

Part A: Thesis

**Diski 9 Nine and Other Stories (and Things)**

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**Stoffel Mahlabe**

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**Abstract**

My thesis is a collection of short stories that reflects the everyday lives of ordinary people. They touch on issues of morality within the current context, in such a way as to both entertain and educate. As a child I learned to imitate the wildly comical, sometimes dark *dinoonwane* and *dithamalakwane* stories I heard from elders. In my thesis, I draw on Amos Tutuola's exuberant style of retelling Yoruba folktales and balance this with the languid candour of Jose Saramago's *Blindness*. Stories such as Bessora's *The Milka Cow*, and Micah Dean Hicks's *Crawfish Noon* have impressed me deeply for their incredible, wild narrative strategies that still, however, emulate realism. Dambudzo Marechera and Can Themba are also present influences. Both have sprinklings of erudition in their writing, but in an earthy kind of way. Their writing contains transliterations that have a ring of the vernacular languages, an idiom that Africanises the English language.

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## **DISKI 9 NINE**

Nobody knows where the name Diski 9 Nine came from, except that it was dug from the deep caverns of that amoeba-like lingo-fontein, tsotsi taal, or South African street lingo.

Diski 9 Nine?

There, players run with the ball between their knees, crawl with the ball under their stomachs, sit or stand on the ball, kick the ball to their mouths and kiss it. They do the zigzag, draw triangles, circles, and run with the ball sitting between their shoulders. That's Diski 9 Nine. During the best of times, when the duende has arrived, some players have been known to use the ball to draw triangles and equations on the soil. There are players who specialise with heading the ball, some kicking back heels, some somersault kicks, and some – with a rush of blood – are known to run on top of the ball like they were running on a freeway.

There are all sorts of styles players have mastered.

The Tsamaya, when a player feigns kicking the ball and the opposite team member takes a hike; Show Me Your Number, when a player pretends to want to hit a shot and the other comes flying, showing his number written at the back of his jersey; Tsa'a Ka O Fora, when a player jumps over the ball with one foot and blocks it with the other, making their opponent kick up dust or grass; Nanana, Carry Me Home, when a player runs with the ball between their shoulders; The I'dolo Li Ka Baby, when a player traps the ball with his knee and turns around with knee on the ball and boasts in any style, some pretend to be conducting a choir as they turn around with knee still on the ball, the shibobo, when ball goes through the legs of the marker thus insulting him/her - and many more.

Diski 9 Nine? The more spectacular it is the more entertaining.

Both young and old share the pleasure of watching twenty-two men or women chase a round object made of bovine skin with the sole purpose of kicking it through goal posts made of stones or bricks or tins or shoes – on both ends of the imagined pitch.

All players at all levels have an insatiable appetite to score goals. All get an indescribable feeling of ecstasy, afterwards, and perform histrionics to celebrate.

Invariably, there are great rivalries amongst players and between teams. These rivalries may exist from numerous and diverse sentiments such as players crossing the floor and going to a certain team, or envy on the number of talented players in the other team, or team owners

fomenting hatred between or among one another. It may at times get dangerous to a point of people killing one another in their pursuit of perfection for their teams. So, when two rival teams meet exceptional excitement is built around the game because there will be roars of thunder on that ground. Goals have to be scored and plenty of them at that.

The townships of Mabopane or Bop-line and Boekenhout or Lebogen had two such rival teams. Both teams drew players from other neighbouring townships around those areas and no matter where their teams, played people walked long distances to watch their games. When the two met in a derby fireworks would engulf the playground.

Among people in the townships and villages of South Africa Diski 9 Nine is oxygen. It does not take a lot of imagination to improvise a soccer ball; an old sock stuffed with linen and paper; plastic rolled around paper; or anything that can be made round.

That can become a soccer ball.

Special apparel also isn't needed to play Diski 9 Nine.

As long as people do not run naked while playing, it can be halala with the game. Young boys stand in a line of any number that may form two teams, the first in front moves to the right, the next to the left and so on. Then two teams have been formed and the game begins. Two players who wear the same size of shoes may 'share' the shoes, be they soccer boots or tekkies, the right-footed take the right boot and ditto with the left-footed. That's part of life in the game. A sense of fairness is employed by all because everyone is a referee, but all must agree in their judgement of fouls. Diski 9 Nine is played in dusty streets, where most stars of the game have started their careers, in a soccer ground or any empty space that doesn't have stones or grass. During break, boys at primary schools play and by the time they go back to class their uniforms are dirty and stink of sweat. Depending on the size of the school yard, two to three games could be played on the different sides of the school grounds.

Renzo Razor played for Boekenhout Dazzlers, aka Lebogen Dazzlers. He could dribble the entire opposition team, including the goalkeeper, and score the most amazing goals since he could shoot bombs with both legs. When he dribbled past the opposition, he sliced through them like a razor cutting a piece of linen used in an artwork with a tapestry of colours. He could run in circles, zigzag, and stop when least expected.

His team, Lebogen Dazzlers, was poised to pit its guts against Mabopane Real Killers aka Bop Killers. Two outstanding stars in Bop Killers were Zorro and Chisa Mollo.

Of the three, Zorro was the ultimate crowd pleaser. He had deft touches and was often more stylish when he passed the ball, no matter how he sent it to his team mates. But still, he didn't have the panache, stamina and general vision that Renzo Razor had.

Razor was the most accomplished all-rounder.

There were no goals scored in the first half. Both teams had to change their strategies in the second. Chisa Mollo is reported to have once hit a shot that pushed the goalkeeper to the nets, scoring both goal keeper and ball. He also hit shots that broke the nets. The stakes were high. The Toyota car assembly factory at Rosslyn had donated a twenty-five seater mini bus. Some of the players from both teams worked at the factory. So, the factory was doing its part in terms of its social responsibility programmes by donating in such a manner. The winner would romp away in the mini-bus and the loser would get ten thousand rand. But in the first half, there were only sparks that were quickly blown out and no goals.

“Yah, bafethu, ons gaan bo di second half,” said Ou Stone. “Dae fifteen minutes sections of the forty-five minutes in the first half, ons werk nog mon hom. Keep watching Bra Joe, the kit man. He's our time keeper. He'll indicate with his hands waving an 'o' in the air as the sections separate. He'll wave one finger with the first section, and two fingers with the second one. First fifteen minutes, slaan die ball aan mekaar, one touch football, ta, ta, ta, ta. If tightly marked, dribble one man and pass. If marked by more than one laat hulle koppe slaan mekaar en jy moet dlula bor hulle. So daar, ball protection, power, speed and timing should be tops, you must run them down. Jy sien their back flanks is net beste, di right is slow and di left is n combination van bees en skaap. He gets easily dribbled en hy't nie brakes, dit lyk for my hulle gooi hom nie enough brake fluid. Wat jy hom gooi hy gaan val bo di Orange River. Laat hy daar gaan swem”.

This elicited raucous laughter from the players.

“So, Razor jy moet rove. When least expected exchange mon ou Papparazzi bo di right flank and operate daar, (only he said operate). Maak seker jy confuse hulle”.

Popularly known as Ou Stone, Blackstone Kgampere was the coach of Boekenhout Dazzlers aka Lebogen Dazzlers.

He had his eight-piece cap pulled to his right and alternated between touching it and rubbing his nose with his left index finger.

Then he paused a while and asked, “Any ideas from anyone?”

Razor raised his hand.

“Heita, bra Razor.”

“Yah dae left back maak mistakes,” Razor said, “so hy moet ge-dribble is in the eighteen area or nie ver van daar. Ons moet penalties and free kicks chaya van daar af. Hulle mid-field is bietjie swak, particularly number six. He doesn’t have speed. Ek het hom gehoor poep ke feta mon yena ke te phasitse bolo mon speed. Ek hoor net peperrereee. He tried to turn faster than his body could manage. Eish dae ou, he paid with his poephol. Di’s hoekom ek gelaag het’.

Those who’d noticed the incident during play laughed, now understanding how it had happened.

“Ons ken nie wat hulle plan,” Razor went on, “but of course we can’t plan our game around penalties and free kicks. Well, wat hulle kom is nca but what if dae penalties kom nie. Di ane ding, skiet van ver af, hit those shots Bomber or anyone. If jy sien n chance chaya, remember aim for the top corners of the goal posts or chaya dae banana kicks. Yah ane ding is, in our half no manga manga, harden your bones and play with your hearts in your boots. Your half of the field should be stop nonsens. You can rather kick the ball to the moon rather than give them a chance. Always wise up of daar waar jy is. For instance you can’t cause a serious card offence van n rough tackle binne binne bo jou half”

He said this with his lower lip curling to the right.

“Cause a tornado in their half, not in yours, wena Chiskop jy het dae ding om te se jy manga manga mon di ball bo jou half. If you get dispossessed you’ll cost us dearly. Yah, ek dink ek is nca elke ding is sharp. First half was just observation of how things are and you held on well. But we nearly conceded a goal. If ou Ruzer was nie sharp in the goal posts we’d be two nil down. So shapa hlombe for ou Ruzer and they clapped. So when do we get our first goal then?”

He scrutinised their faces.

“Phela we plan the side of our bargain, don’t commit to a minute or second but around how many minutes from the beginning of the half?”

Certain players looked at those next to them while others shook their heads and looked down. Others adjusted their socks and tightened their boots. All were aware that the second half is nigh. Then he said, “Aw right, no pressure, let’s go to war boys”.

The open ground looked like a square pot as people occupied all the space around like a big human wall. Many after-church people did not even go home. They went straight to the ground, hunger and all, to at least catch the second half of the game.

Moruti Phiri, a known pastor and soccer fanatic and neighbour of Renzo Razor, just removed his collar and went to his favourite spot on the grounds. He had a special chair that he sat on. Being a game of its ilk, many people had not gone to church. They had to see for themselves. Many who were not far from where the Minister had sat passed snide remarks such as, “Mmmhhhh, he must have summarised his sermon.” Some even added flowers and vinegar and created stories: “He must have flush in the middle of his sermon at one point said, “He o se o, he o se o, o e bona bolo ena e tla ho wena, o e tlhabe ka setlhako, o shaye own goal jwale ka Judas Iscariot”.

This being a home game for the Dazzlers, they had used one of the neighbouring houses as their change room while the Real Killers had changed under a tree not far from the grounds. Soon both teams trotted to the field amidst whistles and ululations. The Dazzlers played from north to south in the first half. The referee did his own last minute warm-ups by doing station running and a few skips and soon; it was kick off; second half.

From the centre, Razor kicked the ball to Spaza, who did a shia and jumped over the ball so it proceeded to Rounder. Rounder ran with the ball on the right flank, going past two players from the Real Killers. Then he stopped and turned and passed the ball to the oncoming Razor.

The ground roared and sustained the letter, “Rrrrrrrrrr....”

Razor trapped the ball and hopped on it with both feet.

Moruti Phiri shouted, “Tshasa, Razor ba tshase san, ba tabole mfan’ a ka!”

Though he was obviously meant to be tight-marked, members of the opposition team were afraid to approach him and preferred marking him in two’s or more. This often created space as he would quickly deliver the ball to any of his team mates where the field was free.

He went past an oncoming defender by kicking the ball over him and collecting it on the other side. The defender put his leg in front of him and tripped him.

That was a foul and the supporters roared their disapproval.

He left the ball to Bomber to restart play. Bomber changed the flanks by kicking the ball to the left where Nqele the Left Footed trapped it with his chest and lowered it to his left foot. He pretended to run forward but changed course leaving the right back of Real Killers to be wrong-footed out of the ground as he kicked the touchline ash and raised a cloud of dust.

But Nqele, mistimed his run and was dispossessed by Chisa, who passed the ball to Zorro who did his marakalas.

He scooped the ball with his right foot, and whilst it was in the air, he bent to allow the ball to land between his shoulders. He did a jitterbug dance while the ball was in between his shoulders that sent the crowd into fits of excitement. The supporters of Real Killers bellowed the letter “ZZZZZZ”, which echoed around the ground.

But before the ball could touch the ground Razor intercepted it and hit it past Chisa.

There was a combined sound of “ZZZZZZ” and “Rrrrrrr”, which created a spine chilling sensation. Razor did not run with the ball. Instead, he hit it again, to the other side of Chisa, who tried to head it, but failed.

Razor did not let up. He hit it between Chisa and another approaching defender. The crowd whistled and roared “Rrrrrrrrr”..

Then he did a Tsa’a K’a O Fora on a Real Killers marker who was puffed up and marked with his heart, as the argot goes. It was the same player who Razor claimed had farted. Tsa’a K’a O Fora is a style of play where the player pulls the ball with one foot to the other and lets it go slide slightly, before suddenly blocking it with the other foot. The result is that the marker is rendered so wrong-footed that they fumbled like sheep racing to cross the road. This time around no poep. When the marker realised that he would not get the ball he wanted to stop. But like a tail less dog he slipped and landed on his head, brushing the ground with his left cheek. He was slightly scratched and suffered the jeers and laughter from the Dazzlers supporters.

The game was a ding dong affair with much action revolving around the midfield. Both teams had tight markers, no mischeck.

In a moment of sheer telepathy, Razor ran from the left flank to the right, not far from the centre line. The ball was in possession of Rounder, who passed him with a scorching ground shot. Razor did not stop the ball. He hit it with the inside of his right foot. The moment the ball left his foot, it was accompanied by four small angels on the cardinal points and curled and curved like a

rainbow ever so gently and cut through the air with flames around its circumference as it headed for a goal.

The goalkeeper of the Real Killers stood rooted to the ground as he could not determine the direction of the ball. He just watched it whizz past him like a flash of lightning.

Before he knew it, the ball hit the top left corner of the goalposts. It was a goal that many soccer players, even the most famous, dream of scoring. If you did not see it live, you would not believe it happened, and if you saw it, you'd never be able to tell anyone how it happened. In fact, many people cried with joy before they could finish narrating the story of that goal. It was made in the realm of the gods. The supporters jumped in excitement, rolled on the ground, and some tore off their clothes; some players from Real Killers clapped for Razor because it was a goal the world deserved to see. That goal stands tall side by side with the best.

Razor normally celebrated his goals by running to the nearest corner. He would bend his knees and wiggle his behind from left to right while moving forward.

But in this instance he could not.

The crowd had cut through the grounds and the supporters from both teams were wiggling their behinds and shouting a continuous chorus of :“sheiiiika s’bono, sheiiiika s’bono, sheiiiika s’bono sheiiiika s’bono”.

That was Razor “Rrrrrrrra tat tat tat” of the Lebogen Dazzlers.

Some flowers bloom in the most unreachable places, in crevices on mountain tops. These will never be seen by the human eye for their beauty nor be plucked for their fragrance. But bees will reach them and give them to people in the form of honey. What about young men like Razor? Big teams that play in the big stages must claim him and display him on the stages of the world, is it not that ... all the world is a stage ...for all human beings? The goal was scored in the ninety first minute of the game and soon after the brouhaha that ensued, it was game over. One nil to Boekenhout Dazzlers over Mabopane Real Killers.

That was Diski 9 Nine.

## **BAFETI STREET BLUES**

The street was named Bafeti, after the school near it. In fact, it may just have been because of the monotonous U-shape of the school, which faced the street. If water could flow from the way the school was shaped, it would flow right onto the street. Almost all schools in townships and villages are made of two blocks of five classrooms facing each other and an office block at the far end, normally consisting of three rooms.

The street had characters aplenty.

There was one Themba, who was called Mthethwa, though he said Mothethwa.

His face was always buried in the ganja smoke. His face had developed huge hard sores that stood like skiet rekker stones and his eyes shot out like red golf balls. He always had a zol hanging on his lips. He was the noisiest member of the street and would sing songs that only he knew and understood. He also sang lots of struggle songs and would lift his hand in a Black Power salute when people passed by and he greeted them. The shape of his lips, which were thick and seemed to be glued together, made him shout Amandwa or Amannwa instead of Amandla. There was always a whitish to yellowish pus-like substance on his lips. He would remove it with the back of his hands but bits thereof always remained at the corners of his mouth.

Then there was the old lady Oumatjie, she of the big legs. She lived next door to us on the eastern side and was into the business of selling magwinya. As early as five in the morning, the air wafted with the smell of freshly baked magwinya. It was said she kneaded the dough with her feet and woke all the children to come and work, meaning their feet did the work.

*Jislaik!*

From sleep to kneading dough... in a waskom nogal ...

What if they pissed on their blankets and washed their bodies in the waskom?

Then later, at around their break time, she would go and sell to the learners at school.

