy iron door. There had been no such door for Maru. He dwelt everywhere. He'd mix the prosaic of everyday life with the sudden beauty of a shooting star. Now and then Maru would share a little of his kingdom with a Miss so-and-so he had acquired through Moleka. But it never went far because it always turned out that Miss so-and-so had no kingdom of her own. He used to complain to Moleka that people who had nothing were savagely greedy. It was like eating endlessly. Even if they ate all your food they were still starving. They never turned into the queens and goddesses Maru walked with all his days.

Throughout this time, Moleka was the only person who was his equal. They alone loved each other, but they were opposed because they were kings. The king who had insight into everything feared the king whose door was still closed. There was no knowing what was behind the closed door of Moleka's kingdom. Maru had no key to it, but he knew of its existence because if he touched Moleka's heart with some word or gesture a cloud would lift and he would see a rainbow of dazzling light.

The clue to Moleka and Maru lay in their relationships with women. They were notorious in Dilepe village for their love affairs, and the opposing nature of their temperaments was clearly revealed in the way they conducted these affairs. The result was the same: their victims exploded like bombs, for differing reasons. At the end of a love affair, Moleka would smile in the way he smiled when he made people and goats ump out of his path, outrage in their eyes. There

was nothing Moleka did not know about the female anatomy. It made him arrogant and violent. There was no woman who could resist the impact of his permanently boiling bloodstream. But he outraged them, and horrible sensations were associated with the name of Moleka. Moleka and women were like a volcanic explosion in a dark tunnel. Moleka was the only one to emerge, on each occasion, unhurt, smiling.

It was different with Maru. At the end of a love affair, a deep sorrow would fill his eyes. He often took to his bed with some indefinable ailment. The victims, too, displayed alarming symptoms. The strongest fled as though they had seen a nameless terror. The weakest went insane, and walked about the village muttering to themselves. Maru always fell in love with his women. He'd choose them with great care and patience. There was always some outstanding quality; a special tenderness in the smile, a beautiful voice or something in the eyes which suggested mystery and hidden dreams. He associate these things with the beauty in his own heart, only to find that a tender smile and a scheming mind went hand in hand, a beautiful voice turned into a dominating viper who confused the inner Maru, who was a king of heaven, with the outer Maru and his earthly position of future paramount chief of a tribe. They only saw the social gains that would accrue to them and it made their behaviour despicable to his all-seeing eye. Someone always died but their deaths often turned him into an invalid. It was nothing for Maru to be laid up for three months on end over a love affair. Doctors said: "Take those pills." And Maru said: "What for?" And doctors said: "You have T.B."

None of the victims could ever explain the process of her destruction, nor its cause. Everyone took it for granted that there was something called social position and you had to scheme and fight for it, tooth and nail. That is the world, they said, as though all the evils in human nature were there by divine order and man need make no effort to

become a god. Thus, the women whom Maru made love to were highly envied. People said: “Oh, and when is the marriage to take place?” A month or so later the girl would flee the village or become insane. A terror slowly built up around the name of Maru because of these events. In their conversations at night they discussed the impossible, that he was the reincarnation of Tladi, a monstrous ancestral African witch-doctor who had been a performer of horrific magic.

Moleka knew of all these things. They were the root cause of his violent, over-protective attitude towards Maru. It was a difficult situation. On the one hand, Maru had all the stuff that ancient kings and chiefs were made of. People had acclaimed those around whom they could build all kinds of superstitious myths. Yet the fear and terror magicians inspired made them live with their lives in the balance. Who knew how many murder plots were constantly woven around the life of Maru? People looked to the day when he would be their chief. But a lot of people, and these included relatives, spent the days counting the nails in his coffin. He aided the counting by always taking to bed with those indefinable ailments. He had only five friends in a village of over fifty thousand people. They were Moleka, his sister Dikeledi, and three spies—Ranko, Moseka, and Semana. Of the five, Moseka and Semana were shadows. From Ranko, Moleka and Dikeledi, Maru was inseparable. But it was only with Moleka that he shared all the secrets of his heart, because Moleka was a king with his own kingdom. Since no other came so close to the heart of Maru, they invented all kinds of rubbish and horrors. Moleka alone knew that all the visions and vivid imagery Maru was subjected to directed Maru’s footsteps along a straight road—that of eternal, deathless, gentle goodness. Moleka walked blindly through life. He walked blindly through all kinds of sensational love affairs. The one great passion of his life was his friend, Maru.

These words were forever on the lips of Moleka as he and Maru sat together at the sunset hour, discussing the day's events:

"Nothing will ever separate us, my friend. We shall love each other, forever."

Maru would smile quietly. One day he had a reply for Moleka. It was a message from the gods who talked to him in his heart. He said to Moleka: "One day we will part, over a woman."

"But that's impossible!" Moleka exclaimed.

He said that because he had never loved a woman. When he did, he wanted to kill Maru. Not even as he sat alone in the moonlit bush that night did he recall those words of Maru's. He screwed up his eyes, puzzled, as though something was eluding him. Then his mind took up the threads of his own life. He said: 'I have come to the end of one road, and I am taking another.'

He bent his head a while longer, lost in thought, then added: "I kept my heart for her alone."

It seemed the greatest achievement of his life. He felt reborn, a new man. No, he felt as young and innocent as a three-year-old child.

Chapter 67

In the Fog of the Season's End

by

Alex La Guma

In the municipal park the trees made rough patterns on the brown gravel of the pathways. They were oak trees, and brown acorns left over from the winter lay in the conduits along the sides of the paths; the leaves, sparse now in the late summer mottled the grass and

gravel, curling like snippets of dead skin in the hot sun. Among the trees were cultivated patches in the billiard-table lawns, the patches were grown with various plants and little sticks pinned with labels in front of each gave their names in English and Latin. Now and then a squirrel came face-down from the oaks and darted into the forest of carefully-tended flowers. In the centre of the park was an ornamental pond with water-lilies patching its transparent brown surface, and reddish-goldfish jerking nervously below them. Beyond the pond the Portuguese explorer, who had been the first European to land on that part of the world, gazed granitely across the oak trees towards the bay, his cassock-like robe and hewn hair speckled by the pigeons, his stone eyes made cynical by a trick of the sunlight. Behind him a maze of pathways led to the museum and the open-air restaurant: Whites only. Beyond all that the edge of the city clambered upward in steps of wealthy thoroughfares to the green foothills and the blue-grey face of the mountain.

Beatie Adams knew the municipal park well. She knew every pathway, every bench, every hothouse where they kept the orchids and other exotic flowers. She knew which were the warmest spots as the sun traveled across the brown gravel, grey concrete, green grass and trees. She knew the park because she brought the baby there for his outing each morning and again after lunch during the warm months, and she had been doing it for almost two years now.

Today she was out in the late morning sunshine again, pushing the baby carriage before her: stout and near middle age, wearing the white cap and washed-out white smock, with their appearance of clinical sterility, as if they branded her with her own childlessness, but yet bestowed her with authority to raise the offspring of others. She kept to the sunlight, circling the mottled stains of the shadows wherever she could, enjoying the heat on her broad tan-coloured, pleasant face. In the cart the infant, pink, golden-haired and healthy, dozed under the blue plastic canopy A squirrel flashed across the

pathway ahead of her, streaking for the ornamental scrub on the other side of the path, and a flock of pigeons, disturbed by the sudden rush, rose from the gravel, some of them whirring into the branches of the oaks, others heading across the park towards the neo-classic art gallery.

There were other people in the park: office messengers in uniform suits taking a short-cut towards the centre of the city; anonymous men and women crunching along the brown tracks; white pensioners dozing on the green benches; an old man with a spiked stick searching for discarded lunch packets and ice cream wrappers. Beatie Adams strolled along the bright pathways, searching for a 'Non-White' seat. The baby slept peacefully under the canopy.

She found a place at last. Her favourite spots were all occupied, but this one was good enough. One man occupied the end of the slatted bench, and he appeared to be sleeping. She sat down at the other end, made sure that the carriage was properly braked, and relaxed back in the comforting warmth. She would sit there for a half-hour, she thought, and then make her way slowly back home. Home was a room in the servants' quarters off the backyard of a big, pink and white house near the park. It was comfortable enough: a single bed with a candlewick cover, some store furniture—discarded when the missus had purchased a new suite—a picture of her mother in a cheap frame and another of a country scene, bottles of lotion on the dresser, and a motley collection of paraphernalia which all went into making life liveable.

The baby woke up and wailed, rubbing his eyes sleepily with a clenched fist.

Beatie Adams said, 'There, there, there,' soothingly and rearranged the light coverlet over the infant.

She looked up again and found the man at the end of the bench watching her.

'Did the baby wake you?'

"Oh, it's okay. I must have been dozing.'

'The sun makes you sleepy,' she said.

'Yah.' He yawned into a fist. 'Excuse me. Been up all night.' He glanced at his wrist. He was holding a parcel wrapped in brown paper on his lap, and a rolled newspaper. Sleepy, copper brown eyes like moist farthings, and a mouth with a longish upper-lip smiled at her. There was a small scar under the left eye, on the cheekbone, and the delicate, almost girlish chin and jaw-line were smudged with overnight stubble. On the whole the face had an air of agelessness; he could have been twenty-five or forty-five, it was difficult to say. The brown suit was cheap, but not so cheap that it wrinkled permanently, and he wore a lighter brown shirt, the collar gone limp, and a maroon patterned necktie. There was reddish-brown dust from the graveled pathway on his tan brogues.

'Yes He just woke up.'

'Like me.' The brown eyes were weary, but he flashed the teeth under the long upper-lip.

She laughed a little shyly, and then looked away at the baby. She wasn't used to making conversation with strangers. It was the left-over of a warning given her years ago when she had left the countryside to take up work as a domestic. Take care of yourself, don't trust those city people, her mother had warned. It had struck with her somehow, like the country accent, in spite of the relentless

attacks of urban life. She remembered it now, and thought with mild bitterness, maybe that's why I'm still single.

'You come here every day!'

For a moment she thought he intended trying to make a date, but decided it was just friendly conversation. He did not look the forward type.

'In the nice weather, yes.'

'I reckon you do more for the baby than its mother.'

'Oh, I like looking after children. His mother goes out in the day. His father's a traveler—kind of petrol company.'

'Yah. It's like that with them. You raise the kids, change the nappies, give them the bottle. When they grow up then they forget it and become a part of the rest looking down on us.'

'Yes, I suppose so.'

'From up country?'

'Oh, a long time already. Seventeen years.'

'I was born here.' He gestured with a hand at the pigeons, the skyline of city blocks, an old man sleeping in the sun and breathing stentoriously through a wet, pink, toothless mouth.

'I been working in service all the time.'

'We all good enough to be servants. Because we're black they think we good enough just to change their nappies.'

She said, hesitantly, wondering whether it would be the right answer, 'That's life, isn't it?'

It wasn't, she could feel, because he said, 'Life? Why should it be our life? We're as good or bad as they are.'

'Yes, I reckon so. But what can us people do?'

The brown eyes smiled. They were red-rimmed from lack of sleep, but not angry in spite of the bitter tone he had used. He rubbed the short overnight stubble on his jaw with a long brown finger. 'There are things people can do,' his voice was not sleepy, 'I'm not saying a person can change it tomorrow or next year. But even if you don't get what you want today, soon, it's a matter of pride, dignity. You follow me?'

'It's so hopeless. You only get into trouble.'

He yawned and shrugged. 'Trouble. There's always trouble.' He spoke as if trouble was something he experienced all the time, but trouble was a stranger to her. He was a man of the world, while she was safe within the fortress in the backyard, with the cast-off furniture and the picture of her mother. If she knew trouble, it came in the form of admonishments that the baby had a nappy-rash or that there was dust on the sideboard.

The noon gun boomed on the hill beyond the cit and the clock in the City Hall tower began to strike across the rooftops. The man looked at his wrist-watch, pulling back the sleeve of his jacket, and yawned again. 'Excuse me,' he smiled. 'Late nights. I have to do and see somebody.'

'You shouldn't stay up so late,' she said jocularly and had visions of drinking and dancing with carefree women, while he laughed, getting to his feet. The brown suit was wrinkled and it did not fit very well at the back: the kind you bought ready-made and paid for in weekly installments. He was fairly tall and the ageless face was not unpleasant. She thought it was the kind of face that would last a lifetime, without growing old: a not-too-ugly carving out of good teakwood. There was a carving on the sideboard in the house where she worked and the master had said it was valuable.

The man said, 'Well, so long. Sorry we can't talk some more. Keep an eye on the baby.'