My family were proud customers of the magwinya until we learnt of the instruments used to make them and the container they were made in. But from time to time, we still bought small quantities across the fence, particularly when amajita would help me early on Saturdays or Sunday mornings. Grandfather believed that fire kills all germs, so that was some consolation. My brother

and I would buy hot chilli tinned fish, baked beans, atchar and French polony. We would throw everything into a big round Tupperware container, mix it and dig in.

What a tasty meal that was!

Magwinya and monyobi, the mixed ingredients, went down real well.

The irrepressible Bra Mike was the back door neighbour of our neighbour on the western side of our house. Bra Mike was short and stout and his face as pitch black as a starless midnight. His face shined like a glass. He worked at the iconic Steve's Record Bar in Marabastad, Pretoria, the best jazz selling outlet in the entire country then. Sunday afternoons until late were the best jazz moments, grand oldies and new releases. He was always up to date with the latest jazz LPs. The music would be played in a 'you'll-listen-whether-you-like-it-or-not attitude'. Loud! Some of my friends would come over and we'd sit at the back of the house, not far from Bra Mike's jazz offering, and talk in hushed tones, listening to the music.

During those jazz sessions, Bra Mike's friends and associates would descend on his house like thirsty goats attracted to a drinking well. There would be curses and insults aplenty.

"Hey wena san, jou moer man, can't you see I'm polishing my shoes; you should go and dance in the street, jou fokon spy."

This would be said amidst the multiple: "Net daar, net daar my autie net daar."

This is the mantra of jazzophiles when tenor solo or guitar riff hits their aesthetic levels of appreciation.

"Net daar, my autie, net data my ma se kind," they would rave.

They would bend their bodies and contort them in various ways, touch their shoes, walk like crabs, roll their hands and whatever else. People who dance to jazz music are a crop of their own. They have their own style of dancing throughout the world. During the days of the Bill Cosby Show, he'd dance the same way as South Africans dance. It's indescribable, but can be a beautiful spectacle that relaxes even the beholder.

"Ek se Bra Mike shapa dae track weer my bra man. Khau phinde my ma se kind."

Bra Mike would parry: "Jy's maal, wie koop di goetes hierse. Ek soek nie scratches bo my LPs." But some, as a result of repeated overplay, were frying with scratches. "Fok jou man," he'd tell them.

Thabo's brother's house was next door to our front opposite neighbour. He is said to have had the spirit. Some said he was a prophet and could foretell people's problems. Every Sunday,

between nine and eleven, their family and a few other people would gather to hold church services in their house. They'd sing apostolic songs with a tiny bell serving as percussion. In some instances, they'd sing completely off pitch but nobody among them seemed to notice and therefore sa kosha ke lerole, they'd blast on in total oblivion. What is interesting is that the brother who was reportedly a pastor or priest seemed to preach the same text every Sunday. He sounded like some of Bra Mike's scratched records. His sermon always revolved around a man who was lying next to a lake and could not raise himself but was nevertheless seen by Jesus. Then he would go into total madness shouting at fortissimo:

“Rise up, rise up and enter the lake, the kingdom of heaven is waiting for you. The gates are open. Enter for the Lord needs you!”

His congregants would go into histrionics.

“Alleliya in the name, alleliiiiya my king.”

Some would go into bouts of crying.

My mother, always the social critic of such human behaviour, would say, “These ones are eaten by their own ghosts of witchcraft, that is why they shout and cry like that.”

“Alleliya, alleliyaaa my lord,” they'd go on, then break into another off pitch and discordant chorus with the bell going in double tempo.

Further down from Thabo's home, towards the Mabopane Terminus, there was Anankie. What a beautiful girl. She was proportionately built, with every muscle put where it was supposed to be. She was more beautiful from the back, where her legs seemed to sing when they trampled the earth. As much as I wanted her to be my girl, a thousand small birds would sputter their wings around my heart when I wanted to put in a word. My mouth would go dry, like an emptied tin of sardines whose open side faced the wind.

I would always find myself saying, “Is waar, is waar Anankie baby, is waar.”

Bra Chicks, Chigo Chigwana, who was toothless on one side, liked me because he thought I liked school and was a good student. He always had a copy of Prestor John from which he quoted passages that impressed him. He would never lend me the book because he said it was very political. I might be arrested if it was to be found on me. As much as he narrated the story to me, it would neither make 'a' nor 'z' with me. I wanted to read it and not be told about it. He lived next door to Anankie's home. Bra Chigwana always made an impression of somebody who had

read greatly. He was always an inspiration to us younger boys. Though a grotman, he was readily available to chat us up.

Two houses from Anankie's home, holding up the street, was Steve aka Stevovo's home, with his fighting wife. How they fought so fiercely but still would make peace and live together is a mystery. On Friday evenings, Steve's wife could be heard shouting loud enough to be heard from abroad.

“Kom uit, kom uit laat ons donder mekaar!”

She would be shouting this at times completely naked because she said her husband was not to hold onto any piece of clothing when they fought.

“You better tear off my breasts jou bleti bliksem,” she'd say.

Certain men of the street would often come to view the nudity of Steve's wife.

“Banna ke lona, you have your own wives' bodies to look at, fusek man.”

Anankie's aunt would shout away some men who would have come to watch the nude body of Steve's wife. Yah these are but some vignettes from my youth days at Bafeti Street down Block B, Mabopane. The place was teeming with personalities. There's so much still untold, but this provides just a little bit of that beautiful, youthful life. One musician of the sixties says, “Those were the days, my friend, we thought they'd never end, we'd sing and dance, lah lah lah lah lah ...” If days could be re-winded ...

## A PASSIONATE SEX QUARTET

She had packed up her bags with a clatter. It's as if she was not sure that she would attend the conference. This was a first. She'd never been away from home for two weeks; at the most it had been three days. This conference was going to be some serious shit, she thought. That night they made passionate love with Ringo, her husband; it was like they were seeing each other for the last time.

The theme of the conference was "The Future Is Yesterday and Tomorrow is Today". This theme had adorned the spaces around the conference venue with banners and was also festooned in neon lights in front of the venue right on top of the entrance. This is class and good organisation, thought Professor Ayanda Nyathi, upon seeing the lights.

Xoliswa, a lecturer from the Chris Hani College of Leadership, was in the throng of attendees. She participated in the discussions with aplomb. Universities and colleges in the land had through their leadership structures agreed that all institutions of higher learning had to move from an introspective position to a fresh and vibrant future.

Academic papers were presented consisting of thoughts of extreme radicalism in how the governance of institutions of learning should be shaped. All possible permutations of stakeholder inclusivity were thrown on the table and opened and sliced through for discussion with intellectual surgical knives.

Professor Nyathi, from Fort Hare, said in his presentation, "We must grab our dark yesterdays by their balls and throw them into the sunshine wombs of tomorrow. No longer shall we allow the rust of colonial sperms to dominate our institutions of learning."

Xoliswa found herself in the breakaway group of the professor from Fort Hare. He was in his late thirties. He was made chair of that breakaway group. His ideas and Xoliswa's merged superbly and they found themselves having dinner in one of the best restaurants in town on that evening. This was the first day of the second week. They spoke late into the night and the professor dropped Xoliswa off at her B & B accommodation at the end of their interaction. He quipped, "Tomorrow we will go together to my place."

Without thinking about it, Xoliswa issued a loud, "Yeebo!"

That night, she took a very warm shower after which she stood in front of a full view mirror to apply her lotions and wear her perfumes. She pulled a chair, wrapped a towel around it, and sat

down. She then called Ringo, her husband, who had understood that she would be the one to call since they didn't know her schedule.

"Hello s'thandwa sam. How's things on the home front", she enquired.

"Hello, my sweet angel. Arg we're fine here. No major issues".

"Okay, its hectic here, we discuss until late, but it's oh so exciting. I'm meeting with some great people here. Wow ...it's amazing".

She was saying this while lifting her breasts with her right arm and pressing them tenderly with thumb and forefinger looking at the mirror. The bulbous fleshed turned and twisted ever so gently and sensitively like inflated balloons. Her nipples were hardening. She wished for the very dark dots on her breasts to be tickled with a tongue, just brushstrokes ...mhhh ... just the thought of it...

"I'm happy if you enjoy it my sweet. Tumi is fine, she showed me her Maths test. Yerr ... jong she bliksemed it."

"Yah ... that one is a great scholar. Those are the ones whose future we're preparing here."

Tumi was Xoliswa's elder sister's daughter. She was doing Grade Twelve and stayed with them. She was short and petite, with pencil sharp breasts that always fought to pierce through everything she wore. Tumi, like all girls of her age was of such a disposition that she could plunge into a sexual relationship. It is just that she was still a 'good child'. Tumi made sure that she belaboured her with pep talk about boys and u- kujola. But the biggest lesson was from her maternal grandmother who said to her when she reached puberty, "mt'ana 'm, boys have a snake that bites girls. If that snake bites you child of my child, you will grow a big stomach. That stomach only gets cured after nine months. So, pasop vir die boys."

As she was talking, Xoliswa stood up to look at herself.

What a body, she thought.

She turned around and looked at her behind.

Whilst doing this, she applied her lotions which were always a combination of three things. She had bums to die for. Every muscle was at its proper location. Her thighs threatened to curve out violently towards her hipline, but were arrested and settled towards a wasp-like incline. Her figure was that of a human wasp.

"S'thandwa good night, I must prepare for tomorrow. I've been placed in a very strategic committee. I'll be leading discussions tomorrow. I'm sending a million kisses and I've just

wrapped my pink gold in a comfortable pillow of velvet and am sending it. Catch it baby ... eat it ... if you can ... all night..."

She concluded stretching the last two words with a lecherous tone.

Ringo released a mighty chuckle followed by a grunt and exclaimed, "Woza, pink gold. Hey you're bloody killing me neh. Now, now, now look at me," he said, emphasizing the letter 'l' in look. He was developing a bulge between his thighs.

She then dropped the call and continued to apply her lotions on her long proportionate legs, whose heels she put on the chair one by one.

After the lotion work, she put the chair aside and pulled a sofa. It had the depth for her to lean backwards while looking at herself in the mirror comfortably. She put a towel on it, sat down, pulled her legs up to look at her voluptuous pink gold. Its labia majora were thick and the black grass tapered from the sides of her thighs all the way up to the pubic area. It was not shaven and thus dense. The pink gold was glistening with wetness and she slid her right middle finger in and out, in and out, holding the lips with forefinger and fourth finger. She closed her eyes and gritted her teeth while releasing some delightful sounds. Her button of pleasure was so vulnerable and could switch on at the slightest provocation. Her middle finger gave it the works and soon she was shooting sweet juices while screaming moans in mountains of pleasure.

Meanwhile, back home, Ringo had an almighty erection. What the blazes was he to do? He had on a track suit because he had gone jogging at the stadium. He gave his crotch some brushing. He fought hard the idea of taking Tumi out of his mind... which kept on cropping up like a well-functioning piston. It was only the two of them in the house, Tumi was ready for the phanzi-phezulu but, ... arg ... he kicked the idea out of his mind. He was still going to assist her with Maths and English during her homework that night and, and, eishhhhh ... he didn't want to think of it. Damn, she often put on her skimpy nightie and her breasts stuck out like they were saying 'hello, you naughty boy'. On the night that Xoliswa left for the conference, he had to go outside for fresh air after her boobs had caught him by the crotch and gave him an almighty hard on. He went to the back corner of the yard to force a pee, which came out in strong spurts like a watering pipe. In fact, Tumi's English teacher, Mr. Benton Moroeng was pursuing her. He often sent her to collect books from the staffroom. The boys in class ever alert to such shenanigans between teachers and girls would hit cat whistles behind the teacher when they saw her. They called her Miss Benton de hallelujah, later cut out the name Benton and just called her Miss de hallelujah. At least that

meant nothing and referred to no one. What could Tumi do, refuse to be sent by her teacher? She didn't know how to behave when Mr Moroeng called her. Her heart went on a double pulse each time he called. She feared the dreaded words that may lead to them singing Marvin Gaye's 'Let's Get It On'.

The following day, after the hectic proceedings of the conference, Xoliswa went with Professor Nyathi to his place. Apparently, he was a Port Elizabeth resident, though he taught at Fort Hare in Alice. His house was massive but she didn't know what was awaiting her in the bedroom. After their discussion on several topics which were not heading anywhere, the professor lifted her up and headed for the bedroom. Uuh .. he was muscular and Samson like. Xoliswa made lame attempts at resisting but as she kicked her legs, she hugged him. The professor put his lips on hers and purred inaudible nothings. Then he put her gently on the oval bed.

She was slightly disoriented when she saw herself in the ceiling. It was a mirror. The professor opened a side drawer and took out a remote control. He pressed it towards the ceiling and a curtain parted as the mirror opened out in full. Another opened out on the side of the wall. He then took out another and directed it at the massive wardrobe. Apparently, everything had been preconceived and prearranged because from the corners of the room boomed Ringo Madlingozi and Oliver Mtukudzi's "Into Yam". The opening lines of the song, 'Hello S'thandwa Sam', echoed her very first greeting to Ringo when she called her. It is as if the lines were saying 'ausi, re a ho bona, o etsang ka daar'.

The machine was good with KEF Series speakers. Just the opening lines from the chorus girls overwhelmed and totally disarmed her. Her joints seemed to give up on her as they weakened in slow, subconscious degrees. She thought she was going to talk and lay down rules of engagement. But ... the beautiful lead guitar of Mtukudzi, with its lyrical legato and his ancient voice, took her to places never been before. Ringo's unique voice was something sent from heaven. The organ towards the end of the song sealed their lips like they would be separated with a chain saw. The chorus girls highlighted the stereo of the machine as the sound spread with a delightful aesthetic around the room. It was as if she was hearing the song for the first time. She did not even know how her clothes got off.

The professor, with a professorial delicacy, took her breasts one by one and sucked them in a way that she had never experienced before.

"Oh Prof ohh... ahh that is so sweet."

“No baby, call me Ma-Yandas,” he whimpered, like a puppy during a cold windy night.

He continued brushing her tits with his tongue. When her nipples were teasingly bitten, she released a soft cry with her eyes closed and teeth clenched.

“Ooohh, ma baby, do you wanna tear them off ... do so nana, rrip them apart.”

Her dark dots stood at attention and were brushed just as she had wished.

His finger searched her pink gold with frantic but delicate darts.

“Ohh, ma love, ooohhh..., woo dala shusha la hohini, mmmmh.”

She spoke in tongues and touched the professor’s weapon, giving it little pressure pumps, like a doctor pumping a high blood pressure pump. This could be a miniature baseball bat she was holding. She drew it to her pink gold.

They had it the missionary position way and upon entry she sighed...

“Uuhhhh, ma love, ma love, it feels so good ... give me baby, cheza la papa rini hagadomi, ruri ruri papa baby” she screamed.

She continued speaking in tongues, which she always did when she was highly charged up sexually. The professor controlled their rhythm, which was dictated by the thumping bass of “Into Yam”.

“Love, love, loooooove I’m cuming, aaahhh runtu riiaahhhh annanahiyaaaaaaa!”

A volcano that had started deep within her body found release through her pink gold and splashed juice on the bed. She screamed and scratched him so hard that some of her nails broke.

“Yeshhh ... yeshhhh yeeshhhh!” he screamed, when the hot lava from the volcano wrapped his weapon. “Fire ... umlilooo ... I feel fire ... yeeshhhhhh!” he said, in praise of the hot juices.

He had not yet reached the summit of Kilimanjaro. He stopped awhile while still inside her to enjoy her warmth and the short involuntary spasms of her pink gold. Then he stood and pulled her up to face the wall mirror. They were still breathing heavily with her making sucking and sniffing sounds through her mouth. Her body shivered slightly as it readjusted to its normal mode. He brought her right cheek to his left and they stood like that, looking at themselves in the mirror. She was beautiful, he thought, and he swivelled his neck to meet her lips. Then he turned her to look the other way and bent her over. He took her from behind and hit it with slow jutting movements, each stroke going deeper and deeper into her orifice, all the way, then back to the

short thrusts again. Xoliswa strained her hands backwards to grab him and bring him nearer to her. He grabbed the hands and pulled her towards him.

“Gimme ... gimme, my love ... all of it, faga yonke lonto leyo, uuuwiii sanda bandila shokri shantila I want it all, kidum kididum kidumdum. Touch my heart ohhhhh please touch my heaaaaart my sweet thing”.

Then he hit her with furious long strokes combined with short ones and occasionally slapped her bums. They arrived together at the gates of heaven.

She screamed like a chu chu train nearing its destination. The professor bellowed like an enraged Brahman bull. They both collapsed onto the bed, amidst heavy breathing, and hugged each other tightly like they were welded together.

She whispered, “That was sooo sweet, ma love. This *must* not be our last mating meeting please baby, promise.”

The professor just smothered her with kisses and continued to make animal grunts.

That was to be the procedure until the end of the conference. Like all conferences, conclusions were arrived at, recommendations drawn, and the last night before departure arrived. That was the night which could be likened to the *duende*. They made passionate love as if the sun would never rise again. They both sweated and swam in each other’s juices. Xoliswa had long taken her baggage from her room and settled in the professor’s house.

The following day they stood in front of the mirror whilst dressed. They were a beautiful pair; they smiled before they passionately kissed the dumano, last coach to Soweto.

There was a pleasant breeze that floated in the air as they went to the garage. Professor Ayanda Nyathi drove Xoliswa to the airport in his brand new Mercedes Benz. Another cap in the Professor’s armoury, that Benz was.

At the Oliver Reginald Tambo Airport Xoliswa emerged from the arrivals terminal with trepidation and a slight tug of fear. Would he read in my eyes my adventures with Prof Nyathi? Will my tongue slip and give away some things?

She didn’t know that Ringo himself was involved with his own internal war. Would Xoliswa find out about his shenanigans with Tumi? What about Tumi? Even though he belaboured it on her not to talk, would she break and tell her aunt that her uncle gave it to her in double dozes?

As soon as she saw him, Xoliswa left the luggage trolley and ran towards Ringo. They were locked in a clamp for several minutes, each with slight tremors of guilt. They kissed and remained doing that until some admiring passing white couple cheered them in a friendly way. They then broke apart and looked each other in the eyes. One of the most amazing things in the human body is the eye. Though it does not talk, it tells of the hidden secrets and mysteries of the complex human body. In the eye, the truth or the lie is easily exposed. After kissing, they looked at each other, but as quickly, their eyes scrubbed the floor. It was as if the other one's eyes burnt the other and the floor cooled off the heat.

Ringo went to collect the trolley and they left for the car outside the airport building. Xoliswa was not a materialistic person, but the Toyota sedan was like his sister's son's toy compared to the maroon machine that took her to the Port Elizabeth Airport that morning.

As Ringo drove, he pretended hard to be looking at the road so as to avoid her eyes. He referred to a non-existent car accident that shocked him somewhere in a certain road.

“So, ever since that accident, I am very very careful”, he lied.

Xoliswa did the same, keeping her eyes off Ringo, even though it was difficult.

They arrived home and Tumi rushed to her aunt and hugged her timidly. Ringo's heart nearly stopped as he anticipated the over flooding of Tumi's mouth. The situation was so tense that only a Caterpillar road works machine could break it. Each word spoken was like a flame that could burn any direction between the three of them,

Tumi was left with a stab of jealousy as uncle and aunt went straight to the bedroom, leaving the bags in the living room.

There was no real revolutionary passion in the bedroom, though. It was more the case of two tired beings who needed a quickie and to lie back.

On the way home, they had gone into a delicatessen and bought readymade food. They lied to themselves, telling each other it would give them more time to themselves.

After some time, Xoliswa left the bedroom in a nightgown to dish out the food.

For Tumi, seeing her in the nightgown was like a huge butcher knife being driven into her body. She also noticed with a keen eye that she had no underwear on. Heishhh ... it means they've been getting it on and she is ready for action, Tumi thought.

In the open plan kitchen and living room, Xoliswa engaged Tumi about her school work, normal domestic talk, and other social things. She wanted to catch on in the mgosi-vine. Each line of the conversation was like a knife was twisted and turned in her body.

Food was rationed out and Tumi took hers while Xoliswa withdrew to the bedroom, but before she left, Tumi asked, “Auntie, will malome be able to assist me with Maths, at least I am okay with English today”.

Xoliswa replied, “Okay, I’ll ask him babe, I’ll ask him”. She was aware of the terse ‘today’ in Tumi’s question and what it implied. She just wondered.

The couple nibbled at their food, and after they’d eaten, Ringo took the dishes to the kitchen while Xoliswa took a shower. He had to see Tumi before he slept. He had to confront the lovemaking ghosts of these previous days with her and gauge the temperature through Tumi’s disposition of how things would proceed during Xoliswa’s presence.

Tumi was at her skimpiest best and had put on a nightgown that exposed her cleavage. But her aunt’s presence forced her to put a shawl on her shoulders. In the presence of this bulldog she let it slide to give more fire to him. She would only adjust it when her aunt came. The Maths coaching went on, even though he kept on saying “solve for cleavage” instead of “solve for x”. So under pressure was him that at one point he said “solve for sex” on several occasions. Tumi was cool and just looked at him with burning eyes. He couldn’t look her in the eye, and at one point, Tumi asked:

“Mara malome, nou, what gives? What is the way forward?”

This question sent the bulldog to all corners of the universe to search for an answer, but what could he say? He could not give a lucid answer.

Tumi said, “Phela I’ll ...”, and she bit her lower lip with such a violent force that contorted her face.

Ringo shushed her pleadingly and continuously whimpered:

“I’ll make a plan nana, I’ll make a good plan.”

“What plan?” Tumi enquired. “Mmmh, you beda, yah, you beda make your *good* plan malome.”

She did something with her voice on the word “beda” and looked at him with eyes that could reverse a speeding train. No homework was done, but at least he had seen Tumi before he went to sleep. Their little bitchy worlds were broken by the opening of the main bedroom door as

Xoliswa came out to look for tooth things in the other small bag. Her wonderful smelling perfumes, odours that tickled the nose were on air and filled the room with a delightful aroma. Tumi quickly adjusted the shawl. In her last-minute packing, when she left PE, Xoliswa had put the tooth things in another bag because she had already locked the one.

Then it was time to go to sleep.

In this sexual encounter, Xoliswa screamed her usual nonsense but kept on mentioning the word Ayanda. It's only that the word was mixed with her other nonsensical gobbledygook, but it was there and could be teased out independently of the others. This hit or mis-hit Ringo's ears but ... Arg di een praat net pong wat sy anekant bo di heavens cross mos, he thought. He didn't know that that was to be like a refrain in a well written song.

Then silence.

Ringo's thoughts: I'm the head of this family. Will Xoli ever jump my dirty deeds department with Tumi? What about Tumi, she threw a threat in with her "phela I'll ..."? Can she really spill the dirty and rotten beans? But Xoli, is she the angel that I always think she is? This hayanda hayanda thing, is it just part of her poppycock or what? Eishhhh ... but the two are incomparable, s'true. With Tumi it's like going through the plier of human flesh. She's tight and at that thought he drew in air as he would push it out saying shhhhh. Xoliswa shook her head slightly and Ringo pretended to be snoring. She was not asleep herself.

Xoliswa's thoughts: Ohhhhh beautiful Prof. I'd never known that the cotton wool like clouds offer such overwhelming joy and comfort. You took me to the highest peak of joy. Ohhhh ...Ayanda. After my encounter with you will I be able to endure my hubby's tender and often lazy care. You were so precious and beautifully rough in your love making. Mhhhhh, she whimpered, pressing her thighs tightly together, with her teeth clenched. Ringo put his right leg on her body and she hugged the leg closer.

In the other room Tumi was in hell.

Tumi's thoughts: The first man to ever pluck my fruit is malome. I didn't know that it was like this. When my friends bo-Daisy talked about this I was in total darkness. Now I know and ohhhh it's so ... Of course the first two days it was painful. But, oohhh, ohhhhh, that thing is nice. To think that it is auntie who will ... she checked herself. Is what happened between us a sin, aai god or whoever will forgive us.

Xoliswa's pregnancy showed early. At two months, already the signs were there. Her eyes were bigger and her face glowed. Tumi's took a bit longer before it could be obvious. She had missed her periods and discussed this with her friend Daisy.

Daisy said, "Choma, skop dae ding uit man. I'll take you to auntie Wuwu to give you things to drink and terminate it".

Though Tumi knew of such practices, she also knew that other people had died while terminating their pregnancies. She kept on saying to Daisy, "Eish, choma, I'll think about it, yah neh, I'll think of it".

She knew deep down that she'd never do such a thing. Once when she stood in front of the mirror, she noticed a dark line growing between her belly button and pubic area, the linea alba. She kept absolutely quite about anything and went to school as normal. Xoliswa never once suspected anything about her niece.

Once, when Xoliswa had gone to the local supermarket, Tumi said to Ringo:

"Malome, I am in the weights."

To which he said, "Ehh! what is that my girl."

"Don't 'my girl' me, I'm pregnant."

Ringo screamed, "Iyhooooo mma wee!...Tumi, Xoliswa is pregnant, do you know that".

Tumi said, "I know, akere wena jy's di bulldog."

Ringo said a big moerskont, di's nou kak en betal. Haai? Both Tumi and Ringo did not know that Xoliswa's pregnancy was Professor Ayanda Nyathi's.

Xoli and Tumi gave birth to bouncy baby boys on the same day at the newly built Medi Clinic not very far from where they stayed. Tumi's baby was two hours older than Xoliswa's. Ringo was the ultimate attendant father, who brought gifts and love to both his children, or so he thought. Tumi's child had the unmistakable look of his father. Xoliswa's was a bit odd. But maybe he couldn't show that early.

Meanwhile deep into several nights, Ringo twisted and turned like a snake that had crawled into hot ash.

## **THEM THINK THEM CLEVER**

If it has not yet come, it will come, that time. It may find you walking in the street, or driving, or lying down, or deep in conversation with a friend, or sitting on your veranda, reading a book or a newspaper. The moment may find you watching your favourite programme or soccer, or rugby or cricket or wrestling or any sport on television. It may find you just after having made love, when the tense wires of the body disengage and settle to their natural form. It may come in words written on paper, or words direct from an unsuspected source, or a watching sympathiser, or a message in a phone, or a call. You may just feel it by instinct or it may occur in a dream. It may be a feeling of complete hopelessness and a numbed sense of dreariness as one ancient poet said.

They may live with you in absentia, some people. They may be here in body but there on the other side of the dense forest in spirit. They may be living with wild animals and snakes; creatures too dangerous to behold or to even walk anywhere near. Between body and spirit which one is the makoya of the makoya? You wake up every morning and look at them and think this thing is reciprocal whereas they may be far away in other spaces. You may hold them in a tight embrace and exude all the passion of one smitten like a seventeen-year-old experiencing first love. Love may flow through the pores of your body, but it may be flowing onto river sand. The sand makes bubbles when it receives it and the love disappears underground never to be seen again. They will follow you with the eyes of well-schooled secret admirers with intentions made of thorns and broken bottles that come from a burning cauldron. You will never know that their eyes are even under your feet, walking with you, under you calculating your steps, smelling with long noses where you go, what you do and what you touch.

You may not know that every conversation is recorded by short invisible men who are with you in every space that you occupy. Where you lead they will follow, said Carol King in that song. No matter how far you go, they will follow and by the time you get home they will know where you had been, what you had been doing and what you have in your person. Whatever thing you brought home will disappear like a mysterious cloud of smoke that you will never even have a whiff of. These people meet with others who may be close to you by blood or daily contact. They will meet in hidden corners and eat you raw in their conversation with long teeth that do not even chew as they plan for the worst to befall you. They may see in you a mine of many rich minerals that will in turn enrich them while they use you in their ill-fated dark secret designs. These people

are so hypocritical, they will laugh with you, laughter that they know has a fart whose smell sticks in the air for seven days and make sure that it smothers you. This fart, they think, will make you forget who you are, what your mission is, and where you come from. Their silences, in between their laughter, will be pickaxes and shovels that dig into your soul to discover how much deeper they may still hew the riches that they imagine you have with their filthy and lazy, stupid mind-set, a mind-set that wants to usurp and does not want to work for what it should have in hand.

These people, these hypocrites, their eyes will scrub the floors when they realise that you have seen through the dirty little intentions and tricks that flow out their asses. So say the Bapedi, my mother's proud tribe, mahlale a ngwana a ka maragong, ge a kgonama, a chologa. The wisdom of a child is in their asshole, when they bend over, it spills out. When they meet in their secret locations and you see them, they will scuttle like mice running away from an encroaching cat whose waylaying silence is not to be known. When you catch them and they cannot do anything about it, they discuss from where the wind originates as if they are creators of the weather and the clouds. They will point to the heavens and swear on their heathen gods that it will rain that night. These people think that life is a dry leaf that has fallen from a tree to be trampled underfoot by passers-by. Yet to every birth its blood, so said Bra Wally Serote. Each human being is born of people who love them, cherish them, and have dreams and expectations for and of them. Each human being loves their people and wants to support their children and kind, who must grow and still grow others within, who are kith, kin and kind. Now who are these nincompoops who think they can redirect life from its natural diurnal and nocturnal course? Who?

ooOoo

During his studies as a music student, whenever his teacher played songs for him to choose from, he chose the ones with a minor melody. Sad songs, whose tones were melancholic and often dripped with dark and hidden mysteries, made an appeal to him. Those he could practice on the piano until the sun rose and he would play them perfectly by the following day. He would never read from the score again, but simply play by ear. Why the sad songs? There was something infinitely indescribable and untouchable deep within him. He could never touch it even with the finger of his soul; it lay deep like gold and platinum that men have to work twenty-four hours and up to eternity to produce. At least the gold and the platinum, riches of the land, are visible and

tangible, but not that which lay at the very depths of the depths of his soul. Was it soul or intellect, he could never tell? Sadness was him; it accompanied his every step and seat and clung to him like hunger for the truth.

There were moments when he felt like crying, from what and for what, he did not know. He never tried it, to cry that is. He resorted to sleep and sleep would come in huge doses like water in a flooded river. It would embalm him, overcome him and totally envelop him in its peaceful embrace of half death. At times, he would wake up like sprinkled shoots of freshly lain flowers and yet at other times he would wake up like he had been beaten with hammers and sticks. The latter were days when his face would be sad and he would never meet with people. That is, the time when he would play sad music of the minor mode until his soul was drenched and besotted with it. There, in those dark notes and chords was solace, not even a lover with drooping eyes that seemed to fall like a high school girl would soothe him. Only the melody of such and such in such a minor key would lift him from half death to where the sun rises.

He would often think, these people who think they can control others with the magic of Satan, do they not know that there is a Being above all beings. There is a Being who sees all intentions before they form in the minds of all living people. These people, do they know that the hand of Him who is above all stretches beyond measure, His eye sees every space they occupy. A human eye may not see but His eye will see wherever they may be, even in water where they meet for their dark and secret stupidities. His ear does not have a plug, but instead, will hear all that they plan against His other children. Do they really think they can be above Him?

ooOoo

How evil people can be? It will happen to you if it has not happened yet. People will try to test their little mad and small and weak strengths on a life that belongs to proud and ramrod straight generations that have built humans who are builders of nations. They will want to test their strengths which are as weak as wet toilet paper on you whose every step is taken care by He who never sleeps, whose ear never gets full and whose hand reaches all corners, dark or bright. Go on and never falter nor be in doubt for He will prevail above their dark secrets. He will Daniel you out of their traps.

## THE TROJAN ANTS

### I

“Tsie lala, tsie lala, ... quiet please.”

Tichere shushed the gathering after the exciting speech given by Mr. Kondashe.

People were amused and excited by both his accent and the facts that he'd presented.

Mr. Kondashe was reportedly a citizen of Malawi who had found a home in Mahidi. He took active interest in matters of the community and worked hard at anything that was thrown his way. That morning, at the meeting, Tichere listened as a number of villagers argued against the donation of R500 per family.

“Please take note that our intention here is to achieve,” said Tichere. “It is our children who suffer. All of us here are adults who have children at this school. Batsadi, we have to change. If we build, we leave a legacy, if we don't, it will be the children who will suffer.”

The silence was as solid as a wall, before it was followed by a rippling rustle followed by a murmur as people swallowed the words of Tichere out loud. Nobody had spoken to them like that before. Tichere had said “our” children and not “your children”.

That made all the difference. He had arrived in mid-February and by May there was already a big difference at the school. Both teachers and learners were early and everyone worked hard.

The community appreciated Tichere and embraced him as one of them.