'Bye.' She bent over to adjust the light blanket around the sleeping infant and when she looked up the man was disappearing among the oak trees. She noticed that he had left his newspaper behind on the park bench, but it was too late to call him back. He was gone and where she had last seen him walking there was an old gentleman leaning forward to feed nuts to a squirrel, and the top of the statue of Rhodes pointing north towards the segregated lavatories: Yonder lies your hinterland.

She picked up the newspaper and unfolded it, telling herself she would spend another fifteen minutes in the sun before going back to prepare the baby's feed. The printer's ink was smeared along the folds and the paper frayed, as if nervous hands had rolled it tight, gripping it all the time. She thought vaguely of a long brown finger, and scanned the front page. A woman accused of murdering her husband was to appear in court that morning: Bainsburg Murder, Woman Appears Today, the headline stated. Suddenly Beatie Adams remembered a country station, milk cans, a sheep pen, a coloured man in a railway cap sweeping the platform as her train pulled slowly past, carrying her towards the city, years ago. Surely, she thought, it couldn't be *that* place. There was a picture of a wood and

metal house, horse-drawn wagons, and corrugated iron fences. A uniformed policeman stood self-consciously on the verandah at the shut door of the house, one hand on his gun holster. In another picture a woman's face in grey half-tone, wearing a hat like a dark halo, obtruded into the smudged report: Mrs. Katerina Zuidenhout. Beatie Adams wondered how people could be so nasty as to go around murdering each other. It was a world not included in a succession of servants' rooms. She flapped the newspaper at a pigeon which had alighted on the canopy of the baby carriage and it fluttered away, made a circle of the path, and then headed in the direction of the museum.

Walking past the entrance to the museum, Beukes was reminded of an appointment he had kept there four years past. It had been summer then, too, and he recollected with surprise that he had been up all night on that occasion as well. For a time it was like re-living the past; a colour slide repeated on a screen.

The entrance of the museum had been chill, in spite of the summer weather. Somehow here was always an atmosphere of coldness at a museum; an atmosphere of refrigerated preservation. He saw again, in his mind's eye, the line of hushed children, accompanied by their schoolmaster, tiptoeing under the chill arch into the lobby; a little boy nervously holding a packet of sandwiches and an orange while the schoolmaster shush-shushed at them. Strolling into the dim lobby that squeaked under his feet, he had felt the eyes of a uniformed attendant scan him briefly from behind a newspaper. Out of the corner of his eye he had seen, behind the glass of a cubicle, a blue uniform cap and the word 'Strike'. For a moment he had wondered whether he could be challenged as not looking like somebody interested in the stuffed animals, the monkey foetus in a glass jar, and the crushed flea behind a magnifying glass. But he had gone on into the dimness, past the medieval weaponry, the headsman's swords

and axes, the old-fashioned muskets and breastplates, and up the broad polished stairway towards the upper floor.

It had been sunnier there. The light splashed in through big windows illuminating the glass eyes of the leopards, lions and baboons like fault radio valves. He had been alone, a stranger in a lost, dead world. A bull elephant, stuffed and motionless, had lurked behind a glass case full of various kinds of monkey frozen on imitation branches, the white name-tag pinned beneath each pose adding to the grotesquerie. For a few minutes he had lost his way and had wandered amid sarcophagi and the plaster heads of pharaohs until he had found the anthropological section. There Bushmen had hunted with bows and tiny arrows behind glass; red-yellow dwarfs with peppercorn hair and beady eyes. Beukes had thought sentimentally that they were the first to fight. He had walked silently past the still ochre figures crouched over cooking pots and ostrich shell water-bottles, and there, in a rectangle of dust-speckled yellow light, he had found Isaac.

Isaac had been sitting alone on the edge of a polished wooden bench like a nervous newcomer in church, his hands clasped in his lap, waiting for the service to begin. He had looked up with a start at the sound of Beuke's footfalls, and had grabbed at the arm of the seat.

'Boo!' Beukes had smiled. 'It's only me. How's it, chum?'

'You gave me a fright,' Isaac had said smiling back. 'I reckoned. . . .'

'don't worry,' Beukes had said, sitting down. 'They're not looking for us yet.'

'How do you know?' Isaac had gazed around the big room with its glass cases and polished floors, as if he expected an ambush.

Beukes had yawned and said, 'I phoned all over. No raids, no searches. What's new?'

Isaac had short curly hair, a light complexion and prominent pink ears. There had been a faint reddish down on his cheeks and his eye bulged a little, giving him a permanent look of slight surprise. He had always been a little nervous and his blunt-fingered hands had plucked at the knees of his trousers. He had worn a long khaki dustcoat over the clothes. 'So far, so good,' he had said. 'The three I got together in my district are still willing to work. Dunno what's going to happen when the cops start bugging around. There's Paul. ..'

'No names, no pack drill,' Beukes had told him. 'Forget the cops for a while, though.'

'Some of our people are going to get shit scared,' Isaac had replied. He had peered bout again. 'Are we alone?'

'Sure, man. Nobody comes to a museum this time of day.'

'How's Frances?'

'Ah, all right. Getting big.'

'Christ,' Isaac had said, 'she's like that and you're not worried?'

Beukes had yawned. 'Haven't slept. Bloody committee meeting. Who says I'm not worried? I got a wife who's in the family way for the first time. We got a strike coming off in a few weeks. Just now the cops will start farting around. You reckon I'm not worried? You bloody well right I'm worried. But what's the use of worrying? Nothing will get done that way.' He had grinned at Isaac. 'What's the use of worrying? Pack up your troubles and smile, smile, smile.'

'Reckon you wish this all happened at another time,' Isaac had said as he gazed at a reddish figure who was pointing at a track in the sand on the floor of a glass case.

'So let's keep on the bright side, hey. Let's get down to business.' Beukes had placed his satchel case on the bench between them.

'So let's keep on the bright side, hey. Let's get down to business.' Beukes had placed his satchel case on the bench between them.

'Where'd you duck last night?'

'I didn't. We had a meeting all night and I didn't go home. Never mind that.' He had stretched his legs and yawned again. 'Can a guy smoke here?'

'No,' Isaac had replied, 'better not.'

'Okay. Now you got three. That's smart. First thing is we got to give them some work to do. I'll be getting the leaflets tonight and they'll be delivered to you. There'll be transport, but it's not my department. The stuff's got to be dished out tomorrow. Some for the factories, some house to house. Our gang got factory connections?'

'One of them is in a clothing faktry,' Isaac had told him. 'The other two are just round and about.'

Beukes had wondered what round and about meant, but he had just said, 'Okay. The factory bloke got to take some in. Leave them around on machines, in the canteen. Warn him not to be caught doing it. We don't want him flung out on his ear, or handed over this early.'

'What about meetings?'

'Well, we had the big meeting yesterday to launch the thing. No more hullabaloo, just small meetings round and about.' He had smiled at his own use of Isaac's phrase. 'Difficult at a factory now. Somebody might call the cops. We got to concentrate on houses. Now your gang's got to dish the other leaflets out house to house. At night, it's best.'

'Sure.'

'At the same time you got to try and find people in your district ready to have meetings in their homes.'

'We'll scout around.'

'And about,' Beukes had grinned again. 'Maybe one of your three.'

'I'll talk to them.'

'That's for a start. The same thing's happening other places. We'll spread out from there.'

Isaac had said, 'I hope so. You reckon this thing will come off?'

'Am I a fortune teller?' Beukes had asked. 'It depends on the tempo we can keep up and the initial interest we can work on. We mustn't slacken.'

Isaac had stared at the figures in the glass cases, his prominent eyes serious, for a moment no longer surprised. 'They been having their own bloody way too long. I hope we can give them a great scare this time, it'll help the people, too.' He had looked at Beukes. 'Don't worry, Buke, we'll give it stick.'

Beukes had said kindly, 'I know you will, Ike.'

'When they get cracking they'll be after you blokes, the ones they know.'

'Ah, we'll give them a run before it's over.' A pigeon had alighted on a windowsill and its rustle had come into the silent room. The still figures of the first people had not been disturbed; an outstretched hand still held a trapped hare by the ears. Then Beukes had said, 'Now remember, do things properly and don't get caught. They don't know you and your gang. You'll get the leaflets.'

Isaac had grinned, 'It's you that's worrying now.'

'I worry all the time,' Beukes had said. 'I'm a great worrier.'

Then Isaac had asked, 'Is that all now? I got to get back to work. Got to do the post early.'

'Okay, then. I'll see you tonight. It will be late-ish though.'

'Hmmm. Look, hey, in case everything is locked up, just leave the stuff on the back doorstep.'

'Will it be okay?'

'Yeh, don't worry.' Isaac had got up, 'I got to run.'

'Right-o. You go first.'

'Be seeing you, Buke.'

Beukes had watched him go off, shoes squeaking on the polished floor, his long khaki coat drooping like limp wings behind him, then he had disappeared among the still hunters holding their primitive bows in petrified readiness. When Isaac had gone, Beukes had risen and had gone off in the same direction. In the Egyptian room an old couple had looked up from a collection of scarabs as he passed and had then continued whispering over the carved beetles. He had caught the whispered word, 'luck', and had known that it couldn't be meant for him, but he had smiled all the same, going downstairs with his satchel, his eyes feeling gritty with lack of sleep.

Now passing the museum Beukes remembered all this. The shadowed doorway was unchanged, except that now a notice proclaimed separate days for Whites and Non-Whites. He emerged from the botanical gardens into a quiet, shadowy street. A block of expensive flats towered at one corner, all glass and mosaic-work, and a little way ahead a taxi-cab dropped its passengers in front of a hotel. A woman with a decorated face and wide brimmed hat like a cartwheel, said, 'You pay, Ethel. I hope we're not too late. . .' while a uniformed porter hurried forward, hands extended as if he was about to catch something.

Beukes went past the hotel and up a short, steep street, coming into a thoroughfare of cheap, forlorn-looking shops. A row of milk-cans stood on the wet pavement outside a dairy and under an awning a girl swept the sidewalk in front of a dusty window that announced shabbily: *Curtaining, It's A Bargain At 29c a Yard*. He walked unhurriedly but watchfully along the footpath, past the windows under the blistered balconies, carrying the parcel with his pyjamas and toilet kit, and thought, you never know where they are, but who would say anything serious was happening? Life went on: it was lunchtime and a group of workers sat at the kerbside playing draughts, two factory girls in blue smocks and caps looked at dresses in another window, a trolley-bus swayed by, heading half-empty

towards the centre of the city. Ahead he saw two policemen wearing guns and khaki uniforms, but he didn't bother about them; the secret police wore no uniforms.

He turned aside into a residential street drenched with sun and flanked by rows of houses that went irregularly up the steep slope to the foot of Signal hill. A row of cars, most of them belonging to the local shopkeepers, paraded down the middle of the street; an old man in a fez dozed on a high verandah under a line of washing that hung like bunting. Beukes climbed the cement steps in front of one of the houses and saw, with some relief that the front door was open.

In the entrance passageway a hallstand displayed a navy-blue raincoat like a drab and dusty flag hung out long ago and forgotten, but the straw hat with the colorful band belonged to this season, like the suitcase that blocked the way across the bright linoleum.

Beukes was about to knock when Arthur Bennett came out of the bedroom off the passageway, holding a child's bucket and spade and a plastic groundsheet saying, 'What must I do with this?' He saw Beukes in the doorway and looked surprised. The look of surprise changed rapidly into a nervous bonhomie and he cried, 'Buke, you bugger, there you are.'

Beukes said, smiling bleakly, 'Hullo, you old crook.'

A woman's voice called from somewhere inside the house, 'Who's there? If it's the milky. . .'

'It's Buke,' Bennett called back and flushed nervously. Beukes. You know Beukes.' To Beukes he said: 'Come on in, pal. Mind the case.'

He led the way into a region of linoleum, polished chairs and a dining-table with a big brass vase shaped like a cooking-pot. One was

reminded of jokes about cannibals and missionaries. A low stuffed settee and heavy armchairs with circular, gleaming wooden armrests were crowded along one wall. There were starched, crocheted table centres and a display cabinet full of miniature bottles, which had once contained sample liqueurs and soft drinks. There was some more brass: ashtrays, a set of fire-irons (although there was no grate), and two candlesticks which would have been at home on an altar.

Bennett said, 'We just got back, pal. Had a helluva time at the beach.'

Beukes was about to ask, 'The coloured beach?' But instead he said, 'I was here Saturday morning as arranged. It was all locked up.'