That morning, the meeting was held in front of the block of two classrooms. The floor in front of the classrooms had cement and chairs had been arranged for the meeting. Some parents stood on the sides. The school had two blocks, with one block having two classrooms and the other block, three. In the block of three classrooms, one room was used as a staffroom. A new block consisting of five classrooms was being built but was abandoned at around knee level in height when the previous principal left. The coming of Tichere was either a glimmer of hope or a perpetuation of more of the same. A number of influential community members argued against continuing with the building. Others wanted to give him a chance. The community had lost all confidence in people like Tichere, who were helicoptered from outside to come and work in their village and they referred to them as makomver. That's the damage that the previous principal Mr. Sidney Mosweu had done. It was believed that he had chowed the money that the community had

collected for the building of the block. Even Tichere's arrival had put a stop to all that, they were still bitter.

Mahidi High School was located in the village of Mahidi. The village was about sixty-seven to seventy-eight kilometres north west of the town of Warmbaths in the Northern Province of South Africa. The village shot to sudden prominence when an asbestos mine was discovered in a clearing at the forest of Ga Mamphasu, about ten kilometres on the western side of the village. Men were digging for concrete that was to assist Mr Koekemoer of Warmbaths, a prominent businessman, to expand his commercial interests. He realised that there was asbestos where they were digging. Koekemoer called his friend, a man with whom he'd worked in an asbestos mine in the past, to come and verify whether he was indeed right about the prospect of the mineral. Fanie, his friend, came and agreed that it was indeed asbestos. They decided to pool their resources together and negotiated with the chief of Mahidi for him to give them the land. An agreement was struck that they would pay a certain amount to the village per month. They then built the necessary infrastructure to get things off the ground for the proper functioning of the mine. In the sea of joblessness that was abroad, it was easy to get a workforce. The men were accommodated in compounds with proper ablutions. There was a kitchen and an elaborate dining hall. Experience had taught Koekemoer and Fanie to treat workers properly and with respect, otherwise strikes would break and disrupt the normal running of work. They wanted to avoid that by all means. In the end, the village started to grow as people from other places bought stands to settle in Mahidi. Most of the miners who came to the village also made the place their permanent home.

Tichere held several meetings with his staff members. He believed in productive meetings but besides he had to win them over. He observed the interests of his staff members and delegated responsibilities according to their interests and talents. He realised, though, that some were still dragging their feet.

In one of his early staff meetings, he told them that they did not do anyone a favour by dedicating themselves to working hard and teaching the African child.

Most of the teachers hailed from this same village and he asked them whom they expected to come and teach their children.

One woman who taught Mathematics, Matshediso, or Tshidi, who had been gatvol with the goings on at school, cried out bitterly. She never knew what to say nor do when her colleagues behaved like skunks. She felt lost. The coming of Tichere restored confidence and reassured her conscience that at least things would be done properly and she had been right all along. Tichere put emphasis on professionalism.

“Professionalism cannot be bought anywhere. It is in you and is fostered by the career that you have chosen. The men and women with whom you trained in the colleges would laugh from sunrise to sunset if they knew what you were doing here. Wise up and do the right thing. Teach. Produce. Be professional in your everyday dealings, you owe it to your profession and to these innocent children.”

Apart from his meetings, Tichere often changed his leadership style. He was fond of leading from the back and directing and intervening only when it was necessary.

It was in their third kgotha-kgothe community meeting – a huge gathering of the villagers – that Tichere made them believe that things could happen if they wanted them to.

Unlike in the previous two meetings, the discussions were smooth, even though a handful of influential people still argued and kept referring to the past.

Masosi, who taught Home Economics, was amongst them, and she kept mentioning that Mr Mosweu, the previous principal, had never been supported by the community of Mahidi. Masosi was reported to have had an affair with Mr. Mosweu and was always on the defensive when the past was referred to and always on the offensive when it came to the present.

“If only he was supported...” she started, before she was shouted down.

Influential as they were, people like her could not fight against the tide of positive currents. The school had to be built. Their arguments were blown by the wind and didn't carry. Inside the block that was being built, there was already a demarcation of classrooms, but the building had been desolate for too long. Learners relieved themselves inside the space and here and there the smell of urine and shit entertained their noses. Little thorn trees and long patches of grass had grown in places. Each classroom had an anthill, and the creatures were known to move fast and take sharp bites of human flesh.

Tichere had nominated Morris to chair the meeting, and he had brought his most sober self, no manga manga.

Rumours abounded that some teachers were reportedly having sex with the learners. Nobody said a thing, and those who were thought to be guilty not only avoided the consequences of their crimes, but they didn't even teach. They would take liberties and go to the shops during class or, worse still, send the learners to buy them magwinya and so forth.

There were even those who called the nearest shebeen house their staffroom, chief amongst them a pair made up of Morris and Commy.

The story went that, one day, one had said to the other:

“Ek se Comza laat ons gaan teach daar bor ou Mamajika se staffroom”.

“Man, ek enterish di marks hier. Net so four pages wat ek moet maak”.

“Nee man, los dae shandies man, or vat di scripts saam jy sall hulle daar klaar kry”

“Djy weet wat djy praat pong. Hoe handle ek di scripts bo dae chaotic staffroom. Yerrrr jong wena djy fokoop bier in a schechi, ou Jesus sal jou donder. Onthou djy bo di Bible?”

However, Commy had ultimately relented to the dance his palate had made in welcome of Morris' invitation. His throat needed a cold beer. He put the scripts and the mark sheet in a yellow plastic Checkers bag and discreetly stuffed them under his shirt and they left.

After a few beers, Commy dozed off on a sofa in the corner of the shebeen. He had kept the scripts near him, on the floor, but some were sticking carelessly out of the plastic bag.

About thirty minutes or so after Morris and Commy had sat down, a group of miners from the local asbestos mine arrived for “a cooling down effect”. They were laughing so hard that some crawled on their knees after they had sat down. No amount of coaxing from Mamajika could make them tell her what the joke was. But after a while, one of them relented. Apparently, they had been given soup and bread for breakfast. The soup was off and their stomachs were running a marathon. Two of their colleagues messed themselves when they sneezed as they passed Mpete's household.

Mpete kept a meticulous garden and the pollen had probably hit the two hard.

So, it was achuuu and prrrrtll as their lower abdomens reported some mischeck. The two had to go back to their compound to clean themselves and their clothes. Those who arrived at the shebeen made very consistent visits to the toilet and soon depleted the helping paper there, a combination of very soft toilet paper, the one that tears and leaves bits in the area of the user, and bits of the insides of newspapers that advertise various household materials. One of them just saw paper in a plastic of Checkers and took off with the whole plastic to the toilet. He released his load

and wiped off with the paper at hand. He left the rest of the papers there. The other miners helped themselves with the paper.

When Commy woke up from his drunken stupor, he did not even know where he was or how he came there. Morris had tried to wake him up for them to go but the man was kwa love and peace. He upped himself, maintained a steady balance and said a drunken mbye mbye to Mamajika and left. That was on Friday. Due to the fact that they had received their salaries, Morris collected him again on Saturday but this time they bought take-aways from the local bottle store and avoided Mamajika's staffroom

This was all before Tichere came.

Now Morris was sober and he ran the kgotha-kgothe meeting like a true professional. Several resolutions were concluded at the end:

- Each family was to donate an amount of R500.00 (though not limited to the amount)
- The money was to be given to three (3) school committee members: These were;
  - Mr. Matome
  - Mrs. Habedi
  - Mr. Khutshwane
- These three were to open a Banking Account called Mahidi High School Building Project Society. It would exist only for the duration of the building and would be closed thereafter.
- All the Service Providers were to be sourced from the local populace unless there was no expertise in certain aspects of construction. In that case, they could source from outside the village.

The three nominees were models of rectitude. They had no tinge of greed or corruption, and after the meeting, they all had to go to the building site for a viewing. Instead of praying immediately after the meeting, Tichere, a famously devout man, had suggested that they go inside the classrooms to pray and then walk about. By saying they should go to the block, Tichere was following the philosophy: "tell him when his cloth burns, but when it's the skin that burns, he'll feel it himself".

It was Morris and Commy who led them and ushered them into the ruins that had to rise.

Masosi, lagging behind, prepared herself for prayer and sat on all fours next to a small thorn tree. She did not want to go into the classrooms. Somehow she loathed the whole marakalas. Her black skirt which was broad at the bottom covered her body and touched the ground. After prayer, she decided, she would just go.

The others all moved into the demarcated classes.

Tichere wanted Mr. Kondashe to be in the class that had the highest anthill. He was going to lead with prayer. He was well known for long prayers that often degenerated into rants. There, where he stood with other members of the school committee, which included Ntate Manthata, is where the ants were crowded.

Morris called for silence, since they were about to invite God.

Mr. Kondashe prayed and prayed.

Then, suddenly, there were lots of 'aaiii man' sounds as the ants feasted on them. Some jumped but those who jumped real high jump were those whose unmentionables had been reached by the ants. They could not scratch themselves. Such places were not called private parts for nothing. They were private.

Mr. Kondashe prayed and prayed, and as the prayer became longer and longer, so did the lines of Trojan ants climbing in the inner sides of the trousers, dresses and skirts of all those who had attended. Mr Kondashe interspersed the word Jehovah in his prayer, only he said Jalhovah. At irregular intervals he would extend the word and shout Jalwowowowovah. The naughty ones would open their eyes and watch him and suppress sniggers as his cheeks would bump on his toothless gums. He was a spectacle to behold, eyes closed behind his large spectacles, beads of sweat dripping from his forehead and his cheeks going in and out like something that was being shook by the wind. The ants were all crawling upwards in their clothes. Inside his trousers, Mr. Kondashe had put on long johns that were torn at the knees. The right leg had a hole at both the front and the back. He also had on sandals that hugged his heels, although he had put on socks.

The Trojan Ants managed to go through those openings; where cloth and muscle blocked the way, they settled for little bites that made him stomp his feet interchangeably. Where he stomped, there the Trojan Ants gathered in multitudes. Then suddenly: booorrooooo, booorroooo boro boro booorroooo Mr Kondashe screamed, and people who were themselves bit by the ants gave their own shouts. Mr. Kondashe, unbeknownst to others, was being bored by ants where it hurt the most. Some ants were running on the freeway between his buttocks and were

descending to the unmentionables. Where the flesh was softest that's where they sunk their claws. Soon Mr Kondashe was talking in tongues, as nobody could understand him. He shouted and his mouth foamed, his eyes shooting out. Ntate Manthata also had his share of the troubling ants. He kept a bold face and only twisted it slightly, screwing up his nose and rubbing his thighs together as the ants bliksemed him.

Masosi, on the other hand, jumped like an excited infant after it had suckled from its mother. The Trojan Ants had gone up the interior of her skirt and where the cloth blocked their way, they settled for a bore. The shawl around her shoulders had transported others to her neck and breasts. Her unmentionables were on fire.

Masosi ran to the back of the nearest block and lifted her skirt, jumping up and down as she tried to remove the ants. The ants were running up and down her freeway, some heading east while some were heading west. Realising that she could not win the war, she held her shoes in her hands, headed for the small gate, and ran. As she ran, she wished that her buttocks could be detached from her body and run behind her. They'd be re-united with the body after the ants shall have completely fallen off her freeway. The big gate was not opened on that day. People started to run out of the school yard and squeezed out of the small gate like sheep leaving the kraal after they had been locked in for too long.

They ran. Young and old ran at the same time as they patted and clapped their bodies. Among the people who ran with top speed was Ntate Manthata. During his younger days he was a speedy left winger who tore down the left flank and threw opponents out of the ground. He ran behind Masosi and it appeared as though he was chasing her. He turned into the soccer grounds, where a pack of junior boys were playing soccer with a sock stuffed with paper and linen. Upon seeing him, the boys abandoned their game and ran after him, shouting all the while. They were amused by the way he ran. He'd often stop and do the Muhammad Ali shuffle as he pressed his thighs together to crush the ants. The small boys imitated him until he reached his home.

There, he went through the front door to the back and headed straight for the lavatory. He took off his trousers, turned them inside out and hit them against the wall to shake the ants out. He vigorously shook the trousers and patted his body like one who was putting out a fire. After that, he hurried past his wife and took out money from the wardrobe. His wife, surprised at all the action, asked, 'Ntate naare bothata ke eng, is there a problem?' 'Mosadi, go thata jong' he replied. He hurried out and went to the clinic.

It was a flummoxed nurse, Madileng, whose clinic was host to the teachers and members of the community who were all sniffing with severely twisted faces. She soon got to learn of the problem. She did not have the ointment, Zinc and Castor Oil, to assist them with, and instead, she took a big plate and mixed Vaseline with Vicks to apply to the small protruding spots on their bodies. In the meantime, she quickly drafted a letter and sent one of her staff members, Bra Tom, to go to the nearest clinic in the village of Lebotloane and make a request for the relevant ointment. They didn't even have Germolene. The first person to receive the treatment was Ntate Manthata who never wanted to be seen naked by women. It was said his wife had a problem. Though they had five children, the wife never saw nor touched his private parts. Now nurse Madileng had to deal with him, wondering what it was that went on over there at Mahidi High School

## II

By June, the amount collected by the three nominated representatives was over four hundred thousand rand.

Mr. Matome said: "Tichere."

And Tichere said, "I am here".

"I think the people have responded well moneywise."

"I hear you, Morena," answered the teacher.

"We have collected about four hundred and eighty. Some business people also donated. We also went to the town of Warmbaths to ask for donations. Our people support those businesses in town, you know" emphasised Mr. Matome as a matter of fact.

"No, you have worked very hard, Morena. So, what do you say, can we start to build?"

They all agreed.

The idea of building the block was going to centre on the concept of letsema, a collective effort. Nobody was going to get paid but everything would be facilitated for those who would be working.

A committee was set up to interview all those who would provide services.

In the end Thomas Khoza, was chosen as the main man. He would coordinate the project and sub-contract all other related services. Matshediso, who held meticulous records, had been nominated as the secretary of the building project.

Preparations for the construction began at the end of July. An enclosure was made under the big mosetlha tree in the school yard, and pots were collected for cooking for the letsema. People who worked had to eat. Drums for water were placed not far from the building and water was drawn from the river. Water for cooking was drawn from a communal well. River sand for building was found further down the river and placed next to the building. Cement, and all paraphernalia required for building, was stored in the lekgotla hall. Mr. Khoza had nominated people for different responsibilities and Matshediso kept daily records of the entire goings on – both on the building and the cooking departments. All forms of transportation, lorries, tractors, donkey carts and even private cars – were used to facilitate the delivery of water, sand, building materials and human capital. People of the village began to enjoy the whole exercise as adults and children got involved in the building of their own school. Tichere had introduced and endorsed the idea of self-reliance.

By the middle of August, the building of the block of Mahidi High School had started in earnest. People of the village took turns in cooking for the workers. All workers had a meal a day and all women, both mothers and girls, participated one way or the other in the project. This was obvious with the men as well.

It soon became clear that Masosi was not involved at all. In fact, she disappeared from the village for two weeks with no one having any knowledge of her whereabouts. When her children, who both attended the school, were asked where she had gone, they did not give any clear answers. The elder one said she had visited her relatives in Ga-Moletji in deep Limpopo while the younger one did not know anything.

She reappeared in the village in the company of a strange looking old man who wore animal skins. At that, she was determined not to be seen in public. At dusk, she and the old man would sneak out of the village to go to the forest.

One day, Ntate Manthata who was from his moraka, cattle post, saw two figures in the thick bush. The man was murmuring incantations while the woman was clapping rhythmically and seemed to be in a trance. Upon taking a closer look, he realised that the woman was Masosi. He decided that he had seen what he was not supposed to see and avoided being discovered by the two.

Young men had volunteered to work: shifting things that needed to be shifted, mixing cement, and passing on building materials to those on the scaffolding. Mr Khoza had his hands tight on the reins and Matshediso complemented him with proper records. The building was rising. Somebody had come with a plan to suppress the raging Trojan Ants. As they cooked under the big mosetlha tree the women sang and the men not far from them joined in. They sang songs of old during harvest times in the fields:

Mma mosimane, re etele pele,	Mother of the boy, lead us
R'o tshela kae noka e tletse metsi	Where will we cross, the river is full
R'dikile r' tlhahola, r'dikile	We've been clearing, yes we've been
R' dikile r'tlhahola skolokoti	We've been clearing the weeds

The men sang tenor and bass, while the women sang soprano and alto, and the village of Mahidi was united in harmony as they worked to improve the future of their children. In some moments, because they worked a distance apart from each other, some would be slightly ahead in tempo than the others, but in typical African harmonic rhythm, they'd soon catch on. The songs fostered a sense of unity and their work gave them an indescribable sense of joy. Soon the rafters were put up and the corrugated iron nailed on.

But Masosi and her old man had a sinister and cruel plan.

The man stayed in an out room outside her main house. He was seen only by Masosi and she is the one who made sure he was fed. Whenever children asked questions because they had seen him, she shushed them harshly.

Tichere never wanted to interfere nor poke his nose in the affairs of the building. Both Matshediso and Mr Khoza gave him briefings about the progress. He sat in such briefings with the three who were collecting the donations, Ntate Manthata and Mr. Kondashe. He often went to the building with them, greeted and checked on the workers, including those who were under the mosetlha tree cooking.

One day, rain clouds gathered and a huge hail storm broke out.

The hail that fell was as big as tennis balls and wrought havoc in the village. Windows of houses and cars were broken, and some cars, as well as roofing in some houses, were heavily dented. Lightning flashed fire and thunder roared as if stones would break.

The following day, people counted their losses and moaned at the terrible state the village was in. The first thing that Ntate Manthata thought of, was the block that had just been built. Luckily, there was no damage there. The only damage was that the huge mosetlha tree under which cooking was done had been cut in half. Some branches were flung far off and the branches were dark as if they had been burnt by raging flames. He approached Mr. Khoza privately and said to him:

“Morena, I suspect foul play here. That tree went but it is the school that’s supposed to have gone.”

“Ya, you see, things do look fishy here.”

“You know, I once saw that Masosi woman with a strange looking man in the forest. It appeared as though they were performing a ritual. She has been very cagey in recent times, disappearing several times from the village’.

“Ya, you see, it could be, but there’s nothing that they could have done to the building, you see. You see, right at the beginning I collected soil from the graves of the founders of this village and mixed it with some herbs. All that, you see, was thrown into the first daga of sand, cement and water which started the building. By that I meant to fortify the building, you see’

“Hey, you have worked Morena, you have done a great job. I suspect that that woman did some marakalas here. I saw her in the company of a very strange looking man.”

“Well, you see, her deeds will follow her if she was involved, you see.”

All people were greatly astounded by the felled tree. The pots were intact, some firewood was thrown a short distance away, and the place appeared as though a herd of cattle had trampled over it.

Finally, the building was finished and all the workers gathered to pray and give thanks to the Super Being and the village’s ancestry. There were wild scenes of ecstasy and ululations. It was not yet the official dedication of the block but the excitement was big.

It was Ntate Khoza who prayed, and he said in his prayer:

“You see God, you are a God of miracles, you see. You guided this project from the start to the finish. You see, there are some who may not have liked progress. But, you see, we knew that You shall deal with them, you see. Here we are God, you see, celebrating, you see. We thank you for that God, you see. We thank all the people, you see, who worked here. Their hands, you see, were blessed by you to bless this work. We thank the presence of Tichere, you see, in our midst, you see. You gave him the vision, you see to lead us, we thank the staff and the students you see. Now they will work without the fear of ants, you see.”

Those who knew sniggered when they remembered that day of the ants. People knew the idiosyncrasy of Mr. Khoza to either start or end a sentence with you see. They just felt it was odd that he could speak that way to God.

At the end of the prayer, Masosi entered through the small gate.

Ntate Manthata, who was standing on the side of the gate, walked over to her and looked at her in a reproof kind of manner. Masosi tried to hold his gaze, but broke and started to run away with Ntate Manthata tearing the ground with his veld skoene behind her. This time the chase was real and how Mr. Manthata wished that the boys who were playing soccer that day of the Trojan Ants were there to help him chase Masosi.

She ran out of the village to the forest of Ga-Mamphasu.

At the beginning of October, Tichere received a letter informing him that he had to attend a Workshop at Head Office for he had been promoted to the post of inspector. He had to leave with immediate effect, and even though the villagers were happy for him, they didn't know whether this was good or bad news ...

## DEATH IN THE FAMILY

Nchimane Moloko arrived home on the 15<sup>th</sup> of June, 1981. He was expelled, along with the entire student body of the University of Ubuntu in the Eastern Cape. The authorities of the university, fearing a full-scale demonstration in solidarity with the 1976 Soweto Riots, closed the university on the 14<sup>th</sup> of June and ensured that the campus was empty by the 16<sup>th</sup>.

Nchimane arrived at the Pretoria Taxi Rank in Boom Street at around five in the afternoon. He wanted to go to Mabopane where he would be accommodated at his sister's, to check on his girl, before heading to his home Temba,.

A taxi was parked outside the taxi rank next to the chisa nyama, and someone was shouting: "Zwakala si vaye Temba, woza, come let's go to Temba!"

Nchimane found himself inside the taxi. Only one person was needed to fill it up, now, and soon, a fat lady holding a big suitcase came in and put her suitcase on his lap saying, "Sorry auboeti could you please hold on while I adjust."

The taxi assistant closed the noisy sliding door with a clang, like he was closing a prison cell, and almost immediately, the driver hit the pedals.

"Ek se, kante waar gaan die taxi, driver," Nchimane asked, when he saw the taxi taking a different route from the Mabopane via Marabastad one.

"Temba, waar gaan jy, my autie?"

Fearing embarrassment, Nchimane said, "Oh right eish, is lankal autie e vaile van di dladla af man."

The fat lady, whose bag was on his lap, asked "Auboeti, are you not lost ruri? Look, it's late already and you may not have any place to sleep. But there are good people who can help you. I can accommodate you, phela in nowadays people just vamoose."

He thought she meant vanish.

"No suster ek is nca," he said.

"E le gore where do you stay in Temba?" persisted the nosy lady.

"Achi sizana man moenie worry that's my home. It's only that my intention was to go to Mabopane and I just found myself in this taxi," he said, looking past her as the taxi went on the incline as it passed the Pretoria Zoo.

“Mhh ho cho hore your ancestors don’t want you to go there. They want you to go to Temba. There must be something that they want you to see or do there ko Temba,” said the lady.

Shifting the weight of the bag to his side, Nchimane pretended not to have heard and stared in front of him like he was reading a newspaper whose pages were blank. The owner of the suitcase, the conversational friend, kept quiet and pretended not to notice his struggle with the suitcase. But could this lady be foretelling something? Could there be truth in what she was saying about not going to Mabopane. No, it was just talk.

The taxi offloaded people in the different sections of the township, including the fat lady, and Nchimane was among the last to be dropped off near the rear end of Temba.

He arrived home to the noisy welcome of his sister, Betty.

In the family, Betty was the noisiest and most adventurous: both of them clicked, and together, they could bring down Kilimanjaro with noise and laughter.

They settled into a loud and voluble conversation in which Betty updated him about the latest township gossip. What a great sister she was, this Betty. They shared so many similarities in their personalities, but Betty was the most forward. They both loved the same kind of music, cuisine and had taste for exquisite clothes. Betty was a great humanitarian. The family never understood why she often went to houses dominated by the elderly to go clean and cook for them. If there was no food, she would take the children of those households along to buy things to eat.

Nchimane’s mother often said, “Wena you want to be the mayor of this place, they’ll give you poison in the same food you cook for them, oho, you don’t know darkies wena.”

Betty would laugh loud, the laughter only she could laugh, which seemed to start from deep in the stomach and explode through her throat and mouth.

During month end, after she had received her salary - she was a teacher - she would go to the bank, change notes into coins, and go around Pretoria to give money to the musicians who busked in the town’s different corners. The musicians were her priority, but Betty also shared the money with beggars. She had made a mental note of all the different locations where most of the musicians played. In some instances, if she happened to find them playing a song that she knew – particularly the two blind musicians from Ga-Rankuwa – she would join in and sing with them for a while before she proceeded to the others. This is something that she absolutely loved doing, and Betty would often ask: “Where do you practice? I’ll come by and rehearse with you one day.” To

which they'd say, "Please come mistress," after they had told her. The Ga-Rankuwa musicians were talented and Betty always praised their guitar play. It was superb and they deserved to be recorded, she mused. Their harmonies were spot on. They called her mistress, a word used in schools to refer to lady teachers. She loved musicians in particular because she thought the educational system through which she had grown up had denied her and many others the opportunity to have been who they wanted to be. She wanted to have studied music, a career that she knew would've catapulted her into an acting career on the silver screen. To this day, she had lots of magazines about the entertainment industry, musicians, and film superstars, knowing deep down that where they were was where she belonged.

During the December of 1980, Bra Hugh Masekela and Mama Miriam Makeba, who were still in exile then, visited Lesotho and dubbed their festival *Welcome Home Festival*. They performed with many other South African artists, including some from Southern Africa.

How Betty found herself at that festival only she knows.

She brought Nchimane a T-shirt with the picture of Bra Hugh and Mama Miriam standing on the other side of the Caledon River, inside Lesotho, looking across into South Africa. The T-shirt had a map of Southern Africa and was captioned, "So near yet so far".

Nchimane took a long time before he could put that T-shirt on. It was a prized collector's item for him. He would often spread it out on his bed to serve a satisfying decorative purpose. Then he would look at the nostalgic expressions of the two artists on it and sometimes find himself crying. Three times, he had wanted to "cross the borders" and go to exile, but each attempt had failed. The people who were supposed to pick them up and take them to the Swaziland border had never showed up. In time Nchimane gave up.

During their conversation, Nchimane told Betty about what had transpired at the University of Ubuntu. It was graduation day and the homeland leader, referred to as Lucky Lips, was said to be attending.

"We said, 'What? Who? Never!' We blockaded the gate as we sang freedom songs. There was a huge banner at the gate written, NO GRADUATIONS FOR LUCKY LIPS. We actually did not want the graduations to go on exactly because Lucky Lips was attending the ceremony. We moved to the Big Hall, where the ceremony was taking place, and continued to sing as people walked in."

As he narrated, Nchimane sang and illustrated how they did things.

“First it was the procession of academics, then parents, then the graduates. We tried to block their entry but the security and local police chased us away. Eish ... my sister, you know people are brave. You know we had held mass meetings on campus in which we had said nobody should attend graduations. But the majority of those who were graduating said, ‘No ways, we want to attend the grads.’ One fiery sister, who had studied law and was pursuing LLB, said, “Yimane bethuna, if we don’t attend this year when do you think we will graduate. Our parents had been waiting for this moment to come and see us, their children, graduating. The university plans towards each graduation. It’s a once off ...what do you think the university ...” “Hey wena, sit, sit, sit man.” The majority shouted her down, during those mass meetings, and then, on that day, as we were singing freedom songs outside, we saw the motorcade of black cars approaching from the gate. We knew that it was Lucky Lips and his entourage. Yerrrrr ... you should have seen us. We ran towards the cars and stood in front of them and shouted U ya phi, U ya phi, U ya phi. We could not locate the car in which he sat. There were about ten of them. Then one jita with an iron rod pushed it through a small opening in a window of the car in the middle and broke it. Kante that was Lucky Lips’ car... Ohoo ... dust rose from the tarmac and grass; warning shots were fired and teargas canisters were thrown at us. One teargas canister fell next to the Big Hall, where the graduation crowd had assembled. There was a low window, which was slightly open, and a brave girl took the canister before it fully spewed out its gas and threw it into the hall. It fell on the stage, just in front of the man who was conferring the degrees.”

“Yerrrrrr ... jy was nie daar... Teargas has no respect for anybody. It has no respect for decorum. It causes people to do the most undignified things. The academics on stage forgot about dignity and became busy. They stood up. They sat down. They collided against one another. Some ran towards the steps of the stage, missed and fell on their faces. The Chancellor blocked his nose with his gown. They all did. As the teargas spread inside the Big Hall elders who had attended the grads sneezed.

“Oh bantu be nkosi, poor parents” exclaimed Betty.

“The doors were locked because they had thought intruders would get inside and cause chaos. Intruders were those of us who were demonstrating outside. The graduates wanted to fly through the windows. But the windows were high, only those next to the stage were lower. The whereabouts of the keys were not known. The security who had the keys had disappeared into the

crack of the clay soil. The Big Hall had only two exits and people were crowded on the exit points, two very narrow doors. You can imagine the mayhem.”

“Tjo, tjo, tjo,” wondered Betty, “Hey ne di bowa mos. I’m just imagining what papa and mama would have done in all the nyakanyaka. Were there no deaths, stampedes, what what?”

“There were but fortunately no deaths. People got injured. You know my sis that Big Hall was not built for Emergency Evacuation. Confusion, Mayhem, Hell inside the Big Hall reigned supreme.”

“What happened on the stage”? asked Betty.

“Iyhoo yho yho,” continued Nchimane. “Things were bad. They were fluffing the gas with their academic gowns, the way you do when you fluff out the smell of a fart out of your blankets. But I don’t think that was effective. Meantime, police reinforcements had been called. A Special Force which trained and stayed in the jungle. They were wild. They were given the instruction that they must hit voor die voet, hit anything that moves. Just when the door of the Big Hall opened, after having been pushed from inside, is the time when that force arrived. Yerrrrrr ... They hit graduates. They hit parents. They hit those in red gowns because they might have thought that those were probably the trouble makers. That’s why they had on uniform. One young policeman was seen chasing a stout man, Professor Linde, who had on a red gown. Hey, just imagine a professor. The policeman ripped the professor’s back with a sjambok, vu, vu , and the professor flailed his hands in the air and vu, he jumped a small stone in front of him and vu, vu but the stout man kept going .”

Betty laughed so loud that neighbours probably wondered what the hell was wrong. Nchimane demonstrated the slow running pace of the professor which was like that of a baby who was learning to walk.

“His big belly jiggled in front of him,” he said. “The campus air was filled with the smell of teargas and the sound of gun shots, warning shots. The police followed male students to their residences and hit that which they found in front of them. Some students who had not joined the demonstration and were basking in the sun at the residences got it jong. Some had nothing on top or just thin T-shirts. Hulle was goed gedonner. It is said some policeman cornered a student somewhere at IONA. He said, “u suka phi wena, where the hell do you come from?” The boy said “e Pitoli baba”. The policeman said you come from so ver u gqeta i Johanasburg, U gqita i Witbank, u gqita ne Rustenburg u zo boxa apha. Kwedini, ndi za k’betha so that your BA must

dismantle, B go this-a-way and A that-a-way. When they come back together again, they are AB, u ya ndiva mfana.” He hit him on his head that the boy smelled rain.

All of this was narrated amidst great teary laughter. At the end of her laughter, Betty said, “As for AB, aaaiiii but the police”.

Then on Monday, two days before June 16, we were given train tickets to voetsek out of campus and go to our respective homes. Special trains had been arranged, to Port Elizabeth, Cape Town and Johannesburg. Those who stayed nearby just left. Another drama happened in the train to Jo’burg. Seemingly, the ticket examiners had been tipped off to discipline us. But there some policemen with pick axe handles who kept on saying, “As julle wil kak sien, spring net. No singing in here, no talking. Bly julle net stil,” Nchimane said with a strong Afrikaans accent. They both laughed at the way he shaped and turned his lips to imitate him.

“The strict policemen travelled with us up to Queenstown,” Nchimane said. “No food no nothing. We were hungry as hell. After we had realised that there were no more policemen in the train we started to sing. We were singing freedom songs such as:

Senzeni na/ What have we done

| .m :m.m I m : .m | m : f I s : - | .f : f.f I f : .f | m : r I m : - | .m :m.m I m : .f |

Senzeni na se nze ni na? se nzeni na se nze ni na? se nze ni na se

What have we done? What have we done what have we done (Repeat through the phrases...)

m: r I d : - | .r : r.r I r : .r | d : t I d : - | - : I : |

nze ni na? senzeni na se nze ni na?

Betty was shocked. When she checked her watch, it was three in the morning and she would be going to work.

Both of them were tired.

They had bonded enough and now wanted nothing but sleep.

Betty woke up early on the morning of June 16<sup>th</sup>. She had bought a black dress that she would wear for that day. To her it was a day of mourning. Just before she left, she entered the room in which the tired Nchimane had slept, and shouted:

“Big brother, big brother!”

Nchimane stirred, completely drunk with sleep, and said, “Mmhhh?”

She said, “Look at me. I am celebrating the young heroes of June 16<sup>th</sup> 1976.

Nchimane wiped his eyes and said, “Aahhh wena nah? Hey, jy’s relevant. Wow the dress hugs you like ahaaa jy fostaan?”

Betty said, “I bought it some time ago and thought it would not fit because I thought I had gained some weight.”

“Nah ... it just looks every inch tailored for your body.”