Bennett flushed and said, embarrassed, 'Sorry, old pal. Nelly reckoned we should leave Friday night instead. Women always changing their minds the last minute.' He put the beachware down beside a bookcase containing nothing but a set of new-looking encyclopedias, and pulled a face, jerking a thumb in the direction of another room, whispering, 'She didn't like it. Sorry.'

As if she had overheard, the woman's voice called out, 'I don't want any bladdy trouble.'

Bennett said again, 'Sorry, pal. Did you find a place to doss down?'

'Oh, I managed,' Beukes said, and thought, you hypocritical bastards.

The woman came out of the room and said, curtly, 'Hullo' to Beukes and to Bennett: 'We better finish unpacking before the child wake up. I haven't got all bladdy day.' She was small and fine boned and pretty as a garden snake.

Bennett flushed and grinned at Beukes. He was a short an, younger than Beukes, but already bald, his brown skull under the few thin

hairs, shiny as the furniture and brass in the room. He had anxious, harassed eyes that fought to maintain the disguise of bonhomie, but it kept slipping like a badly-glued moustache in a school play. He gestured with bony hands. 'Do you want to sit down?'

Beukes looked at him, feeling a little sorry for the harassed fellow. He said, 'No, don't bother. But if you can let me brush my teeth and shave. . .'

'Oh, sure, oh sure. That's no trouble.' He sounded relieved that he could do a small favour to compensate for a more important failure. 'This way. Through there.' He gestured vaguely towards the kitchen. 'We just got back a little while ago. Had to drop the old lady. You go ahead, Buke.'

In the bathroom Beukes shaved quickly and angrily, brushed his teeth, using some of the toothpaste he found on a shelf, and splashed his face. He dried it on one of their towels and wrapped his shaving kit and brush once more with the pyjamas. When he came into the other room he said, with a little malice, 'They going to declare this place White. You'll be pushed out into the *bundu*.'

Bennett looked solemn. 'I heard so. They always doing this kind of thing to us.'

The woman came in and said, 'There's no time for politics now, Arty. You got a lot to do, hey.' She disappeared into the kitchen.

Beukes ignored her, saying, 'That poor bloke in Sea Point went and hanged himself when they had to move, after living there God knows how long.'

Bennett said, 'Yes,' glumly.

Beukes jabbed at him with words, punishing the harassed bald man, and enjoying it: 'And you, you bastard, you can't even lift a finger. A bloke asks you to give him a place to sleep while you're away for a weekend at the beach, but no—you got to promise him it's okay and then you bladdy well sneak off.'

Bennett said feely, 'Nelly was afraid of trouble.'

'What trouble? They don't know you. All it meant was I'd stay a couple of nights here and then I'd be off again the time you got back.'

'Somebody might of seen you.'

Beukes said gleefully, 'Like right now, hey?'

Bennett looked shocked. He put a hand on his bald pate. 'Oh, God.'

From the other room his wife cried: 'When are you going to stop talking?'

Beukes said, 'Don't worry. Nobody that mattered saw me.' He grinned at Bennett with the long upper-lip. 'Thanks for the wash and brush-up.' He began to move towards the passageway, the other man following him, looking worried. The bony hands waved about like faulty signals. Sorry, pal.'

'Sorry? What the hell you mean sorry?'

Bennett flushed again and then put a hand in a trouser pocket. He said, 'Look, here's ten bob. A donation.' He displayed the note nervously and glanced back over his shoulder. His eyes pleaded. 'You know how it is, Buke. Nelly's scared. She ain't mean. Just scared. People talk. They got informers everywhere. You can't even trust your best friend. Here. It's a donation, likely.'

Beukes looked at the note, then shrugged. He was sorry he had hurt the small, bald man. He said, 'Keep it. You don't have to buy your way out.' Bennett followed him to the front door. 'How's the boys up north doing?'

'They wiped out a bunch of soljers,' Beukes told him.

'That's the stuff,' Bennett said smiling. But at the front door he was nervous again. 'You sure nobody saw you come in, Buke?'

Beukes looked at him, grinned and then shook his head sadly. He went down the steps with his paper parcel, into the hot sunlight, leaving the other an standing there nervously against the backdrop of brass ornaments and polished furniture.

Chapter 68

The Late Bourgeois World

by

Nadine Gordimer

CHAPTER 71

“The Late Bourgeois World”

By

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The telephone was ringing as I came into the flat, but when I reached it; it stopped. I was sure it was Graham and then I saw a bunch of flowers under cellophane, on the table; he'd got the florist to send them here instead of to the Home. But my name was on the finicky little envelope—he had sent me flowers at the same time as he ordered them for the old lady. Samson the cleaner must have been working in the flat when they were delivered, and had taken them in.

They were pressed like faces against glass; I ripped them free of the squeaky transparency and read the card. With love, G. Graham and I have no private names, references, or love-words. We use the standard vocabulary when necessary. A cold bruised smell came up from the flowers; it was the snowdrops, with their onion-like stems and leaves, their chilly greenness. He knows how crazy I am about them. And about the *muguet-du-bois* that we bought when we met for a week in the Black Forest in Europe last year. There is nothing wrong with a plain statement: with love. He happened to be in the florist's and so he sent me some flowers. It's not a thing he would do specially, unless it were on a birthday or something. It might have been because of Max; but good God, no, surely not, that would have been awful, he wouldn't have done it. We had made love the night before, but there was nothing special about that. One doesn't like to admit to habit, but the fact is that he doesn't have his mind on court the next day, on Friday evenings, and I don't have to get up next morning to go to work.

While I was putting the flowers in water the phone rang again. 'They're lovely—I've just come in this minute. The first snowdrops I've seen this year.'

'How was he?'

'Oh, it was all right. He's a very sensible child, thank God.'

I began to wish he would say come to lunch, but I wouldn't do anything about it because we make a point of not living in each other's pocket, and if I were to start it, I'd have to expect him to make the same sort of use of me at some time when it might not be convenient. You can't have it both ways. He was probably lunching at the house of the young advocate he'd been playing golf with; the wife is a lawyer, too, a nice girl—I enjoy their company and have a sort of open invitation from them, but before people like this, his

colleagues, we don't like to give the impression of 'going about everywhere together', we make it tacitly clear that we're not to be regarded as a 'couple'. There's no point in a man like Graham flaunting the fact that he's got a woman unless—what? I don't suppose you could say that our affair wasn't serious; but all the same, it's not classified, labeled.

Graham told me there was something about Max in the early edition of the evening paper. Do you want me to read it?

'No, just tell me.'

But he cleared his throat as he does before he reads something aloud, or begins his plea in court. Unlike most lawyers he has a good voice. 'It's not much. There's no mention of you, only his parents. The case is exhumed, of course. . . and it says he was a named Communist—I don't somehow remember. . .?'

'Which he wasn't. He was never named. However.'

A diving team managed to bring up the car. There was a suitcase full of documents and papers in the back, all so damaged by water that it will not be possible to determine their nature.'

'That's good.'

'Nothing else—His father's career in Parliament.'

'Oh yes. No mention of Bobo at all?'

'Fortunately not.'

We might have been cool criminals discussing a successful get-away.

I said, 'It was a most perfect morning. Did you have a good game?'

'Booker beat the pants off me. That's the second time this week and I've told him it's once too often.' He and his golf partner had been opposing counsel in a case Graham had lost.

I said, 'I don't understand it. If I were you I should have seen enough of him to last me for a bit. He laughed. I a always shocked by the way lawyers can attack each other with every sign of bitter ruthlessness over somebody's life—and then sit in brotherly bonhomie at the tea-break. 'Nothing's more frightening than professionalism. Imagine, whether you get ten years or go free can depend on whether or not your counsel can out-talk the other man's, and there they are boozing together at the golf club. It terrifies me more than the idea of the judge. I like to think that when I go to a lawyer, he's as tied up in my affairs as I am myself.'

We both laughed; on ground we'd gone over before.

But you know that wouldn't do at all, he'd be giving very bad counsel if he were to be. You're too emotional.'

I thought of how we'd just talked of Max's death. Honesty sounds callous; so that one is almost ashamed of it.

'Booker doesn't know we're going to appeal, anyway', he teased me dryly. 'I'll get my own back in court if not on the green. I'm going to do some work this afternoon, that is, if I don't sleep. I don't suppose I'll be able to resist a sleep. That chair you made me buy.' In Denmark he ordered the beautiful leather furniture they make there, and we threw out the ugly stuff his wife must have thought suitable for a 'gentleman's study'. There's a chair you could sleep the whole night in, even make love in, not that he ever would. Yesterday after the servant had taken the coffee away, although the mood for love-

making came as we sat in front of the fire, we went into his bedroom as usual. What nonsense it is to write the 'disembodied' voice on the telephone; all of Graham was there as he talked commonplaces. Last night he was held in my body a long time.

The call-box bleeped at his end and I said something again about the flowers, before we hung up. Once alone, I didn't feel the slightest inclination to go out, after all, I felt on the contrary, a relief. I brought the water in the vase to the right level. I threw the paper and cellophane in the kitchen bin and put the food I'd bought into the refrigerator. I opened the creaking joints of my plastic and aluminium chair and sat on the balcony in the sun, smoking. Many of the demands one makes on other people are nothing but nervous habit, like reaching for a cigarette. That's something for me to remember, if I were ever to think of marrying again. I don't think I'll marry again. But I catch myself speaking of Max as my 'first husband', which sounds as if I expect to have another. Well, at thirty, one can't be too sure of what one may still do.

At eighteen I was quite sure, of course, I would be married and have a baby. This future had come out to meet me as expected, though perhaps sooner. Max might not have been the man according to specifications, but the situation, deep in my subconscious, matched the pattern I'd been given to go by. The concept of marriage as shelter remained with me, even if it were only to be shelter from parents and their ways. There, whatever the walls were made of, I should live a woman's life, which was? — a life lived among women like my mother, attached to a man like my father — in the sense that the sort of man my father is doesn't represent to me, in my world, what it did to my mother in hers. I was brought up to live among women, as middle-class women with their shopping and social and household concerns comfortably do, but I have to live among men. Most of what there was to learn from my family and background has turned out to be hopelessly obsolete for me.

Graham and I have known each other since the trial. I was already divorced from Max, but there was no one else to do anything, that's how I met Graham. I was told he was the right man for the case. As it happened he couldn't take the brief in the end it was given over to someone else, but he remained interested and afterwards, when Max was in prison, he helped me make various applications on Max's behalf. Graham didn't ask me any questions, he was like one of those doctors with whom you feel that he knows everything about you, simply from a professional reading of signs you don't even know you exhibit. He had a wife once, she was a girl he'd gone about with since they were schoolchildren, and she died of meningitis when she was younger than I am now. There are still traycloths in the house on which she embroidered her initials.

Graham defends many people on political charges and is one of a handful of advocates who ignore the possible consequences of getting a reputation for being willing to take such cases. I've got my analyzing stools for tapeworm and urine for bilharzia and blood for cholesterol (at the Institute for Medical Research). And so we keep our hands clean. So far as work is concerned, at least. Neither of us makes money out of cheap labour or performs a service confined to people of a particular colour. For myself, thank God shit and blood are all the same, no matter whom they come from.

In Europe last year, we enjoyed ourselves very much, and lived in the same room, the same bed, in easy intimacy. We each went our own way some of the time, but we'd planned the holiday together and we stayed together for the greater part. I don't think we once felt irritated with each other. Yet since we've been back we've lived again just as we used to, sometimes not sleeping together for two weeks, each taking up large tracts of life where the other has no claim. I didn't need him, sitting in the sun on my balcony.

A sexual connection. But there is more to it than that. A love affair? Less than that. I'm not suggesting it's a new form of relationship, of course, but rather that it's made up of the bits of old ones that don't work. It's decent enough; harms nobody, not even ourselves. I supposed Graham would marry me, if I wanted it. Perhaps he wants it; and then it would all change. If I wanted a man, here, at this time, in this country, could I find a better one? He doesn't act, that's true; but he doesn't give way and that's not bad, in a deadlock. He lives white, but what's the point of the gesture of living any other way? He will survive his own convictions, he will do what he sets out to do, he will keep whatever promises he makes. When I talk with him about history or politics. I am aware of the magnetic pull of his mind to the truth. One can't get at it, *but to have some idea where it is!* Yet when he's inside me—last night—there's the strangest thing. He's much better than someone my own age, he comes to me with a solid and majestic erection that will last as long as we choose. Sometimes he will be in me for an hour and I can put my hand on my belly and feel the blunt head, like a standard upheld, through my flesh. But while he fills me, while you'd think the last gap in me was closed forever while we lie there silent I get the feeling that I am the one who has drawn him up into my flesh. I am the one who holds him there, that I am the one who has him, helpless. If I flex the muscles inside me it's as if I were throttling someone. He doesn't speak; the suffering of pleasure shuts his eyes, the lids are tender without his glasses. And even when he brings about the climax for us—afterwards I am still holding him as if strangled: warm, thick, dead inside.

That's how it is.

But I don't think of it often, and sitting on my balcony in the midday sun that cannot possibly be called 'winter', it simply took a place in my consciousness (I was growing drowsy from the dry warmth) with the pigeons toeing their way along the guttering, two children I couldn't see, but could hear shooting water-pistols at each other,

below my feet and the men on the bit of grass above the pavement opposite. They were black men with their delivery bicycles, or in working overalls. They lay flung down upon the grass, the legends of firms across their backs. They were drinking beer out of the big red cartons, in the sun. We were all in the sun. There is a way of being with people that comes only by not knowing names. If you have no particular need of anyone, you find yourself belonging to a company you hadn't been admitted to before; I didn't need anybody because I had these people who, like myself, would get up and go away in a little while. Without any reason, I felt very much at home.

In spite of everything.

Their talk went on sporadically, in the cadences I know so well, even if I don't understand the words. It was the hour when all the flat-dwellers were at lunch and only they had time to lie on the grass, time that had no label attached to it. After a while I went in and cut myself the crust of the loaf I'd bought and put some papery shop-ham on it and ate a banana in which there was winter—a hard centre and a felted taste. When I had food in my stomach I was overcome by weariness and lay down on the divan in the living-room where it was warm under the rug from Bobo's bed.

A vision of seaweed swaying up from deep underwater.

Not asleep but awake in the vision, as I opened my eyes in the room. At once close to the water where the heads surface in bunches of torn rubber ribbons sizzling with the oxygen of broken water, bedraggle in the wash from the rocks; and at the same time looking down from the cliff high where the road is, down on the depths tortoiseshell with sun and the rippling distortion of the great stems, brown thrashing tubes that sway down, down, out of the focus of lenses of water thick as bottle-ends, down, down.

The water rushed into Max's nostrils and filled his mouth as it opened for air. For the first time it came to me as it must have happened when he made it happen. The burning cold salt water rushing in everywhere and the last bubbles of life belching up from places where they had been caught—the car, under his shirt in his lungs, filled with the final breath that he had taken before he went down. Down, down, to where the weeds must, at last, have their beginning. He took with him a suitcase of papers that could not be deciphered. So much sodden muck. He took them with him, and no one would ever know what they were—writings, tracts, plans, letters. He had succeeded in dying.

I was lying still in the room and my eyes were filled with tears. I wept not for Max's death but for the pain and terror of the physical facts of it. The flowers had stirred and opened while I slept and the warm room was full of scent. I lay quite still and felt myself alive, there in the room as their scent was.

Max's death is a postscript. A postscript can be something trivial, scarcely pertinent, or it can be important and finally relevant.

I believe I know all there was to know about Max. To know all may be to forgive, but is not to love. You can know too much for love.

When Max and I got married he left the university and took a job—many jobs. None of them lasted long; there were so many other things to do, at that time there were still things you could do whose immediacy appealed to us—discussion and study groups in the rooms of people like ourselves and in the black townships, open-air meetings, demonstrations. The Communist Party had been declared illegal and officially disbanded, but in the guise of other organizations the whole rainbow from politically conservative do-gooders to the radical Left-wing could still show itself fairly openly.

Above all, African nationalism was at a stage when it had gained confidence and prestige in the eyes of the world through the passive resistance campaigns, and at home seemed ready to recognize Africans of any colour who wanted to be free of the colour bar. In our little crowd, Solly, Dave, Lily, Fatima, Alec, Charles—Indian, African, Coloured and white—Fatima gave Bobo his bottle, Dave laughed at Max' bad moods. The future was already there, it was a matter of having the courage to announce it. How much courage?—I don't think we had any idea.

Max's first job was abandoned because they wouldn't give him three days off to attend a Trades Union conference. Max had been reading politics as a major subject at the university, but there were great gaps in what he felt he ought to know, at the time he was concentrating on trying to give a small group of politically ambitious Africans some of the theoretical background in economics that they wanted. I forget what happened to the next job—oh yes, he got a typist to mimeograph some leaflet during the office hours. And so it went on. The jobs came last in any consideration because they were of no importance. He took whatever he could get to do that would help to keep us going. He had no particular qualifications, anyway, he had been studying for an arts degree, which his parents had seen as a harmless alternative to commerce or accountancy, and that he had seen as freedom of mind. The nature of the degree didn't matter much to them; he'd been expected to join one of his father's companies on the accomplishment of it, that's all.

Max was supposed to be going on working for his degree, at night, but at night there was less time than during the day, since the study groups and meetings were all held after working hours, and friends came for sessions of talk that used to last half the night, I went back to work when Bobo was five months old and we had a nanny, Daphne, a tough, pretty, real Johannesburg nanny who looked after Max, when he was at home, as well as the baby. Once she and I both

suspected in the same month that we were pregnant, and without my bothering Max or her telling her boyfriend, we managed to mend our situation by promptly taking some pills exacted from my doctor with a warning that they wouldn't work if we were.

I was possessed by the idea that Max must be able to go back to university full-time and finish his course. We wouldn't live off the Van Den Sandts (we had to take help from them now and then—over Bobo's birth, for example). I wanted to find some work I could do at night, in addition to my daytime job. We examined the possibilities; I couldn't type. I said at last, 'A cinema usherette. That's about all. I wonder what they get paid.'

'Why not? With a Soutine pageboy's outfit and a torch.' I could see that the idea really pleased him. He began to remark to people, as if I had already taken the job, 'Liz's going to be working in a cinema. Don't think you're seeing things.' I was working for a private firm of pathologists, then, and instead of becoming an usherette, I got the writing up of some research notes to do for one of the doctors. It paid better than working in a cinema would have done, and I was able to do it at home. But Max was often irritated by Dr. Farber's notes spread about in the cramped flat where there was not enough room for his own books and papers, and he seemed to lose interest in the purpose of my extra job. To work as an usherette in a cinema was perhaps the furthest point one could possibly get from any sort of activity that Mrs. Van Den Sandt or beautiful Queenie could have imagined themselves engaged in. I deprived Max of an opportunity of reaching an ultimate in his distance from them, and a gratification of his longing to come close to other people in a bond of necessity. I was aware of that longing, but I didn't always understand when I failed to further its fulfillment.

Although Max had been a member of a Communist cell at the university, he did not take a strictly Marxist line in his attempts to

give Africans some background for the evolution of their own political thinking. And when the Communist Party began to function again, as an underground organization, although he was approached to become active under its discipline, he did not do so. He had been very young and unimportant during his brief experience in the Communist cell; maybe that had something to do with it—he didn't see himself in that limited status, any more. After the Defiance Campaign in which people of all sorts of political affiliation took part, he joined the new non-racial Liberal Party for a while, and then the Congress of Democrats. But the Africans themselves did not take the Liberal Party seriously, he saw himself set aside in a white group that Africans felt had the well-meaning presumption to speak for them. Even in the Congress of Democrats, a radical white organization (it provided a front for some important Communists) that did not confine itself to polite platform contacts at multi-racial conferences, he was restless. The COD people worked directly with African political movements, but had come into being mainly because, while identifying themselves with the African struggle, they understood as a matter of tactics that no African movement seeking mass support can afford to have white members.

I hadn't joined the Liberal Party, but I worked in COD, not exactly with Max, but mostly on backroom stuff, printing propaganda for the African National Congress, and so on. You make curiously intense friendships when you work with the fear and excitement of police raids at your back. I believed in what I was doing and in the people I was doing it with. I certainly had enough courage to measure up to what was needed then—before Ninety Days—and I limited my activities only because of Bobo. Other people had children, too, of course, and they put their political work first, but then if Max and I were both to have been arrested there would have been literally no one to look after Bobo but Daphne, since even the thought of him being taken over by the Van Den Sandts or my parents constituted, for me, real abandonment.

I'm mincing words. After all these years, because max is lying drowned. It's like putting on a hat for a funeral, the old shabby convention that one must lie about people because they're dead. The fact is, there was no one responsible for Bobo except myself. Max was unable to be aware of anyone's needs but his own. My mother once called this inability horrible selfishness, whereas it was the irreversible training of his background that she had admired so much, and that she saw him as a crazy deviate from. Driven to school and home again by the chauffeur every day, and then shut out of the rooms where the grownups were at their meeting and parties at the Van Den Sandts he was ministered to like a prince in a tower. Even poverty didn't release him; and we were poor enough. He had the fanatic's few needs, and expected that they should be answered. He bought a pair of shoes or books or brandy on credit and was arrogantly angry when we were asked to pay; or assumed that I would deal with the shops. Max simply did not know what it was to live with others; he knew all the rest of us as he knew Raskolnikov and Emma Bovary, Dr. Copeland and Torless, shut up reading alone in his room on the farm. He would sit for hours analyzing a man's troubles and attitudes with good insight and a compound of curiosity and sympathy, but he would not notice that the man was exhausted; nor would he remember that the man had mentioned that he had to catch a train home at a certain time. He used to take Bobo off down to Fordsburg to be handed about among the adoring young daughters of a multiple Indian household, and then, eager to follow up an acquaintance he'd perhaps made the night before, he'd go on to some yard or house and dump. Bobo with a set of faces or a pair of arms—anybody's—the baby had never seen before. Once Fatima phoned me to say that the mother of a cartage contractor in Noordgesig, the Coloured township, had rung her up to get my number, because Bobo was yelling and she didn't know what to offer him. Max had left with her son and Fatima's brother; left Bobo as he used to drop a

bicycle or toy for the servants to pick up from the Van Den Sandts' lawn.

I tried to explain to Myra Roberts, a woman who seemed to me to have the only 'saving grace' there is—a natural feeling of responsibility for strangers as for one's own family and friends—that COD couldn't count on both Max and me because of Bobo. She said, 'Oh we feel we can count on you!'—and the emphasis made first my face burn and then hers. For a time I showed a certain coldness to her to make up for the disloyalty of that flush.

And yet Max would have done anything. That was somehow the trouble. When he was given a job he would always take it a stage beyond what he had been told was its intended limit. If (he was working on the news-sheet) he were asked to write a leader along certain lines, he would pursue the given conclusions further. He wrote well and would have liked to be editor of the news-sheet; if the executive could have felt assured that he would not use it to follow his own line and commit them where they did not choose to be committed, I think he's have been made editor. In committee he sat charged with the desire to act—silent, shabby in his undergraduate non-conformist uniform of cracked veldskoen and blond beard, a nervous hand across his mouth. As they spoke—the experienced ones, who knew you must not risk bringing the banning of the organization nearer by one wasted word or step—his bright eyes paced them. And when they had finished he would seize upon the plan of action: 'I'm seeing the trade union people tomorrow, anyway—I'll talk to them.' This's something that can only be done with the youth groupers. We'll have to get together with Tlulo and Mokgadi, Brian Dialisa and that Kanyele fellow must be kept clear of—' A febrile impatience came from the sense that was always in him of being, in the end, whatever was done when working with white people like himself, outside the locations and prisons and work-gangs and overcrowded trains that held the heart of things.

But the others decided who should do what and they knew best who should approach whom. He would come home with the charge banked up glowing within him. The prescribed books on history, philosophy and literary criticism lay about (I read them while he was busy at meetings); what on earth would he have done with a Bachelor of Arts degree, anyway? It was a dead end that would have served a rich man's son as a social token of attendance at a university. Perhaps he might have written something—he had passion and imagination; there were attempts, but he needed day-to-day involvement with others too much to be able to withhold himself in the inner concentration that I imagine a writer needs. He might have made a lawyer, but all the professions were part of the white club whose life membership ticket, his only birthright, he had torn up. He might have been a politician, even (if was in the family, after all), if political ambitions outside the maintenance of white power had been recognized. He might even have been a good revolutionary, if there had been a little more time, before all radical movements were banned, for him to acquire political discipline.

There are possibilities for me, but under what stone do they lie?