Nchimane half rose from the bed and raised his fist and shouted, “Amandla!”, to which Betty outshouted him by saying “Ngawethu!”

Nchimane joined the shouting match and said once more, “Amaaaandla!”

Betty reciprocated once more too.

Then Nchimane sang, “U nziimaaa lomthwaaloo, u fuuna si manyane...yah neh my dear sister this burden is heavy and needs us united.”

Betty said, “Iyhoo, I don’t want to be late because, given a chance, I may address the learners, ...yebo”.

As she exited Nchimane’s room, Betty met with their mother, who said, “Naare lona, what is the noise all about so early in the morning?”

Betty just laughed and said, “It’s your son, he thinks he is Mandela.”

“Haai wena that name is expensive, don’t just mention it as if you own it. That’s a big name jong. Pasopa nana.”

Betty then went to her workplace, Temba Primary School.

At around between half past nine and ten, a boy of about eleven or so knocked at the kitchen door. Nchimane was just emerging from the loo and he said, “Come in”.

The small boy entered and without greeting said, “They say I must come and tell you that mistress has fallen.”

“Who is mistress, boy?” enquired Nchimane as his mother joined him in the kitchen.

“Mistresse, mistresse...” emphasised the boy.

“Which mistress boy boy?” asked Nchimane’s mother, almost pleadingly? She had heard the conversation while she was walking in the passage.

“Mistress of here at home,” replied the boy.

“Where did she fall boykie”?

The boy twiddled his fingers in utter embarrassment, unable to give more details about what he'd been sent to say.

Nchimane's mother said, "Okay my son we have heard you neh my boy ... It's okay".

The two never really understood what the boy was talking about, but soon, there was a screeching sound as the gate opened outside. Nchimane peered through the window and saw a car. It parked on the driveway and out came a tall man who must have been someone.

He had on a tie and a greyish suit.

Nchimane greeted, and after the formalities, the elderly man enquired whether there were elders in the house, to which Nchimane responded in the affirmative.

"May I come in my son?"

Nchimane said yes and retreated into the house.

"Ma, ma, there is a visitor," he shouted.

His mother found the gentleman sitting on the sofa and said, "Greetings Ntate Tloubata, papa is not in, he is at work."

Nchimane's mother knew the man – he was an inspector of schools in the area.

"No mme Moloko, I don't want *rre*. Please sit down, mama."

After she had sat down with question marks dancing in her eyes, Ntate Tloubata, with a dam forming in his eyes, said, "Mama, the child of this home has left us."

He then took out a handkerchief and wiped his face.

"She collapsed at her workplace."

"Ntate Tloubata, who do you mean, who collapsed?"

"Your child who teaches at Temba Primary School," he said, now breaking into a full sob. If you see an elderly man crying then you must know that some catastrophe looms or shit has happened.

"What did you say happened to her, why don't they take her to Jubilee Hospital?"

The man did not know how to bring the point home and just blurted out:

"Your child is dead, mama."

"Dead? My child? what happened?"

Nchimane's mother could not process that information. Something seemed to snap inside her head and a stabbing pain followed with a throb. No tears flowed from her eyes.

"Let me go and collect Mrs Habedi so that we can go to the mortuary together."

Mortuary? she wondered.

He then stood up and left.

Nchimane was glued to where he had stood all the while.

“Mama what just happened here?”

His mother was looking down with no words coming from her mouth.

“My child, they say Betty, your sister is dead.”

His mind reeled.

He thought of the big lady’s words in the taxi, “Ho cho hore your ancestors don’t want you to go there. There must be something that they want you to see or do, there ko Temba.”

## **IN THE HEREAFTER**

The Hereafter is populated by spirits of people who have left Bophelong (where there is life). There, the spirits, who shall be referred to as bonzos for men and wonzos for women, live a life of freedom and absolute ecstasy. The difference between The Hereafter and Bophelong is that there is neither day nor night. The Grotman decides when there can be day or night. Most times, there may be four days of light and three nights of total darkness. If there are four days of light on the bonzos' side, then there will be three days of darkness on the side of the wonzos. One thing that has worried the inhabitants of that world is that there is separation between the bonzos and wonzos, let alone between black and white. Life at Bophelong had been decidedly black or white. If one was black they knew where they belonged and ditto for white. The bonzos were still planning how to visit their white counterparts to check whether they still carried ideologies of colonialism, racism and discrimination. Grotman decided to keep things separated because He didn't want flare ups and fights. One of his key principles, Principle No. 3: "You have fought enough at Bophelong, there's no need to continue fights in The Hereafter." This was followed immediately by Principle 4, which read: "Having died already, there shall be no room for die-die, i.e. dying a second time." These principles have been summarised into ten and keep life in The Hereafter tight, fair and running according to schedule.

Though they had planned to visit the white side to engage with, the leadership of bonzos wanted to clear issues among themselves, particularly the political leadership. So much damage had been done at Bophelong by leaders who had vowed to liberate their people. The same leaders, after taking over the cudgels of power, oppressed their own people by taking away their livelihoods. This had to be addressed in this life. The climate in The Hereafter is one of mist and a slight chill all of the time. Sunshine never blares.

The houses on the side of the bonzos were rondavels divided into four rooms that converged in the middle to make another room right in the centre. The rooms in the centre were always reserved for macuzu bonzos, the leaders of the pack. The four other rooms were reserved for the maduna bonzos, deputies of the macuzu. These houses were made of spirit wires and translucent panes cut from ice. Since there were many countries in the world, and particularly with special reference to Africa, they clustered themselves into special regions – East Africa, West Africa, North Africa and Southern Africa – and these, depending on the numbers, had to be sub-

divided. The idea was to touch and reach all. In Bophelong, there were misrepresentations, lies and general mayhem on the part of leadership. Each section and subsection of The Hereafter community had its own representatives: from crooks, gangsters, tsotsis, political leaders, and leaders who had been incarcerated in the prisons of Bophelong for a variety of offences or non-offences, as well as the hoi polloi. For some strange reasons, all of these bonzos regarded the political section as the highest leadership in rank, above them all.

The leadership gathered at the shade where the mist was thickest. They called out Botswana. Each was called by their country of origin. He was tall and lanky and was shown where to stand. Then question time! There were ten questions in all but only three questions were of utmost importance:

*What did you do for your people as a leader after you took over the reins?*

*Are you rich from the resources of the land, your land?*

*Have you left a legacy of riches for your own children?*

These questions were all answered with humility by Botswana. He had had no intentions of self-enrichment, but instead, was bent on improving the lives of his people. He gave elaborate answers. The question of land redistribution was no problem as Botswana depended heavily on crop farming, but livestock was their mainstay. They were content with the export trade of their beef to Britain, mostly, but also to other parts of the world. After all the questions were satisfactorily addressed, the Bees of Bayon were called to examine any vestiges of lies that might have remained hidden. They came, the Bayons, small in stature but big in sound, they sounded like a skorokoro double decker bus on an incline. These were bees of The Hereafter, bees that could smell lies. They buzzed and buzzed around him and started to sing a melody that was so sweet. Each part of the harmony was properly balanced into soprano, alto, tenor and bass. The leadership all danced the dance of victory. They jumped around and kicked their legs and turned around and laughed in unison and said

:

| : I : .m | s : .m I s : .m | r : .m I r : .m | s, :- I - :- | : I : | : I : | : I :

Hi ye hi ye ha oo ha oo hi ya

Then Botswana was dismissed and it was South Africa's turn.

He was tall, also, but a wee bit taller than Botswana.

The same questions were asked, with almost the same answers given, with a rider that South Africa was under the cruellest settler regime. Therefore, the challenges were big but a lot of work had been done, the mind-set had to change across transversal sectors of society. There were cobwebs of tribalism, for instance, that had to be cleared in order for solid nationhood to exist. The leadership which held the reins was supposed to turn the tide and address the legacy of the previous regime. South Africa had to learn from the rest of Africa and take the best from each African state. Though there were doubts among the listening and questioning leadership, the Bayons were summoned. They circled South Africa and sang one of the best symphonies ever heard. This one needed no dance for it was a symphony in melancholy. The melody was almost the same as Mankunku Ngozi's *Yakhal'Inkomo*.

Then they called Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe strained and fumbled through the questions, indicating that the first ten years of his reign were marvellous. He had identified the problems and worked on them thoroughly. He kept on saying "uhmmm, hamma, hamma, erhhh" which some of the questioning leadership interpreted as doubt. Zimbabwe had its own vision but was crowded and clouded by the settler regime, which in spite of having succumbed to the Zimbabweans demand for their independence, wanted to continue to hold onto the land.

"How does Zimbabwean land in Africa belong to Europe?" he asked, rhetorically.

If Europe wanted to own Zimbabwean land it meant all the produce from the land would belong to Europe. That could never be tolerated, otherwise the whole idea of independence would be a farce. Zimbabwe, however, had educated his children (somebody whispered "her" children). Oh yes, her children. The biggest budget for the first ten years, he said, was on Education. Though there were a few good responses from him, those momentary pauses had given him away. Some thought that perhaps he had held onto power for too long. But the Bayons would confirm everything.

When the Bayons came, the sheer sound of their voice was paralysing, so paralysing that it was scary. Was something wrong? Though they bit with a strong sting the pain lasted for a few seconds but left green and red marks on the body that lasted for a few days.

This story shall continue for there is still Malawi, Zambia, Mozambique, Namibia and who else... all must come and account for the stories of their nations... The Bayons are locked in their

nests awaiting to be summoned ... All of the residents in The Hereafter have their own stories to tell as to what and why they did what they did during their lives in Bophelong. It's going to be a long a story...

## WRITING THE SELF

Every time, when I stand upright and look down at my feet, I cannot see them. I can hardly even see my man. Everything is obscured by the mountain that is my tummy. Mountains on the landscape are a natural phenomenon, but this one has been made by a jealous woman whose hand I had taken in marriage. As to how things devolved to this extent, that can only be described by both our heathen gods.

We started off so beautifully in Alice, far away from our homes and relatives.

We were one of the most admired couples in town.

I taught for a while in high schools around there and she was not employed. Some principals, two, had mercy and employed her on a temporary basis at their schools. At that, it was all because of the reputation that I had built there as a hard-working and trustworthy teacher. Having been excluded from her studies due to riots on campus, I spoke to authorities whom I also wrote letters to, begging, cajoling, ringing bells of mercy for her forgiveness. The rector then was a predikant. I belaboured him with Biblical references and he would listen in my meetings with him, but as soon as I left his office, he would just pee on everything that we had discussed. The predikant in him might have had an iota of sympathy somewhere in his makeup, but his right-hand man was more a verkrampste than a verligte. When I thought that everything had been exhausted and all hope was lost, a big surprise arrived and she was readmitted. I paid for her fees to complete her studies.

At that time, I had left Alice to take up a post in a college in the North West Province. My wife joined me after completing her studies and we resumed our normal marriage life.

It went on swimmingly and was everything that a young couple enjoyed in marriage. I, being a lover of the arts, would take her with to attend festivals, including the Grahamstown Arts Festival. On two occasions, we attended festivals in Limpopo and Mpumalanga without knowing where we would sleep for the night. But amid the din of music and dance, I would make friends with people who would promptly take us in and accommodate us. It was that spirit of adventure that we wallowed in.

Then, as suddenly as rain falls from a passing cloud, I felt my stomach having little twists, not that painful, but bothersome nonetheless.

I would talk with her about this and she always said that things would be fine. I went to medical doctors, who saw nothing. X rays revealed that everything was normal.

There was something in my tummy, I insisted. Then I reverted to traditional healers. All of them told me their own versions of what they thought was the truth, but the thing inside me was growing and my stomach got bigger and bigger.

Just what is happening to me? I could not tell.

One day, a traditional healer said to me there was something lodged in my stomach and that it would never ever come out. Anybody who would take it out would die or I would die.

How I prayed that God assist me.

Then I started to see a change in her, the way she looked at me or did not, spoke to me or did not, walked in the house or did not, cooked or did not.

Everything began to change and I would enquire if the cattle that we took to her home for lobola were grazing properly. She, with a face as blank as a fresh piece of A4 paper, would say there was nothing. My tummy would cry rage and some of my body parts would react, not so much with pain but a lot of discomfort. I realised, also, that my books that I used for research and teaching were disappearing bit by bit. Also, my music, much of which I had collected long before we met, disappeared, the most heartfelt disappearance being George Frederick Handel's *Messiah*, the original Dublin version of 1742. That by all means is the best recording of that work by Handel and is out of print in CDs. I had attached so much sentimental value to the three record set because it was of such magnificent beauty.

Then, one day, on Thursday, the 27<sup>th</sup> of August 2008, I arrived home after having visited a spiritual healer to find her behaving like a taxi conductor, moving this way and that inside the house. Not only was she doing that but she avoided locking eyes with me.

The issue is that the spiritual healer had performed some rituals on me and apparently, I had been moving with 'a thing' that monitored my every movement. Whenever I set out to go somewhere that 'thing' went with me and before I got home it reported where I had been to and what I had been doing. The spiritual healer took it off my back and sent the 'thing' back to her. For those few days, as well as the months of September and October, I watched a film of sorts in the house. I never uttered a word about what I was observing. If she was in the kitchen and I went there, she would suddenly leave to do something else in another room.

Over a period of time, whenever I went out of home due to work related matters, my tummy would grow bigger and bigger. I would spend the most uncomfortable time there with the tummy blown out of proportion like a pregnant elephant's. My colleagues would look at me and wonder. Some would, of course, pass nasty comments.

What could I do? I just never ever had peace.

Then one day she collected a few clothing items from the house. She was with her sister. There was so much drama from the two of them and the two police men who had come to give me a protection order.

Protection order?

I tried to understand from the police what that was and what it meant. They simply said I must sign that I have received it and they wanted guns from me.

“Guns? Did she tell you that I owned guns?”

Between August and October, she had installed another monster inside the house in my bedroom. The ‘thing’ was an absolute miracle, a stuffed body of a snake, horns of a buck, a maroon cloth stuffed with stinking things, and two ears of a child on both sides. There was also a R100 note which I had put inside my brown suit pocket attached to the ‘thing’ and lots of beads of different colours and sizes. Our culture operates with animal totems and mine is a duiker. I have pictures of the ‘thing’ somewhere.

There were times when I would not go out, but instead, spend the whole weekend under the covers. I did not know why. When I slept, I emitted sweat that was hot and very stinky. My sleeping clothes and blankets stank, my hot wings, that's Sepitori language for arm pits, would stink, my mouth stank. I was in a horrible kind of situation. I learnt from other people and healers that I am supposed to have stunk so that I would never attract nor live with any female partner. At work, I did not know what to do as I had to chair a few meetings.

The stink that my body emitted left me clueless.

Later, on the 27<sup>th</sup> of October, she arrived with the police to take the rest of everything. The police were quite dramatic: two police vans and four sedans. One of the vans blocked the gate, in case I thought of running away.

I was rescued by a colleague from Mamelodi, Desiree, who told me of spiritual healers from Pretoria East. I consulted them and came to my house with them.

That's when that horrible ‘thing’ was removed.

The man who removed it later phoned me to say that as he was burning the thing, he saw a vision of my ex having gone to the person who had installed it. My ex was going to activate the thing so that I could be killed, but the man found it.

My ex fought with him and complained about the R30, 000 that she had given him for my execution by the thing. That is how much my head costs apparently. A lot of my clothes had apparently been taken, including my shoes. One day, I had wanted to put them, but they were gone, only to come back later.

All my efforts at reading and advancing my studies had been thwarted by her. Books disappeared, but also, something somehow dragged me away from them. My piano practice was affected. I had no enthusiasm for any progressive piece of work.

Meanwhile, I did not die and this caused her a lot of frustration. I was to learn later that she had invested lots of money in my name so that should I die and she would have a golden harvest of lots of moola. She bribed the ladies who assisted me with cleaning and household work to remove things like under clothes and these would come back unbeknown to me. As to what had happened to them, I do not know, but I felt so much discomfort when I wore them.

She now teaches somewhere in a village.

We never meet, but she has people following me and observing what I do, who I am with particularly whether there is a woman who accompanies me or not. Most of the people who are spying on me are my cousins. They would pretend to visit but would actually be taking notes to report back to her.

I think she still thinks I'm a sitting duck, but there is a power much bigger than all of us keeping watch over me. Some of the concluding lines of R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* say, after the search of the treasure had been exhausted in all possible ways... the treasure is still there. With me, the hideous 'thing' is still in my body, but only time will tell ... sings Bob Marley in a song of that title, only time will tell...This is a true story ...