Max came home with a man called Spears Qwabe. He was a sodden, at-ease ex-schoolmaster, who talked in a hoarse, soft voice. The dangerous thing is we don't look to see what comes after the struggle, we don't think enough about what's there on the other side. You must know where you're going, man. You ask any of the chaps in town how he thinks we're going to live when we've settled with the whites. He's got a dreamy look in his eye thinking he'll get a car and a job with a desk, that's all. The same old set-up, only he's not going to sit in the location or carry a pass. Even the political crowd don't know where they going ideologically. ANC takes advice from the Commies, they willing to use their techniques of struggle, fine, okay,

but apart from the few chaps who are Communists first and Africans second, who believes that ANC wants a society along orthodox Communist lines? They haven't got a social doctrine—all right, you can wave the Freedom Charter, but how far does it go. . .? The same thing with PAC. Thinking just doesn't go beyond the struggle, And if it does—without making a noise about it, what d'you think it is? What's it amount to? Listen to them talk in their sleep and you'll hear they just want to take over the works—the whole white social and economic set-up, man, the job-lot. A black capitalist country with perhaps—I'll say maybe—the nationalization of the mines as a gesture. “The mineral wealth beneath the soil, the banks and monopoly industry shall be transferred to the ownership of the people as a whole.” Nice poetry. But how they really going to work out an equitable distribution of what we've got? Does anybody talk sense about that? Does anybody bother to? And why should we have to take over any of the solution of the East and West, cut-and-dried?

'You will largely, whether you like it or not, because you'll be taking over various institutions of the East and West, won't you, you're not going back to barter and cowrie currency—' Max wanted to encourage him, show him off.

'But wait—that's nothing—human institutions are adaptable, isn't it? What we need is to see ourselves as an industrialized people who can break out of the Capitalist-Communist pattern set by the nineteenth century for an industrialized society and make a new pattern. Break right out.' He talked a long time that first day he came, but maybe I remember as what he said then also what I heard him say later, at other times. 'We want a modern democratic state, yes? Tribalism will make it bloody difficult, even here, where tribalism's been just about finished off by the whites, anyway, although this government is playing it up again with Bantustans and so on. We must take the democratic elements of tribalism and incorporate them, use them, in a new doctrine of practical socialism. Socialism from Africa and for

Africa. We don't need to go to the West or the East to learn about the evils of monopoly, man—land always belonged to the tribe. You don't have to teach us responsibility for the community welfare, we've always looked after each other and each other's children. All this must be bought into a new ethos of the nation, eh? The spirit of our socialism will come from inside, from us, the technical realization will come from outside.

Then Max began suddenly to rummage among our books and piles of newspapers, and he handed him Nyereres book.

'Yes, yes—I know—but African socialism can't be the work of one man. The doctrine of African socialism must be made by different thinkers, all adding to it. We must put it down, man. We've got political heroes, no thinkers. Mbeki, yes, all right, perhaps. We'll have plenty political martyrs, plenty more; no thinkers! We must put it down, man!'

When Max was deeply interested, he had a way of standing before the person with whom he was in conversation, literally closing in for an exchange. I remember how he stood above the man in the dirty raincoat (even on the hottest day Spears held about him the late loneliness of a rainy three in the morning) saying, 'Yes. . .but the two must run together, African socialism must be the philosophy of the struggle, it must be in at the struggle *now*—if it's going to mean anything

I liked Spears. He drank but although he couldn't always manage his legs he never lost the use of his tongue. He had a small coterie and they started calling themselves 'Umanyano Ngamandia', which meant something like "Let's pull together", as a colloquial name for an African socialist movement. Most of them were men who had broken away from the African National Congress or Pan African Congress. Max became their guru, or Spears became his; it doesn't

matter. COD ceased to exist in Max's consciousness, he didn't manage to return in decent order the papers that belonged to work he had been doing. I know that I went through our things to try and find them, but months dragged by, we moved house, and I grew more and more embarrassed at being asked for them. I had continued to work with COD because I thought Max was wrong—it frightened me to see him simply *forget about* the people we had worked with there. But I began to see in the work COD did, if not in my friends who did it, limitations that were in the nature of such an organization and that had always been there. I needed max to be right.

Spears was with us most of the time. He and Max were formulating his methodology of African socialism. Max saw it as a series of pamphlets that would become the handbook, anyway, if not the bible, of the African revolution *We must put it down, man*. The phrase was at once the purpose Spears lived by and the net of catchwords in which he tried to collect purpose when he was drinking; you could laugh at him when he repeated it drunk, go ahead and laugh at the infirmity of him: but it was like the name of a God, that does not alter in its omnipotence whether used as a curse or a blessing. *We must put it down, man*. I heard it all the time. It was the beat in his voice spacing the political clichés, grammatical constructions, translated from Xhosa and literal translations from Afrikaans, of his strong-flavoured English.

And yet he did not see 'getting it down' in quite the literal terms that max did, that Max could not escape from. Max planned point by point, chapter by chapter (at one time he thought of writing the whole thing in the form of Platonic dialogues); but Spears' thinking erupted in a lava that, cooled to the process of note-taking, was difficult to break down into its component dissertation and analysis. Max and Spears talked late into the nights and every day Max wrote and recast from notes and memory. That was the time I came home from work and found Max yelling back at screaming Bobo. He had

been trying to work all afternoon against the baby's noisy games and interruptions. Max's face was a child's mask of hysterical frustration. I took Bobo and walked in the streets with him, but there was nothing I could do for the face of Max.

For hours he stood planted, arguing in front of Spears, he couldn't stay put, in a chair. Spears was intense but quite without Max's tension; he could talk just as well sitting on the kitchen table while I fried sausages, or while Bobo climbed up and used his shoulders as a road for a toy car. He used to call me 'Honey' and once or twice, when he was only a little drunk, he cornered me in the kitchen, but I told him I didn't like the smell of brandy, and he kneaded my hand regretfully and said, 'Forget it, honey'; I think that most of his drive toward women had washed away in brandy, but the residue was an unspecified casual tenderness to which Bobo and I responded. And Max. Max most of all. There was Max standing urgently over him, protesting, arguing, pressing—it was not just the determination to *get it all down* that held Max there; he hovered irresistibly towards what could never be got down, what Spears didn't need to get down because it was his—an identity with millions like him, an abundance chartered by the deprivation of all that Max had had heaped upon himself. Some of the white people I know want the blacks innocence, that innocence, even in corruption, of the status of victim; but not Max. And everyone knows those whites who want to be allowed to love them as an aberration, a distinction. Max wasn't any of these. He wanted to come close, and in this country the people—with all the huddled warmth of the phrase was still left out, he experienced the isolation of his childhood become the isolation of his colour.

I don't know whether Max loved me. He wanted to make love with me, of course. And he wanted to please me—no, he wanted my approval, my admiration for whatever he did. These pass as definitions of love; I can think of others that are neither more nor less acceptable. This business of living for each other, that one hears

about; it can just as well be living for the sight of one's self in the other's eyes. Something keeps two people together; that's as far as I'd go. 'Love' was the name I was given for it; but I don't know that it always fits my experience. Someone has given Bobo the name, too: didn't he say, 'I'm sorry I didn't love him?' What did he mean? Did he mean that he didn't need his father? Or that he didn't stop his father from dying?

I wanted to make love to Max, and I wanted to give him the approval he wanted, I wanted to please him. But it wasn't a matter of watching your husband rising a notch in the salary scale. What I wanted was for him *to do the right things so that I could love him*. Was that love?

Max was wonderful in bed because there was destruction in him. Passion of a kind; demonic sex; I've had it with others, since. With every orgasm I used to come back with the thought: I could die like that. And of course that was exactly what it was, the annihilation; ever time, of the silences and sulks, the disorder and frustration of the days. We moved four times in the first three years, each time in response to having reached another impossible situation—living in a one-room flat with a baby; working at home in a two-room flat with a baby; not being able to afford a larger flat on my salary; not being allowed to have Africans visit us in the building—and there was never time or money to make each place more than habitable. Everything had happened to us too soon; before we'd collected enough chairs to sit on the ones we had had begun to fall to bits.

It was Felicity Hare who tacked cotton cloth she had brought from Kenya round the packing-cases our stuff was moved into a converted outhouse in someone's backyard. We used them as cupboards and tables. We had space there, and she lived with us for a time—a big, red-faced girl just down from Cambridge who wanted to 'do something' in Africa. She had been handed on down the continent from territory to territory by introductions from friends of friends

and always either in danger of being deported by a British colonial government when she became too friendly with African nationalists, or appealing to a British consulate for protection when African governments wanted her deported for becoming too friendly with members of their Opposition. She wore shorts and would follow you from room to room, talking, whatever you were doing, hitching herself on some ledge or table corner too small to support her, with her enormous, marbled legs doubled up in a great fleshy pedestal. Her conversation was confused and conspiratorial—Actually the woman in charge of the place wasn't American at all, she was a Dane, and the girls couldn't stick her. Couldn't understand what she was saying d'y'know. That's another thing I didn't tell you—they came from about twenty different tribes and could scarcely understand English anyway. But there'd been some fiddle in the State Department—that's clear—and she wasn't the one who was supposed to be there at all. The girls weren't learning a thing, but old Alongi Senga—'Who's that?'—Senga, Minister of Education, d'y'know, stupid old bastard, Matthew Ochinua says they say all he wants to do is inspect high schools so's he can pinch the boys bottoms. Anyway, he'd had a row with the Field Service people—Most of the stories ended with a shrug of the breasts and the big face gazing away, as if she had just discovered them, at her tiny hands with their little shields of bitten-down nail pressed into the plump pad of each finger. 'So that was that. . .' 'so I was off. . .'

She made herself useful doing some typing for Max and spent a lot of time getting people out of what she called 'messes'—mostly the aftermath of parties she went to—taking home in her little borrowed car the corpses that piled up, staying the night with girls whose men had gone off with someone else. She patched the lining of Spears' raincoat and drove him on his complicated errands. There was the night I got up and found her dressed as if for a picnic, carrying a spray gun. 'Going slogan-painting,' she said. She went off with a tiny torch to wait to be picked up by whomever it was she was working

with. I went back to bed and told Max. 'A midnight feast for Sunnybunny! O wacko!' he said. The absurd play on her name was his invention; he and Spears treated her with the comradely mock-flirtatiousness that men show towards unattractive girls. I said, 'Spears shouldn't tease her; it'll set her after him. She worships the two of you.' Why on earth not? Do Spears no harm, and she needs a man, our Sunbun.'

She was always urging us to go to parties with her, but these were the parties where white liberals and black tarts and toughs went for what each could get out of the other. It surprised me that Max, once or twice, seemed willing to go. The work he and Spears were doing was going badly; Max as finding Spears evasive. Yet it became a sort of craze for the three of them—Max, Spears and Sunbun—to appear at these parties as a weird trio. I dropped out because I couldn't last till three in the morning without drinking too much, and if I drank too much I couldn't work next day; if Max and Spears couldn't get on with their work, then, at least the parties provided a reason.

Often when I came home from the laboratory Max would be sitting waiting; punishing Spears with his waiting as a child believes he is punishing the grown-up who is not even aware of being the object of resentment. When Bobo's voice rose in the kitchen, or shrieked in the bath, Max gave me one of his seizing looks. The calm of white coats and routine work, life apprehended as a neat smear under a microscope, came from me like the bar on the breath of a drunkard.

Felicity used to hover, importantly self-effacing. 'I was desperate, d'y'know, he hasn't turned up all day. I made some excuse to go out and scout around but no one knew where he was.' She spoke to me out of Max's earshot, as if he must not hear his condition discussed. Then Spears would arrive, and the casual tone of his excuses and apologies was not altered, whether Max was angry and sulky, or whether he suddenly was in a warm good mood and behaved as

though Spears had not been expected until that particular moment. One night when this happened—the arrival of Spears at long last, and a quick rise in Max’s mood—Max was moving about the room like a cork caught up off the sand by the tide, opening beer, offering cheese on the point of a knife, talking, putting papers together, and he pointed the knife at Felicity, saying in a cheerful impatient aside. ‘Come on, move that big arse, Sunbun, you know where you put the list I gave you—’

It was his way of talking to her and I was astonished, this time, to see her cry. I suddenly understood that he had made love to her.

He stood there with the steel blade dulled with the grease of cheese, gesturing at her, and she rushed out of the room with all her flesh— buttocks, breasts—quaking; it was somehow specially moving, as if some poor peaceful browser had been stuck with a spear. I went after her and bumped into Daphne, holding a freshly ironed dress that she must have tried to hand to her. I said quickly, ‘I’ll take it.’

‘What she’s got to cry for?’ Daphne lifted her chin, she wanted me to know she knew too.

Max said, ‘She bloody well wouldn’t leave me alone. It started after a party and I was drunk anyway. She smothers you with her bloody great tits, you’ve got to fight your way out and that’s the easiest way.’ It was true that one couldn’t be jealous of it would have been different But there was only one reason why Max made love to her. He knew it and I knew it. He needed approval and admiration so much that he was prepared to throw n a god fuck as payment. I could have forgiven him sleeping with a woman he wanted, but I couldn’t forgive him the humiliation in her big shaking body when she ran out of the room. I used to think of it when were making love. And I couldn’t tell him because I myself couldn’t give the approval and admiration.

Max shunned the Van Den Sandt's standards of success but in a way they triumphed in him, passing on, like a family nose or chin, the rage to succeed. He did not weight in on their scale, but he retained the revengeful need *to be acknowledged*. It came from them: the desire to show somebody. What? The objects of his purpose were not demonstrable in the way that money and social prestige are. Why is it that these people always win, even if only by destruction?

Oh, there were other women. When he went underground during the State of Emergency in 1960 he lived with Eve King while hidden in he house And before that there was the thing with Roberta Weininger— beautiful Roberts, she's been under House Arrest for some time, now. These love affairs caused me pain, and in its context I had one or two affairs of my own. I suppose I thought of redressing the balance— some such expedient. But this again was the use of measures designed for a situation that had very little bearing on the realities of ours. If I'd only known; it didn't matter how many women Max had, it didn't make any difference. Whether or not he could really love a woman, me or any other woman, was not what was vital to him.

Spears went underground, too, but other members of 'Umanyano Ngamandla' were detained and when they came out of prison the movement broke up; most of them, including Spears, rejoined the ANC, then banned and became an underground movement. The notes for the methodology of African socialism had been safe from the security raids on our outhouse cottage because I had bundled the papers into a laundry bag and kept it hidden in the laboratory, all the time. When Spears came to see me one day I told him they were intact; he smiled; the days of the work on the methodology belonged to another time. Decades, eras, centuries—they don't have much meaning, now, when the imposition of an emergency law or the fall of a bomb changes life more profoundly in a day than one might reasonably expect to experience in a lifetime. Spears wasn't drinking.

He didn't come often any more, and neither did William Xaba, another friend who always used to be in and out of the cottage. There was a move among politically active Africans to keep out of white houses, no matter whose they were, and to reject friendship and even intimacy with whites as part of white privilege. Max was in Cape Town then, for three months that stretched to six, working on a new radical journal whose editors were replaced as quickly as they were banned. Bobo and I went down for two weeks at Christmas and every day the three of us walked along the cliff road above the sea, where the polyps of seaweed reach up from far down in the water. 'Look there. Look there,' we urged Bobo, but his little boy's gaze would follow your finger as its object, and see no further than the end of it. I wonder if it was the papers of the African Socialist methodology that Max took down with him in the suitcase.

Between heliograph flashes of sun on water, undeciphered, there are still things that were said. 'Christ, when you see how African women will live! They know how to wait. And to keep themselves and their children together. There's everything that matters to learn from them.' Yes, he was right; I was an amateur in loneliness, in stoicism, in trust. Maybe if you're ever going to achieve something, you'll have to do it quite alone.' I said that once knowing that already he was scornful of the journal he was working on, and (looking down at seaweed) in the water like flowers imprisoned in a glass paperweight) seeing the end of this like the end of anything else he had begun. He didn't answer.

It was the last time we really lived together. He came back to Johannesburg and eventually we were divorced and he would disappear for months and turn up again. There was a rumour that he had slipped out of the country illegally and got in again. I didn't know whom he spent his time with, though I had heard through our old Indian friend Solly that he had associated himself for a while with

people who wanted to organize a new underground white revolutionary group.

Then the telephone rang at eleven o'clock at night and he said, 'Liz? That you Liz? When the papers come out—d'you get the morning paper? There may be something big. . . Don't forget.'

Nobody knows this. Nobody at all. I didn't even tell the lawyers. I have never told Graham. It's all that's left of Max and me; all there is still between us. That voice, wild and quiet, over the telephone.

The water covers everything, soon no bubbles rise.

There were possibilities, but under what stone? Under what stone?

Max's bomb, described in court as being made of a tin-filled with a mixture of sulphur, saltpeter and charcoal, was found before it exploded and he was arrested within twenty-four hours. Others were more or less successful and it all began again, and worse than it had ever been before raids, arrests, detention without trial. The white people who were kind to their pets and servants were shocked at bombs and bloodshed, just as they had been shocked in 1960, when the police fired on the men, women and children outside the Sharpeville pass office. They can't stand the sight of blood; and again gave, to those who have no vote, the humane advice that the decent way to bring about change is by constitutional means. The liberal-minded whites whose protests, petitions and outspokenness have achieved nothing remarked the inefficiency of the terrorists and the wasteful senselessness of their attempts. You cannot hope to unseat the great alabaster backside with a tin-pot bomb. Why risk your life? *The madness of the brave is the wisdom of life.* I didn't understand, till

then. Madness, God, yes, it was; but why should the brave ones among us be forced to be mad?

Some fled the country, some were held solitary in their cells and, refusing to speak, were kept on their feet under interrogation until they collapsed. Some did speak. Max was tried and sentenced to five years imprisonment but he was called as a State witness after serving fifteen months, and he spoke. He was beaten when he was first arrested, that we know, but what else he was confronted with later, what else they showed him in himself, we do not know—but he spoke. He spoke to Solly and Eve King and the man who was arrested with him, he spoke of William Xaba and other friends with whom we had lived and worked for years.

He is dead now. He didn't die for them—the people, but perhaps he did more than that. In his attempts to love he lost even his self-respect, in betrayal. He risked everything for them and lost everything. He gave his life in every way there is; and going down to the bed of the sea is the last.

Chapter 69

The Wanderers

by

Ezekiel Mphahlele

Don Haley is a tall, lanky man with a face that is pulled taut like rubber, which always makes him appear to have come from a windy August safari. His untidy mop of hair does not help to dissolve the illusion. His smile does not last more than about a second. It simply flashes on and off. When he speaks, he bobs his head up as if his long neck were always inclined to let the head droop a little and he were making sure you were still in his line of vision. He looks right into your eyes as you speak.

He often calls his staff individually to talk to them about their work.

“That man is shrewd!” Timi would say to me after a session with Don.

“He’s no fool.”

“And a calculating mind, whew!”

“He’s to look after his money.”

“That’s all right. But I don’t think he feels he’s dealing with human beings. We just seem to be puppets in his vast money-making schemes.”

Don is wealthy. His father was the owner of race horses, sheep and large tracts of farms. He had also entrenched himself in the diamond mines. When Don came into money, and he had graduated at Oxford, he bought *Bongo* from a Britisher who thought he had to run a magazine for the uplift of the African. It looked like a cross between a farming magazine, a missionary pamphlet and an intellectual inventory or directory. We changed all this and made it a city social picture magazine. It circulates in other parts of Africa and we have editions that circulate in West and East Africa.

"Think you can cut down expenses on your side, Steve?" he asked me recently.

"I've been asking you for a raise."

"I know, I know. I think you should wait."

"I don't think I should."

A smile slit his face open at intervals.

"Just give me a little longer please. Production costs are throttling me."

"Circulation is mounting."

"I've been talking too Timi to tell him we want some more exciting political stuff. Anything. Scandals like the Domingo-Vuya affair are simply luscious and our readers must have them."

"You know Timi's attitude to petty political scandal-mongering."

"Damn him! I told him this is a picture magazine and not a political propaganda sheet. Just drum that into his teacher's head."

"I just don't think he's carved out for all we want. But he's a stabilizing force in this setup."

Funny isn't it! A man with the journalistic acumen and mind like Pan is his own enemy—booze and ulcers et cetera. And then a Timi with only an erratic acumen and no taste for what we want doesn't booze himself lights out would go and be a stabilizing force!

"It's how it is. We just have to keep both."

"Lazy still a good sub?"

"As good as any in his field."

"I may have to organize a regular turnover in both papers so that as soon as a man's skill becomes costly we can replace him with a learner."

I should have been shocked, but shocks from Don are such a staple experience that one hardly winces when words detonate from his mouth like that.

Pressure. I know I can be pressured so far and no more. One day I'll—I don't know. When it happens, it will be fast—so fast that I shall only be able to think afterwards. What cuts me up inside is that Cecil Epstein can stutter his way into Don's office, and right into his heart and get what he wants.

"I've to play politics with these government chaps," says Don one day to me and Cecil.

"How do you do it?" I ask.

A smile cuts his mouth open, the sides of the mouth pull down and he says:

“Hand fire with the exposures and simply coast along.”

“J-j-just what I-I-I’m doing in *P-p-post*.”

The devil! I think.

“Politics are taking precedence in the minds of our readers,” I say.

Cecil takes out his tin of tablets, throws one into his mouth and chews. I keep wondering why he always grimaces when he chews his tablet. His face always looks like a baby’s, and the grimace accentuates the impression.

Cecil’s paper is a weekly tabloid, *Bongo’s* a monthly and we must come out with big follow-ups on the news.

“That’s p-p-prof-f-found, Steve!”

“Hardly,” Don remarks. “I just want us to lay off for a while instead—thrust into township social life and give some shrewd political speculation. Who’s in, who’s out in underground African political organizations, any up-and-coming young leaders—things like that.”

Cecil’s body twitches as it always does, as if he were being bitten by a flea underneath.

“We-we-we have n-n-no p-p-problem on that s-s-score, Don.”

“I appreciate that,” Don says, “that we must bear in mind our two rivals are thriving on light stuff, on the social life of the blacks.”

"I thought we were operating on another level anyhow," I say.
"We've never looked at ourselves as a government paper."

"Hell, no!"

"We-we-we g-get s-s-several letters f-f-from readers c-c-com-m-m-menting on our s-s-social and m-m-music pages, s-s-so they m-must b-b-be? f-f-finding greater p-pl-p-pleasure out of them."

"And let's cut out the short story. I can't think many people read it anyway."

"Have the big boys in government been working on you, Don?"

"Frankly yes."

"Why don't they pursue humane policies?"

"It's neither your fight nor mine. It's the black man's."

"These chaps like it you know — when *City Post* splashes its pages with violence and sex because it justifies their belief that the black man is degenerate."

Cecil gives me a dirty look. I know Don knows we don't like each other, Cecil and I. I know it's his bleeding obsession with tabloid journalism and the conceit over the rise in *City Post's* circulation figures that I detest, even though *Bongo* is not on the downgrade either. Who the hell does he think he is!

Don Haley never lists down orders and gives them in a formal manner. But he brings them in during a discussion; you can't mistake them for suggestions. His eyes tell you that it would be folly to.

"I must go to Streuben and Dinokana," I said to him when things blew up in that quarter.

"Why not just send Bob to take photographs and we can use stuff from the dailies and just angle it carefully."

"Look, Don, this is a hell of a blowup and we'd look silly to come out with a secondhand text. Bob is a photographer, not a reporter."

"Okay, okay if you insist. But angle it carefully."

Cecil insisted I take his photographer, Peter, instead of Bob, so he need not send a reporter. He could use my stuff if I phone it through in time.

"I can get you some stuff to smear on his desk," Lazy had said too me one day.

"Whose desk?"

"Cecil's."

"What for?"

"So he stays off your back and doesn't obstruct you the way he's doing."

"I appreciate your sympathy. But where would you get the stuff?"

"My father knows a witchdoctor — one from the north country — they're tops in black magic."

"You can't believe in that kind of nonsense!"

“Why do you think you can’t sack me although I booze a bit too much now and again!”

“An understatement. Now go off, Lazy.”

“Know what the stuff’d do to him? His hand would stop halfway between his tin of tablets and the mouth.”

“How long?”

“Forever, till the witch doctor undid the magic. Imagine—the poetry of motion arrested—a fit subject for an Epstein bronze.”

And Lazy laughed aloud.

Nora’s smooth black face close to my no longer infant’s face. I hold it in my hands and draw it closer. I kiss it and her face leans on my left palm I release my right which slips down her back and when she throws her left arm over my back to complete the embrace something explodes inside me and I wake up in a jerk which leaves a pin quivering down my back and she is not there, was never there never.

...

I wonder how far Timi is. . . .

I think he represented one side of me—the side I never wanted to acknowledge. Like the policeman who charges upon a crowd with his baton and bludgeons those he can get at. His ferocity increases maybe because there’s some antithetical human quality in himself he refused to acknowledge. I like journalism. I opted for it when I refused to practice engineering which would have paid me twice as much and which offered higher and higher prospects for an executive

position. I'm not sorry. And when magazine journalism came my way I jumped at it. I'm not sorry for it: it fulfills my creative urge.