## SWEET SCHOOL DAYS

Nestled in the shadow of the Pilanesberg Mountain Range is the beautiful village of Moruleng. It lies west of the Rustenburg town which due to its vast platinum deposits is the fastest growing town in South Africa. The houses of the village cascade from the foot of the mountain, where the Bakgatla ba ga Kgafela once made strides in developmental progress long before their peers would wake up and wash their eyes. The Sun City Holiday Resort found the village already a long established madala in its own right.

I found myself in the village in the early seventies as a student of the great Moruleng High School. The school had newly built hostels in which all the occupants were brand new.

In the high schools and colleges of those days, there used to be a hideous system of breaking in new students that was referred to as ‘treatment’.

The poor newlings could be made to do all sorts of nasty things, including, among others, holding a stalk of grass in one hand and paper in the other as someone shouted:

“Grass, pampier, grass, pampier!”

The poor children would march for hours on end. They’d do it with trousers folded above the knees in one leg and shirt buttons mis-arranged, with one side longer than the other. The other form of drill work was that one or two of the oldies would shout; “lakavan”, and the newlings shout back “ek soek n koffie” and one, two, three, lakkie, ek soek n koffie and one, two, three, lakavan, ek soek n koffie” etc. ad nauseum. At times, they’d be sent to go and propose to a girl for the nasty oldies only to receive scorn and tongue lashings from the girls concerned. It was bad days as this could involve a few slaps from the ladies. Payback time would come though. Those who mistreated or ill-treated others would pay with their skins long after the ordeal had passed. A witch hunt would take place and fists would fly. Woe unto cowards at that stage for they would be given beetroots with stone fists, willy-nilly.

But in the hostels there was no such. We were all new and there was an unsigned arrangement that those who were Day Scholars – i.e., those who stayed in the village – would not touch the Boarders. Students came from all over, including the urban centres of Johannesburg, Pretoria, Potchefstroom, Randfontein and Krugersdorp in the reef; and other places in the north west like Mafikeng, Vryburg, Taung and so on. In addition to all of these, there were students from

the local populace and its surrounding areas. The school had a potpourri of personalities, lifestyles and lingo mixtures.

I stayed in the hostels. I have never had experiences such as those that we had there. In fact, we loathed school holidays because they broke the rhythm of what we thought was the best life. We lived as in a commune and had such a sense of unity that nothing differentiated one from the other in terms of place of origin or any some such social differentiations. At Moruleng, sunset meant going to sleep and having a collective dream of how the next day would be lived better than the previous one. Charles Dickens must have had such places in mind in terms of the positives in his opening paragraph of *A Tale of Two Cities*, when he referred to “The best of times ...the age of wisdom ... the epoch of belief ... the season of light [and] the spring of hope” as we really had “everything before us”. We had the enthusiasm of youth, excellent teachers, wonderful music conductors and extremely good soccer players, year in year out. You name it, we had it all at Moruleng. We boys knew that we had the most beautiful girls and the girls ... well it’s obvious. A certain sub-culture evolved. For instance at boarding schools, dinner was served at between five and six in the early evening. Then it was study time in the Dining Hall between seven and nine at times seven to ten. By the time we got to the hostels we would be hungry. So diverse people, diverse in terms of place and standard would group themselves into groups called mabandla. These would have food stored, tinned stuff, bread etc. to eat before they went to sleep. In the same vein, members of the group would break up and join other mabandla. No harm was intended nor hard feelings harboured. Life was sweet.

Friday nights were bioscope time. Most girls understood that there would be no wearing of trousers or jeans, but only loose-fitting skirts or dresses. Knickers were also forbidden, unless if strictly when necessary. I mean, we boys wanted full access in terms of the touch – touchy in the darkness under the tables. After the bioscope, we would book a place in the Dining Hall walls and exchange old fashioned smooches, real makoya. Some of us spared the beautiful smell on the fingers to let friends “listen to the smell of rooibos, the smell of life” as we referred to it. We drank rooibos ad infinitum, that’s what. Come evening time on Saturday, we would have converted the Dining Hall into a Performance Space and dressed to the nines, both boys and girls. There, different people would entertain in song, drama, comedy and whatever else. We saw apartheid days – which were supposed to drown our fun and press down on us – passing by and made the most of our time.

That's where I featured with prominence.

My love for music made me join as many singing groups as possible and we sang pop music of the time. With the late Bra Oupa John, a first team goalkeeper at school, we'd mesmerise our audience with 'Proud Mary' of the Credence Clearwater Revival, 'Heather Honey' of Tommy Roe and many other songs. Bra Oupa would be on the vocals whilst I'd be all instruments. Great times those were, exactly what Dickens says in the lines above. The latter song was to become an anthem for the school and was sung on the grounds. It was so easy to become a super star. I later joined what we called the Bee Gees, which consisted of Bra Troy, Bra Abbey (May Their Souls Rest in Peace) and Bra Ike. We sang The Bee Gees' songs only, in close harmonies.

In Josiah 'Killer' I had a lifetime desk mate whose popularity added bliss and fame to my cap. Being back seat boys in everything – class, bus trips and whatever else – we'd often call girls and ask them to show us the colours of their knickers and derive such a sense of gratitude and achievement out of it. This was done in class and we'd put the girl in the middle of the desk between us in case she had ideas. All this went on smoothly until, one day, we surreptitiously waylaid Jane at our desk. We asked her and she refused. Jane was fat. We lifted her skirt by force and she cried so bitterly that the next teacher who came to class took us to the staff room.

“Aiiiya yai ya yai ya yaaaaa!”

There, we were confronted with a tribunal with a full bench, all of teachers present in the staffroom, weighing in on the matter.

Marvelling at our cheek, one of them asked, “Yah boys, tell us, what did you see? Mhhh what”??

Our eyes were stuck on the floor. After several hot claps that left our ears whistling, we were beaten up on the buttocks. We both couldn't sit properly for about two weeks thereafter. But that's the time when I realised that Killer had the liver for punishment; he could take it. As they beat him up, lying on top of that bench, he put his chin on his left hand and pretended to feel no pain whatsoever. I could have just about pissed myself.

Then one beautiful summer weekend our school hosted Thulare High School from yonder side called Lebotloane. Three divisions in Netball, two divisions in Softball, and three divisions in Soccer were to be played. Around lunchtime a debate contest would ensue between the two schools. Then the remaining teams would play. Everything had to get done well in time because the A Soccer Team was the crème de la crème of all the games. Some interesting shenanigans used

to happen in the Debate Hall. The two schools would test their mettle and wits in debate on a given topic. One side would affirm the topic while another would negate. The topics of the day included, 'The Pen is Mightier than the Sword', 'Lack of Parental Care/Control is the Cause of Juvenile Delinquency', 'Summer is Better than Winter' and so on.

A few of us hotheads used to collect tomato box planks and carry them into the hall and occupy the back seats and just rearrange chairs so that if anybody who was an authority wanted to reach us would find it difficult. In those days tomatoes were packaged in boxes that had thin and slightly thick planks. There were two thin at the bottom and at the top, one thin on both sides. So, there were eight thin, and three slightly thick ones, because the other slightly thick divided the box into two. We used these planks to be the ultimate guards of the Queen's language. Depending on which side the visitors were, whether Affirmative or Negative, they'd suffer if they dared to break the Queen's language, grammatically or otherwise.

For instance, in the topic, Lack of Parental Care/Control is the Cause of Juvenile Delinquency, an opposing team member would say: "Thank you Ladies and Gentlemen."

A signal would be given for breaking and there would be a simultaneity or echo-like crack of the planks to indicate that the Queens's language had been broken. This would draw suppressed sniggers from those who were around the place.

The speaker would go on, "You see in homes father is needs support family money and go to works in the towns" and crack went the planks.

"The children they are suffering from a hunger", crack went the planks.

The Sports Master, feeling uncomfortable about the restlessness at the back, would come and cast furtive glances, but people would be placed strategically to do an *arrrra, aaarrrraaa*; that is, a warning to the others in sophisticated whispers about the lurking danger.

"A mothers is not a strong person to make noise for a childrens" and crack went the planks. "The girls they become loose and they make sex with the men and they get a pregnant." Another crack, plus an eruption of laughter in the hall.

But such debates were good social gatherings, since retired teachers, elders and teachers from local schools would attend. These were great social cohesion moments. Some speakers in the debate sessions had oratorical skills and would have the audience spellbound. It was only the upstarts, the plank crackers, who would spoil an otherwise wonderful gathering. Some of those debating contests were educational. They taught us how to gather facts, arrange them logically,

and present them. We would learn of new words such as “deportment”. Leaders emerged from such, people with great oratorical skills who went to convince the world.

Then, the big one, the Division A Soccer match, ho lo lo loooo, our school was the bomb. I have earlier referred to the various places from which students came. Among the throngs of new admissions at Form IV (the current Grade 11) in 1974 was one Kenneth Brenny ‘The Bre’ Mokgojoa. If you ask me, ‘The Bre’ was just an ordinary guy, lanky and tall, with a somewhat lazy gait. But, my friend and life time desk mate, ou Josiah ‘Killer’ Molaoa, got hold of one of those soccer magazines; it must’ve been *Kick-Off* or something. In there, were photos of a lot of teams that were campaigning in the Top and Lower Divisions. Somewhere in there was Moroka Swallows Babes. Seeing as there were two Moroka Swallows teams, one had to differentiate itself with the name Babes, and yes, right there in the line-up was Kenneth Mokgojoa.

He arrived at school in a rather sizeable contingent of students from Krugersdorp, a place that gave the best soccer players to Moruleng High, the likes of Bra Fred, one of the greatest soccer diplomats that I have ever known, who could go to the United Nations, talk with his feet and be heard, and Chris ‘Tshukudu’, a young man whose feet held conversations with the ball, as well as Galaxy and the others who had come before. In ‘The Bre’, though, a glittering diamond was to be given to the world. Ruzer Mgevu was a goal minder from Potchefstroom who was simply the best. His hands seemed to extend to the ball and stop otherwise obvious goals.

A typical Saturday morning in the hostels: those who woke up very early would go to the basins and showers to bath, most of the time with cold water, summer and winter. The musically inclined among them, like Parks from Magong, would start singing: “Oh leba la me ke le lentle jang”, how beautiful my dove is, and most of us, if not the entire hostel, would wake up and join in on the singing. Inside the dormitory, there were two rows of bedsteads on one side and one row on the other. There’s nothing as emotionally scintillating and intellectually stimulating as listening to men singing their hearts out. The heart vibrates with excitement and happiness as music becomes a bridge, uniting souls. It takes the singer to another, more beautiful world. This is one of the things that has indelibly remained with me, hearing those men harmoniously blending in voices that sang unsanctioned, i.e., uncontrolled, according to the limitations of choral singing. One voice would drag here another pull there and generally a variety of voices would bring good cheer to the song. In that impromptu singing, certain notes and tones that cannot be put on a four-part harmony score

of first tenor, second tenor, first bass and baritone would weave into the song, giving it a unique and indescribable sound of perfect harmony. Music was indeed a great element of our halcyon days.

Later, in the morning, the shoeshine lover boys like Bra Joe would take their shoes and line them out – real shoes were more popular than tekkies, and so were real trousers and shirts over jeans and T-shirts – and put his shoe polishing paraphernalia to good use. Things were serious: the shoes would be wiped with Benzin or Spirits, first, and then the shoe polish applied and the shoes would be shined. One would think the shoes were made of glass. Those who did washing did so, while others took theirs to their girlfriends at Mzana, the female dormitories, amidst irritating boasts of their conquests.

The Krugersdorp contingent had a lingo style of saying “Chicha chicha chicha” when they greeted each other. This was combined with a shaking of bent hands that shook forwards and backwards, forwards and backwards. The late Scotch was the key stylist in that. His big eyes would shoot out like tennis balls and his big hands had a way of shaking when he did the chicha thing. So influential were they that we almost adopted that style in the hostels, but in the end, we limited it only to the times we were talking to them.

Killer, my lifetime desk mate, would sing the hallelujahs about The Bre.

“Ntanga” he’d say with that famous gleam in his eyes, “we have a professional player in our school fana fana. Check hierso, here he is”. Killer was the type of a man whom if he was a journalist would smell news from a few hundred kilometres away or from deep under the soil.

He’d point at him on the page.

“He’s doing Form IV (Great 11 now), right here at our school, yennnnn fana our school is going to fly soccer wise, s’ttrue.”

As I was pondering Killer’s enthusiasm, he said, “I’ll show you the guy.”

If you ask me, when I finally saw him, ‘The Bre’ was such an ordinary guy. His initial soccer name from his township was ‘Karate Killers’. I mean that name nogal, it must have been derived from the movies of the day like *The Good, The Bad and The Ugly* or *The Magnificent Seven* or such names as those. Lanky and tall, with a somewhat lazy gait and a shy smile that came through his pencil moustache, he could not be the real makoya that my friend was singing about. But Killer, the ultimate optimist, sang the kindest and sweetest music about him. We all did not

know then that 'The Bre' would become a combined tornado and tsunami in the South African and overseas soccer scene and was to be named 'The Horse'. The name derived from his natural way of running. He would lunge forward with shoulders – going interchangeably back and forth, back and forth – that extended slightly beyond those of normal being's. His long legs tore the ground on which he ran.. For a man that tall 'The Bre' had a sense of balance that defied gravity. He could run fast and turn net hierso and leave those who were marking him to chase the wind.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

After the initial adminis were done and all students had settled in their classes at school, the sport season started in earnest. Our teachers were not the nosey type who imposed authority, even where unnecessary. They observed how things were developing, set up systems, and monitored from the background.

'The Bre' took responsibility of the entire soccer set-up at school. With a stern determination, stone discipline mixed with a disarming humility, he took the different soccer teams through rigorous motions. He also had a good eye for talent. Those of us who did not play soccer went early to the soccer grounds to book a place just to watch those guys at training. One of the exercises that I remember was the team running from the goal line to the outside line of the penalty area. The ground was hard soil, so they had to slip slide from one point to the other while running top speed to both ends. He must have known what exercise developed which part of the body, in the indoors and outdoors. After he had studied the geographical area of Moruleng, he took the best that he had identified to the river and ran them hard on river sand therein. Soon, those guys developed stone muscles in the thighs, calves and breasts. They grew super fit.

The day of the first official match at school was a cool summer day. The dormitory was astir in the morning with the normal great communal songs. On days such as these the singing was double ethereal. The sun shone its glorious self with its selfless golden rays, shining for the whole world.

Bra CC, a team A midfielder and my classmate, also from Krugersdorp, took his jump rope and did quite a number of skips. He warmed up very early for a game that was to be played in the afternoon.

Then it was game on.

We had heard about 'The Bre', we had seen him taking the soccer teams though their motions, but we had never really seen him in action. But with his first touch of the ball, the ground

roared, bellowed and rang like an ambulance siren. There was something special in the way his body related with the soccer ball. Soccer ball and player were simply in love. All were flabbergasted by his style of running. Indeed, when he was named 'The Horse' later – playing for professional outfits such as Benoni United, Highlands Park, Kaizer Chiefs and overseas teams – the name fit him like a glove.

He soon collected the ball from Mgevu, the goal keeper, and another lanky player, before dribbling the entire opposition team. Then he passed the ball to his teammate, Pele. It was if he was testing the depth and hold of the opposition team.

'The Bre' could not fall, he truly defied gravity.

The first goal of the game came through him as he ran the opposition team to the ground. Having been passed the ball from the back, 'The Bre' ran with top speed and, nearing the centre line, was approached by three members of the opposite team.

Running at them, he stopped the ball almost at the centre line and spun to face where he'd come from, then dragged the ball unexpectedly with one of those long legs of his. The three defenders had their legs in an almost inextricable web and collided against each other. In the meantime, he kicked the ball, full laces, with his right foot through a forest of legs. The blindsided goalkeeper probably heard a whistle as the ball went past him. There were no nets behind the goalposts during those days; neither were there many spare balls in the ground. When the bafanas who had gone to collect the ball went looking for it, there were wild Christmas celebrations in which people went for a real mafick. 'The Bre' had arrived and great historical moments and memories were still to be recorded. His second goal was a true miracle. Coming from the right side of the field after dribbling past four defenders, he hit the ball while running at top speed with his left foot. The ball, after the goalkeeper had missed it in his lunging dive, hit the lower part of the left goalpost and rolled to the right goalpost with speed and rolled nicely to the back of the goal line.