But what does one do when the big bullies in government harass you through their secret police? When they tell you: You can go on publishing because we don't want to tamper with the freedom of the press. And then when you criticize their brutality you're told you're abusing privilege and freedom? When they tell you you should be lucky you're not in Russia? You know they'll ban you or your paper or both, ban some of your staff. They'll put the screws on you so that either you go out of circulation or you publish harmless material. Don Haley has chosen the latter.

Another question: what do you do when you realize you're operating a paper for only a segment of the nation—for nonwhites, because some of their interests, their yearnings, aspirations, hopes and fears, their music, their politics, their economics, their lives as individuals and as communities are segregated; because they make up a separate ghetto of the human drama? My rationalization has been that if we find ghettos and we lack the instruments to remove them, we must at least make them reasonably self-sufficient. We have to help them to retain their morale. Papers are not only to inform but to interest people in their own weakness and strength, their failures and successes. If one accepts, as I do, that politics are an expression of people's yearnings and hopes and fears and therefore a vital part of communal life, how can we justify our avoidance of them or our nibbling at the edges of political life?

Fear must be the only answer. Don is afraid, I'm afraid, so is Cecil—all of us white. But why should we be, our bosses in government say, as long as we obey the law and to hell with our consciences? Fear. The bosses are also afraid because they know that they have created the conditions for agitation. And so they grow tougher. Fear. The radical white man who goes to the torture cells, who is placed under

house arrest, who is serving a life sentence on Merino Island—these people have to a large extent overcome their fear. We who still operate our media of communication after *New Age*, *Fighting Talk*, *Torch* have been banned because their resistance politics are afraid to endure the same fate. Fear. So many whites have a liberal disposition and want equality for all and know they would find greater security in a nonracial society. But they are afraid. Afraid that they may be following a false signal, afraid of physically pitting their liberal ideas against fascism, against power. . . .”

“Dinner is ready, sir. Is Dr. Simons coming tonight, sir?”

“No, Nora. He will come only once a day now. If my mother rings, tell her I’m sleeping, eh?” My mother’s face never hovers over me in my dreams or fancies, but a black rejected face hovers over me with deep concern that has nothing to do with wages—so meager anyhow. Mother talks too much for e now the way I have never noticed before. Now I seem to hear nothing from her but words words winding round and round badgering me, badgering Father who runs for cover in an invisible cocoon of stoicism. . . . Father, a retired mathematics professor walking about with a pipe-smoking detachment as if life were an eternal maze of angles and triangles and quadrilaterals and trapeziums and circles and tangents. . . .

“Why are you sitting on a broken chair, Felix, naughty boy?”

“All the other chairs are occupied, dear.”

“Why don’t you take mine, Felix?”

“You’re sitting on it, dear.”

“Funny man, your father, Steven. Well, either of you must repair the thing. Anyone want some more tea—Millie? Jenny? Merv? Monty? Steve? Felix?”

Whenever Don pressures me, I find myself pressuring my staff: how else? Hey show me they resent it: how else? Over and above this is the problem I have with Pan. As my assistant, he should be supervising. Lazy’s, Bob’s, Jurgen’s, Si’s wrk. Si, by the way, is our new political reporter. But I do all this plus Pan’s own work. He can lay out a story on Saturday and not come to work on Monday and two or three days later. Then I have to rummage in his drawers for the layout. He often comes to work on Mondays with a bruised face. I rant into a train engine and stopped it, he invariably says. But the other boys are bound to tell me how he was beaten up at West Town.

“Frightfully intelligence,” Sheila Shulamuth said once of Pan. His intelligence is continually bruising him because I think it tells him to be responsible but his other and more wayward self negates this. The only way is for him to lull his intelligence to sleep. He writes a prose that seems to crackle like a live fire. He uses a bruising idiom. It stays on the ground as if it were always capturing the visual quality of things. . . .

Bob, our photographer, is a mulatto, tall and thin. He walks as if his body were made of plasticine, as if he were kept on his legs by some remote control. Pan and Bob went to Mahikeng in the southwest some two hundred miles from Tirong and just over the border for a story about a detention camp for deposed rebellious chiefs. They brought back nothing but a tall story about how they failed to make contact. Yet a magnificent cameraman, Bob is.

Then there is Lazy, my sub. A little good-humored lad whose father often beats him up as if he were a mere boy, because he insults his stepmother when he is soused.

Timi—he stayed on the job. I wonder how far he is, if he has not been intercepted and is being kept in some godforsaken jail. Only his attendance was predictable, dependable, but he was unhappy. Those who love the fast life *Bongo* and *City Post* affords think part of the game is a day's work broken into by a quickie at Polly's backyard shebeen, where there is also a possibility of a love adventure. And yet they turn to work to my deadline. *Bongo* flourishes.

"I'm very fond of you, Naledi. Madly."

"You're a white man, Mr. Cartwright."

"Does it matter?"

"It does to other white people who won't let you."

"Do you think Monty and I are the same as other white people?"

"Diliza says you're all the same."

"What do *you* say?"

"I've only been in Tirong for nine months, so I cannot know. But you are white, Mr. Cartwright."

It's no more in Monty's house. It's here in my flat. I take her by the arms and press her to me: "Naledi, I love you, I love you," I cry. "Come to me, come to me." Her muscles relax and the soft warmth from her bosom passes into me and the undulating waves break on the shore and she struggles to be free and she lets out a cry. When the waves recede I hear a knock at the door and a hard and gruff voice breaks through: *Open! Police!*

Breakfast is ready, sir," Nora announces at the door where the police should be.

"Confound it!"

"What is that, sir?"

"Nothing, Nora."

"Water to wash, sir?"

"Yes, please."

"Did you sleep well, sir?"

"Yes, thank you. Jack's drug sings an everlasting lullaby and caps it with strange dreams."

"A bad dream, sir?"

"N-no."

"Then it is all right, sir. A troubled mind breeds bad dreams, as my people say."

The first time I ever dream of Naledi, I reflect.

When I met you I felt I'd come to the end of my search. I still feel so. I love, you Steve. . . .

Sheila's letter: so much like the others.

“It aches, man, it sails up to the shoulder blades and then seems to fall down in cataracts to a base at the lower back and weighs me down down.”

“Don’t be theatrical with me, Steve, you know me better than that! Maybe you dreamt riding a bucking bronco, eh?”

“No quips with me, Jack Simons. Right—I’m afraid of pain and when it’s got me my whole skin and bones and muscle seem to have trapped it and some little animal seems to be chasing it around while it tries to spring clear of the trap.”

“Tck, tck—too theatrical—missed your profession me boy.”

I went to see Naledi at the earliest opportunity after their return from Goshen. And none too soon: she was going home to Dinokana to see her parents. She caught my eyes staring at her and became bashful. For the rest of the time I saw her face in profile. It tore and tugged at my heart, that profile, on that very encounter. Shy? I wondered several times after her departure. In a week, I mused, in seven days, she had waited in a village for news about her husband; in a space of one, two, three days up to this time when I saw her again she had found where her real grief lay. She was going to continue in grief. Her black blouse and black skirt and black headkerchief said as much.

A month later she came back to Tirong. She came to my office at *Bongo*. Still in mourning. She smiled and it allayed my fear of the unmentionable.

“How are the old folks at home?”

“Still faring well, Mr. Cartwright.”

“Your Papa’s carpentry shop—doing well?”

“Yes, although these are hard times. But they are still able to make a living. My Papa—he is not so strong anymore. He keeps on saying the white man’s sawdust—you know he worked in a furniture factory for thirty years—the sawdust is still in his eyes he says.”

She laughed and I was teased out of my own gloomy thoughts.

“Mr. Cartwright, I want work. Do you know anyone in the suburbs who could take me as a cook?”

“Well—er—a woman of your training—wouldn’t—er—you’d be throwing your education into the dustbin.”

“I just do not want to teach, although even then I would earn less than a kitchen woman having no teaching certificate.”

“I see. Can you give me two days or so, and I’ll ask around. All right.”

“Thank you, Mr. Cartwright.”

“Are you staying at Diliza’s?”

“Yes.”

“Do you have some money to help you over the period of waiting?”

“I do have a little, and Diliza is too kind to let me pay for food and lodging.”

After she had left the fancy took me to ask Don to advance or give Naledi some Money. After all she was in need, she had enhanced the value of at least one number of *Bongo*. I had little hope of milking Don with any success.

“What’s come over you, Steve?” he said, looking at me straight in the eyes.

“Nothing.”

“This isn’t a benefit society.”

“Don’t I know it!”

“Just wait, just wait.”

After a pause, he said emphatically, “No-no, no-no. It won’t do for me too create such a precedent.”

“You’re paying for the schooling of one of Hank’s children after all.”

“That’s different, damn it!”

“How — they’re both needy?”

“Hank was a full-time reporter on my staff when he was murdered.”

“I don’t want to be disrespectful to his family, but surely Don, he wasn’t doing a story?”

“Well-well, it was impossible to establish that, but I thought it only decent to give his family the benefit of the doubt. Besides, African reporters have no union to turn to for help. So I did it out of mere charity.”

“Which you can’t extend to Naledi?”

“Damn it! All right, it will have to be a loan, see? As soon as she’s able to earn money she must repay. Will you stand guarantee?”

“If you want me to.”

“I do, damn it!”

I sent a message to Naledi through Timi that if she was ever in need of money, *Bongo* could lend it to her.

She never came to borrow the money. Most likely Diliza’s influence, Timi surmised.

It was no use assigning important stories to Timi. He simply did not have any steam or enthusiasm left in him. I gave him more subbing to do. Fine. He fitted into the socket just nicely. He also found great fun answering “Letters to Dolly.” Many a time he bawled out laughing at some of the things lovers complained about.

“It’s a bloody fraud pretending to answer love questions,” he said one day. But if people are foolish enough to think that they can learn how to love and keep their sweethearts they get the answer they deserve.

Friday night. Humanity in the African complex getting ready to fall apart for the week-end.

Diliza, the ultranationalist; the Kabaka, so called because he has a princely bearing: unattached but good stringer, with dreamy eyes

that seem to look far beyond the immediate object. Robert of the National Congress of Liberation now gone underground. Pan, Lazy, Don, me. Our host, Blackie. His bed-sitter in West Town. A refrigerator: an oddity in a black township, something belonging halfway between today's and tomorrow's worlds. Mozart's piano concerto No. 20 in D Minor comes ever so softly from the corner behind me. "No wonder the composer has such a grotesque name," Pan says sneeringly. But then he doesn't go for jazz or African pops either. Can't sing two consecutive notes correctly. Always seems to be attempting to sing them simultaneously, like striking a chord on an instrument.

"Suzan, Moll, Tandi, Keledi will be joining us later, boys." That's Blackie our host. Outside this room, out there in the yard that is full of rooms, is squalor. You meet the dirty water at the gate. In here, Mozart, well-painted walls, pieces of Swedish furniture, a refrigerator. Talk, ideas, hunting, slumming: a *Bongo* occupation for whites if they've a mind to it. Beauty in a slum. . . squalor cheek by jowl with cleanliness. . . Mozart within, screaming and buzzing outside. . . the enlightening creating an enclave where they can talk, bruise themselves and one another while seeking a clue to their lives, their eventual destiny in a benighted country. They will talk and hurt themselves, but their minds will always chafe and thrust forward and turn in circles. . . .

"Keledi, Tandi, Suzan and Moll will be joining us as I said, gentlemen. There's the hooch, help yourselves. Hei, Lazy, you don't put anything into the hat and then you creep in like a mouse!"

"Overworked and underpaid, Blackie boy. That's me Lazy in flesh and blood and seeing as I'm too thin to gatecrash I refer you to Don over there—he'll pay."

"I'll deduct it from your pay at the end of the month. Right?"

“That’s Don in flesh and blood. Seeing as how I’ve no choice, Amen, illustrious one!”

“Do you think exclusive nationalism has a chance, Diliza?”

“Why not? Whites, Indians, Colored don’t feel the oppression the way we do. They don’t carry passes. How can they identify with suffering they don’t experience?”

“I think Diliza’s right.”

“You realize of course that the government is determined to place Indians, Coloreds, whites in separate ghettos—some glorified, others real. We are supposed to regard ourselves in time as four national groups, not as belonging to one nation, the South African nation. Diliza’s theory would tend to promote the government’s interest.”

“Hei, hei, wait a minute, wait a minute. I’m talking about the period of struggle, not the ultimate social condition. While we fight, we Africans must be self-reliant because *we* feel the brunt.”

Robbie shows his contempt. He hisses it into my ear; “These bloody theorists who speak from the sidelines—we’ll throw them into the bonfire, just you wait.”

“Which bonfire? Where’s the bonfire?”

“Now, see little dormouse Lazy just catching on!”

“That man hates you whites.” Pan shoots a glance towards Diliza. “Hell, you can read it in the eyes.”

“Impotent hate?”

“Potential dynamite come the revolution.”

“Moll, Keledi, Suzan, Tandi will be joining us soon, boys. They can’t be long now.”

We aren’t so many. But the babble takes several courses: it’s a big crowd. The voices want an exit to spill out into the yard and its darkness.

“Don?”

“No thanks, enough for me. Board meeting tomorrow.”

“Who the hell ever heard of a Board meeting on a Saturday morning?”

“Chicken?”

“Oh nonsense, Pan. Some people simply must work on Saturdays.”

“Excused, excused.”

Exit Don.

“*Et tu, Kabaka?*”

“If I don’t get the hell out of this here hold—hem—with due respects to mine host—life will become intolerable for me in the next twenty-four hours.”

“Excused, excused.”

“Disgraceful for a protégé of mine!”

"If anyone can succeed in disgracing thee, Mr. Pan, I declare he merits a standing ovation. But in the interim murder will out."

"What murder? Who killed who?"

"In here inside my belly something has murdered sleep and I must now eliminate my anatomy."

Outside in the dark, a splashing sound following a few *hic* strokes. Another splash, yet another. . . .

"Told him, I've said to him before Don't mix your drinks, Kabaka, or you'll lose your kingdom. Anyone wants to take a trip to the Victoria Falls?"

"Is your Ma home, Blackie?"

"Think I'd hold a party if she was in? Where would I keep the corpses? Okay the Kabaka's finished pissing through the mouth and I'll see him into my Ma's rooms. Can't bear looking at a corpse lying in a pool of blood in the street when I've seen the owner the previous night and the boys will wipe him out if he tries to make it home. Keledi, Moll, Tandi and Suzan will be joining us presently."

Diliza's face is long, his lower jaw a bit skewy. He's laughing at me. The face swims in front of me, weaves and ducks like the head of a cobra. No, like a balloon trying to fly off from a string. I'll touch it with my cigarette. Pop it goes and Diliza's sitting in his original place, his hands dangling at the wrist from his upright arms like sunflowers. His chin on the wrists. It's the statue of a god; no, a corpse sitting in a grave trussed up after the style of an ancient rite. . .

"Lazy's sleeping. Carry 'm out!"

"Yes, Doctor Pan."

Exit Lazy, another protégé.

"Two bodies— anymore?"

"Hei, Sasha'll be coming soon. I forgot."

"That's Steve in flesh and blood— forgot."

"Jews, natives, dogs not allowed!"

Mozart's gone, finished, carried out of the door and thrown up in the yard.

"Tell me, Diliza, why do so many of our doctors drink themselves silly till they eat their jobs? Any explanation? I mean chaps like you are an exception."

"Hard to explain. Maybe because it's the highest profession a darkie can attain if you think of the five-six-seven years of training and the money you spend. Now, there's your man on a pinnacle. He has power to heal, and lives among people who are constantly sick. He can quickly afford a car and a good house even within the ghetto where he can improve and extend a municipal house. He has power, power, man. I think the ecstasy of it all is painful. Maybe the man starts feeling guilty that he's up there when so many are heaving and sighing and pushing and tugging and killing and dying.

Unconsciously he may be wanting to sink back among the crowd. So he sets out to destroy the public image that haunts him with this sense of guilt. And this self-destruction goes for many of the other members of the elite. Sometimes I long for the heroism of our

forefathers who pitted themselves against the white man with only spear and club.”

“Romantic tribal shit, Diliza.”

“That’s it, Pan, maybe we need a shot of romanticism.”

“What! Against this brutality? C’mon, man! You mean those fellows in the island concentration camp and in the jails around us and the man who throws himself down seven stories rather than answer questions from the secret police and all the women who slave alone for their children because the man is in jail—you mean these are not heroes and heroines? You measure heroism by the dim distance between us and your heroes. I measure it by its immediate dynamism, even by its futility. Hell, what’you talking, man?”

Fat fingers. Senses numbed. Head swimming. Human figures exploding with laughs and giggles and brandy for me please, gin and lime please, I’ll have whiskey—neat, brandy please you got ginger? Okay neat then. A song explodes:

Come nearer baby
Hela the bride is our baby
Come to daddy
Let him mop your tears.

Enter five feet of Sasha. Exit six feet, four inches of Diliza. Enter Suzan, Moll, Keledi, Tandi.

Figures moving as if behind a wet glass window.

Frenzied stamp on the floor.

Pressure is on from deep inside for something to break loose so the tensions dissolve or spill out into the next morning.

Me close to Keledi, Sasha close to Tandi, Moll on Pan's lap, Suzan in Blackie's arms; Robbie chuckling in between brandy sips muttering mazedly. Fuck it, I say fuck it!

The world is upside down, or I am. Everything's in reverse. Order is chaos, chaos is order.

Warm flesh, ecstasy of flesh. Befuddled sense of order where was chaos. Sense of control, defiance of power. Ecstasy. Release from one's heritage, tribal sanctions, one's guilt, one's dreams, fear of the law; release from fear. The interminable cycle waiting for ordering chaos to break it. Baptism by excretion. Ecstasy, warmth. . . .

Opening door. Whispers. Police. "Hei boys, police!"

"Here, Steve! My key, to my house. You're in no condition to drive. Through the window you and Sasha! The ladder back there to take you over the fence. See you tomorrow."

"The hooch!"

"We'll collect for a bribe. . . ."

The place—Pan's rooms, The time—10 A.M., Saturday.

"You awake, Steve?"

"Ja."

"Did we do anything last night?"

"Didn't think we were meant to do more, the room crowded and everything."

"C'mon! Only four couples and Robbie watching from his corner, too dazed to see farther than his cornea anyhow."

"Wasn't meant to be an orgy, Sasha, dirty young man!"

"I'm sure I did something."

"I wasn't so far gone I couldn't see what was going on."

"You seem happy we didn't do something."

"I don't know. Oh shut up!"

"And to think I came to Blackie's with the sole intention. . . .Oh never mind it was worthwhile driving up to the brink."

"Well if you want to know, Blackie's good at brinkmanship. He just wanted us to be acquainted and then decently develop along our own individual lines as he puts it."

"think there should be a follow-up, Steve?"

"Those are nice kids. They're a singing group."

"If you say so, Steve."

"Lunch is ready, sir."

“Bring it in, Nora.”

“Is the pain gone now, sir?”

“Yes, thank you.”

Naledi and Nora merge in one face. I can only ramble in my notes as my mind is rambling. . . .

“If my mother phones, I’m asleep. Take a message.”

“Yes, sir. I am going to the corner shop to buy some fruits, sir. I shall be back soon. Anything you want just now, sir – from the shop perhaps?”

“Hmm – n-no thanks, Nora. Oh yes, a packet of cigarettes. There’s money on the dressing table there.”

Naledi and Sheila have been on my thoughts all morning. What would Sheila say to Naledi if they met and she knew? I’ve never wanted to confess to Sheila my love for Naledi. First, she might think that this has been the reason for my drifting away. But I know it was not the initial reason. It merely made it more difficult for me to return to Sheila.

Chapter 70

Emergency

by

Richard Rive

Andrew arrived in the brightly-lit, but now empty, foyer of Milner Court and briskly mounted the staircase to the second floor. He felt much better after his talk with Abe. Rejuvenated to a certain extent. Abe always made one feel good. Really a nice guy. Andrew hummed

De Little Black Bull to himself. A real dependable guy. One felt fresh after speaking to him. De Little Black Bull went down to the meadow. At the same time it was advisable to be cautious of the other white tenants. Coloured men just didn't visit unmarried white girls at ten in the evening. De little black bull went down de meadow. Long time ago. He reached her flat, 19, and was disappointed when he found it in darkness. He brightened up, however, when he found a note pinned to the door. "Dear Andy" —he wondered why she always called him Andy—"see my letter box in the foyer." He tore off the note, then crumpled it in his picket. In her box he found an envelope addressed to him.

"Andy,
I've been visited by two members of the Political Branch who asked me a lot of personal questions. I waited until 9 and then decided to try and find you in Grassy Park. T his note is in case we miss each other. Enclosed please find the key. Let yourself in and wait.

RUTH"

So the bastards had already been to her. What the hell was all the fuss about? His gaiety was suddenly dampened, and he was back in the world of police-raids, interrogations, baton charges and gaolings.

He let himself into her flat when he saw that nobody was watching, and switched on the light. Her bed-sitting room was tastefully furnished, with Sekotos and Van Gogh reproductions on the wall. Her books ran the length of one side. Dr. Du Bois, Paton, Maupassant, Gorky, Steinbeck, Howard Fast. The record player was situated next to a comfortable couch, almost smothered with coloured pillows. The room led through French doors to a balcony giving a view of the University and the mountain. A kitchen and blue-tiled bathroom made up the rest.

He decided firstly to freshen up and have a shower. He felt a pleasant warmth creeping over him as water poured down his neck and over his tired body. He raised his head and allowed the stream to splash in his face. He wondered what they could have asked Ruth. They really were hot on his trail. First Grassy Park, then here. What the devil for? Having the wrong friends? The wrong ideas? Being in love with a white girl? A security risk? A progenitor of the P.A.C Campaign? Whom the Gods wish to destroy they first make mad. He dried himself vigorously, and then felt extremely hungry. Even ravenously so. He hadn't eaten all day. Unskillfully he cut the bread, warmed the coffee and heated the pan to fry eggs. He decided to have two, no three. He found some tomatoes in the refrigerator and sliced them up, then settled down to his meal. A Congress notice, faded and brown, was pinned behind the door, calling for a boycott of Nationalist-controlled products. The list of goods not to be bought followed.

He felt much better after he had eaten and, fresh and contented, he went back to the main room to wait for Ruth. Through the door he could see the lights of the University set against the black mass of Table Mountain. He could make out Jameson Hall and the Residences, little dots of lights against the mountain. Andrew poured himself a brandy and mixed it with soda. There was an unread *Argus* on the couch, but he felt in no mood to read. Music. That was it. Her record cabinet was at the side of the player. Smetana. He knew the work backwards. *Moldau* from *Ma Vlast*. My country. Patriotic music, the stirring of national consciousness. A firm favourite of his. He opened wide the French doors and a slight breeze smelling of pine blew in. He put the record in position, started the player, and switched off all the lights. Then he settled back comfortably on the couch with his brandy. He had always played it at Abe's place. He had read somewhere that Smetana, like Liszt, had shown that music might be brought in touch with the intellectual movement of the time, and had enabled it to play its part in the fight for progressive

ideas which could give a better, freer impulse to the life of Europe. How erudite and learned. Yes, sir, as Abe would say, what we need in this country is the development of all indigenous cultures for the furtherance of a truly South African art form. Solo flutes described the river Moldau as it started from its source high up in the forests of the Sumava. Yes, he knew every part of it, recognized every instrument, every note. Hell, waiting for the strings to take up the motif in the middle of pass-burnings and rioting, while on the run from the Special Branch. Fiddling while Rome burnt, The swelling of the mood indicating rustic revelry. Country folk dancing and singing at a rural wedding. The green banks of the Moldau strewn with the dead of Sharpeville and Langa. And waiting in a flat for a white girl he loved passionately and sensuously. Ten with Ruth through Prague to Vysehrad where the river broadens into wide, majestic stream. Flooding like the crowd at the Langa funeral. Black faces stretched from bank to bank. Dignified but dangerous under the unruffled stillness. Like the water at the deep-end of Hanover Street Swimming Baths. And then the increase in vigour and tempo as the Moldau shoots over the St. John's Rapids. A sudden eruption. Startling and ominous, like a crowd suddenly turning dangerous. Defiantly burning their passes. Uncontrollable like the south-easter whipping around Tennant Street corner. Or his mother's temper. Controlled anger for which he could not be held responsible. Which could bring death thirteen years before on a windy day. Long time ago, long time ago. De little black bull went down de meadow, long time ago. With the smell of sweat and wine and decaying vegetables in his nostrils. District Six. *Ma Vlast*. My country. Based on national stories and a grand, spacious, heroic theme which runs through the music. The brandy needed more soda. Why the hell wasn't Ruth back yet? Wonder what Mrs. Carollissen would tell her? The music becomes enriched harmonically and melodically and passes into a long coda, and is carried forward to a last view of the distant river as it sweeps unrelentingly forward to the sea. Down to de sea. Long, long time ago. When de little black bull went down de meadow, long time ago.