Such an unselfish man he was. During weekends, he'd call those who wanted to gym to the classrooms and take them through vigorous routines. I am able to jump rope because of him. Without skipping ropes, he'd say let's skip and go, "Skip, 2, 3, 4, skip, 2, 3, 4 etc." I still remember the smell of sweat with relish from those gym days.

'The Bre' played with a tennis ball with the small boys during the day on Saturdays and he would be there playing with them until sunset. The attachment that he had with the boys was indescribable. Those were the biggest cheerleaders during official games.

Yah, the weekend was great, but Monday morning at assembly The Sports Master called the captains to announce the results.

The principal was very sceptical and critical about those teams that had lost.

When he talked after the results, he said, "This is no place for lazy people, we will not tolerate losers here." He wagged his finger from side to side and continued. "Go to the ant thou sluggard, observe her ways and be wise. Lazy people will jump through the legora fence."

One of the boys at the back said, "Wa 'ka monna", you lie, buddy.

Ohoo...

"Who said that, the principal would demand, banna, basimane who said that"? Silence. Bo mmeer, i.e. male teachers we must teach these boys good manners. All girls go to your respective classes. Boys go to that room".

All the boys and all the male teachers had to go to the slaughter house. That's the room where serious punishment was meted.

*Hlwa \*... Wup\*\*\*... Wup\*\*... Wuup\*\*\*\*\**

So went the switch and its sound on the buttocks of boys at our school. Several, about twenty, had already received their share from teachers who changed hands in the beatings. There were still many of us coming. The landing switch: lifted, a few stars from the buttocks. This was a men's only affair.

Yah! Men of Moruleng High School. All.

The boys of the school were being punished by all the male teachers who were following the instruction of the principal. This punishment happened on a bench – a very strong bench, inside a room adjacent to the staffroom. The beaten had to lie on their stomachs on the bench, and the beater had to stand on the side with a switch.

The beating continued with boys going onto the bench. Many left the bench with twisted faces, whispering, "Ashuu ... ashuu ... ashu ... shu shu shuuuuu," and squeezing their buttocks like they could tear the pain away. Some, like Parks, just stood up with slow, calculated movements.

Eyes would threateningly stare at the beater and the beater would hold the gaze. He was mos with his colleagues in there! So the beating went on.

*Wup \*\*\*... wuppie\*\*\*\*\*... wup\**

The hand of the beater tired and another beater took over. He was tall and he swivelled the switch in his left hand.

*Washawuuup \*\*\*\*\**

The boy screamed, and screamed, until his five lashes were done.

He left the room jumping like he was skipping rope.

Then, enter my friend, Killer, who was next. One never knew what Killer had in his bag of clown antics. He made an oval circle around the bench. Yes! Once...twice and thrice, and his hands made signs and his lips moved like he was in some kind of a trance.

The beaters were stunned into complete silence. We enjoyed the waste of time; our turns were postponed by a few minutes.

Then Killer went to the bench.

He held on to it, his feet lifted high and his hands and chest resting over it.

Killer's other sport was Tumbling, so he was using that skill on the bench. Before his lower body had settled, the beater had descended on him.

*Wasshawuppiee \*\*\*\*\**

My ma hoor my, that must have made the bulls bellow out in the jungle, but Killer did something unexpected: he released gas.

The beater was stupefied for a moment. He thought the sound came from Killer's shoes, for that's where he looked, and as if to reassure him, Killer released a stream of gas. Yah! In the sound of *boboborrrrrr, borrrrrrrr*, and towards the end, it curled into a crescendo. This one had super fumes: *Yebo!* Fumes that spread like wild fire in the room, the wild smell of a polecat. Noses were lifted by the beaters. Yes, noses.

The biggest nose, belonging to Mister Big Beater, he was mos next to the teargas canister that was Killer, the one whose turn it was, twisted and turned like a top. For a while, he wanted to stop the beating and just ... but an urge seized him and... *boomlakawashaupiuppiee\*\*\*\*\*... the switch descended.*

This time, Killer roared.

Yah! He roared from his lower abdomen. He was equal to the task

*...borrrrop ... borrrrop ... borrrropropp ... roppp ...*

The sound came in spurts like the sound of a gun, a well-functioning machine. We couldn't hold ourselves, first we sniggered, then a few sneezed, then we poured our lungs out with laughter, taking in lumps of the smell in the process.

The beaters headed for the door with hands blocking their noses. They were scuttling away like sheep running out of the kraal to the grazing fields. We didn't know what to do. The place smelled like shit.

It took one brave boy, Papi, to say, "Bafethu, we'll die in here."

We all saw an opportunity to get out of there. Mister Big Beater was caught in the scatter of the melee: the skunk had delivered the people from the land of switch-land and slavery. He was taken along, the beater, by the mob to the escape route, the door. His hands flailed in the air with his switch; the bench had been upturned in the struggle for survival and Killer was among the first to get out: unworried, unblemished. He was, and remained, KILLER wa bantwana, Killer the Liberator. It was later reported that Mister Big Beater had lost his wallet. As bodies pressed on him and his hands were in the air, some clever bastard searched him and liberated his wallet. What a day well spent at sgela. Moruleng High School, the school of my salad days, remains an unwritten chapter and missing link in the history of high schools in the South Africa of the seventies. Moruleng High School went on to conquer South Africa which was then divided into Bantustans with soccer. The deeds and control of The Bre showed in grand style. He always gave himself off selflessly and in great style. They team and its huge support from the student body went up to Natal where amidst turbulent and unfriendly territory won by giving a display of some of the best soccer ever seen in those days.

## THE HOMECOMING BLUES

Edward Botlholo stood at the ruins of his former home on the other side of the river. It had shrunk, this river, and its sand was dull and looked like the smithereens of broken light brown glasses. Dry. He had washed his hands with the sand. It was dry and coarse, the result of long years of drought. Alongside the river, on the dry grass, lay the skeletons of beasts: donkeys, cattle, sheep, goats and a few wild animals. Their ribs stood out like Satan and his siblings' ribs. One could rake the grass off and leave the ground looking like sandy chiskop. Flies droned like the sound of ten tractors ploughing a peanut farm in Lichtenburg. The place smelled. It was a strong smell that had gone beyond smell. When he turned his nostrils to the left, he wafted the smell of long dead carcasses. To the right, the wind carried the smell like rotten eggs that had gone beyond rot. The combined smells that issued forth made him woozy. He sneezed endlessly and farted like the end part of a donkey's bray.

In some instances, wild beasts had come to feast on the carcasses of the domestic beasts, but could themselves not survive. Their strength could only carry them a short distance from their prey and they also succumbed to death. Maggots went in and out of the bodies of the wild animals as they feasted in never ending lines of freedom. That was seemingly the only life that ticked in these surroundings. Maggots. The birds of prey, long having licked the flesh from the bones, stood a few meters away, ready to feast or fly away.

He had earlier been to his former home or what remained of it. The walls were battered down and the gaping spaces looked like grotesque wounds, where the door and window had been. They were looking back at him, these spaces, with an inexplicable, mocking grin. When he looked away, they laughed at him. When he looked back, they kept silent, a graveyard silence that crawled on the ground. There was a ghostly atmosphere in the place. His ten years of studies overseas did not prepare him for this shocking change.

The pristine days were a never-ending and pure sunshine, full of life. Land yielded plenty for man and beast and there was little difference between rich and poor. He longed for the days of his youth, when he and his friends ran behind tyres and spoke-less bicycle rims down the footpaths of the meadow. The tyres would splash into a rivulet. They'd then take their clothes off and chase one another in the water amidst laughter and cheers and more splashes as they danced the jitterbug in the water. The water would go up in clouds of liquid as it wetted their wet bodies. Joy was wet

bodies. Water nourished the land whose yield was food. After play, they could go to any family and get food.

He cast his eyes to the adjoining forest. It was bereft of all green. The tall and proud poplar trees were dry and the leafless branches were like tumescent veins on a bodybuilder's hand. In yonder days, white birds that follow cows to feast on ticks would populate on the trees and flutter endlessly as they fought for a place to settle. But no cow nor bird now, only dry branches and the smell of death. He picked up a stone and threw it at the trees. The branches broke like a huge object had fallen on them. They hit the ground with a thunderous sound that echoed through the forest.

This was not his home.

This was the home that drought had killed with its silent cruelty. Some of his family members, friends, and former teachers had died. There was a silence where he stood, a dead silence that hit his body like the death that dominated his surroundings.

## THE DANCING RED HANGER

Solly alighted the taxi at the corner of Cul Five, Unit Nine, two streets away from Ma-M'sadinyana, the local shebeen queen. Today was not the day to go and do one-two one-two, the gentleman's session of taking two sundowners. One of his friends, Mrio, called it "one glasses one beers", and although it was referred to in ones, it always ended in four to eight beers per session. Luckily for him, Bra Lumber Jacket was not around, having visited relatives in Matlosana, so, for a few days, he had taken time off from drinking.

Solly aka Kerzner, aka Soul Train aka Bra Sol, was employed at the Mafikeng industrial site in a car dealership. His wife, Marylin, was known to never miss an opportunity to comment: "Uwii they say they sell cars but they use their walkaways, left, right, feet nyakaza." Meaning that he walked to and fro work. She would say this and look up and laugh, clapping her hands in a downward stroke and concluding with "Uuuwiii". Not that Marylyn did not love her husband, she did. They got along very well and she would never pass such snide comments in front of visitors, strangers and neighbours. Whenever she wanted to jibe and taunt him, she used the "they" instead of referring to him directly.

In his usual voluble manner, Bra Sol greeted all along his way leading to his house. The last to greet was Buddy Chigla, who lived in the house front opposite from that of his next-door neighbour. Not that Bra Sol my love, as he was called by his wife during times of extreme happiness and relaxation, did not have a car, technically he did. His company often gave him a Mazda van to go home with, but these occasions were far and few in between.

This was South Africa in 1994 going on to '96.

Marylyn had a car, a battered but still running Toyota sedan. This was an inheritance from her uncle, Malome Poypoy, who said, "Look I'll give you this sebatana - small wild fierce animal - once I'm done with it."

He kept his promise and gave the car to his favourite niece, who he felt deserved it because she got a B.A degree from the local varsity. For all the convenience the car provided in the house, Solly took it to his company for service and so on. He would buy parts from Wayco Spares, next to Engen Garage, which was opposite The Protea Hotel and down Mandela Street, leading to Botswana in the north and Lichtenburg and Zeerust in the south and southeast respectively. The gents in the workshop at Mazda would then service it properly. So, though it looked old on the

outside, in the machinery department it was slick and kicking and revving in all the right directions, a sebatana indeed. He would often say this animal barks real good. The funny thing with Marylyn is that she had unitary tendencies; she had an inclination to think of her family only, in matters relating to care and support.

One day, she said to Solly, “Bra Sol, my love, sweetie, my *yok’ into*, my ma is not well you know.”

He knew that when the praises tumbled out like that from her mouth, and that smile flashed so liberally, there was big trouble coming. Trouble may take the form of anything, from spending money – either on herself or a family member – to accommodating a distant relative of hers while studying, or driving them across a long distance. Well, this time it was on “my ma”, but still, he wondered what the trick was with the smile.

“Wazematter baby?”

“She’s not very well you know. Her arthritis often blows up unexpectedly. I mean apart from her other ailments, high blood pressure and diabetes”.

“Ok, should we take her to the doctor or clinic or do you take a day off to check her out?”

“No, I just want us to hit a turn and check on her. I have bought some arthritis tablets, you see”.

“Oh, okay, when can we do that?”

“Tomorrow, I’ll get a few things from Checkers. It’s nearer to my workplace and we can drive home to check on her afterwards.”

Marylyn worked at the Mafikeng Police Station as a clerk.

“No problem baby, mmmmmmcwa,” he said, and then he sang part of the song “... but it seems to me, you lead your life like a candle in the wind, ba ba du ba du baaaaa, on the rain city...” before he continued to whistle the rest of the refrain as he disappeared into the bedroom to change clothes.

He had kissed her fully on the lips, and although Marylyn gave in to the kiss, there was an inward rejection of it. She relented, but not freely, and she only did so because she wanted the deal to be sealed for sure.

The following day, after he knocked off, Solly went straight to the Checkers supermarket. He thought that Marylyn should find him there and it shocked her when she saw him in the throng of people waiting outside the super market, smoking a cigarette.

“Aooo love, you didn’t have to bother. I would collect you at home”.

“Arg, bra Slinger my colleague was coming this way, so I thought he’d drop me off”.

“But not to worry, I’ll do the shopping you may wait out here...”.

“No, baby no, why I’ll go with you to assist in whatever way.”

Little did he know that he was tying himself up in a knot. He realised as much when he took a smaller trolley, to which Marylyn said he should take the bigger one.

“I want to buy some things for home as well, you know to replenish.”

“Ohoho okay babes”.

They walked in with him pushing the trolley. He was surprised when Marylyn picked up another bigger trolley, bigger than the one he had already and followed him. Well, not to worry. The picking of items followed and trolleys were filled with items. Solly was surprised by the sheer relentlessness of her shopping. Simba Chips, Sweets, etc. Their daughter, Bontle, was not into those. Solly had always discouraged her from a huge intake of sweets and had always frightened her with growing up toothless if she didn’t listen. Now he was surprised by how many packets of marsh mellows were being thrown in the trolley.

“Hey Lyn baby why so many of these?”

“You know she loves these because she does not have teeth.”

“But is she not diabetic?”

“Ahhh she loves them. You know she doesn’t have teeth so she just loves chewing these like old mother goat, you know just sliding them in her mouth and between her gums like ...”  
Marilyn imitated the way her mother chewed the marsh mellows.

This threw Solly into uncontrollable fits of laughter. He always wanted to do this observation but did not have the guts to do it in front of people, Marylyn notwithstanding. So, he continued to laugh in between jabs of “Aaai sweety, no man” and “Wena Lynntjie babie”, so preoccupied with laughter that he did not notice the huge pile of items that were filling the trolleys. Then they went to the tills. Come payment time, Marylyn stood by the side, a little away from the till and hesitantly pushed the trolley to the cashier. Marylyn pretended not to be a part of it and stood back, until Solly said:

“Nou sweety, what about the tsika for this”

“Ao, bathong Bra Sol ouboet, pay for it.”

“But...eish yah neh. Baby you did not even expect me to come...”

“Not to worry sthandwa sam, you know, the queue baby... move on please”, she said, nodding to indicate the queue.

The total for the impromptu expenditure on groceries was R3056.78. Solly searched for his wallet, his hand unsteady, and gave the card to the cashier.

They swiped it, and the payment went through, before Solly was left to push the trolley to the car. He is the man *mos*. The trolley was packed. The lady who packed the stuff into plastic bags had done a good job to compress the goodies into one trolley. The marsh mellows were not far from the handle of the trolley and seeing them reminded him of old she-goat. His shoulders were shaking with laughter when he thought about it. He went to the car while Marylyn was still talking with her colleague, Seipati, outside the shop, and waited.

“Iyho sweety,” she said feigning surprise, “I’ve forgotten that it’s me who has the keys. Sorry my love”.

“No problem baby”.

She then tossed him the keys. He opened the boot and started to pack the plastics from the trolley. Just where this bounty of food was going to, he wondered.

They then left for Mmakgori, Marylyn’s home village, which was about a hundred kilometres from Mafikeng. They went straight to the Taung road, took a turn for the Mafikeng Airport road, and drove on. They did not have to go home because Marylyn had arranged with her neighbour Koketso that their child Bontle be accommodated there till they came back. When they drove past Mmasutlhe, she felt a slight discomfort and felt like peeing but held it in. They drove past Disaneng and went through other villages until they reached Mmakgori. The pee discomfort was now reaching the middle of the incline of a crescendo. Marilyn thought she might as well relieve herself when they reached home.

They found mama sitting outside on the stoep enjoying early dusk. Marylyn thought they would not really stay for long and after greeting went to the car boot to sort the goodies for mama and for their home. Mama called one of her granddaughters to bring a chair for Bra Sol. It was time for the goats and cattle to arrive home and there was a joyous sound of bleats and bellows and bells amidst a trail of dust that formed a background cloud.

The cowherd, Modisa, whistled and shouted their praises, “Boa koo Swartjie, the bidifil black one. I gifi you black politsha for shiny shiny. Heey Spitkop, kom aan tsena mo lesakeng. Wena jy soek net spitrap.”

Then he shouted and praised the he-goat.

“Hey Bokbaarde, wena jy sa man. Jy loop agter die vrou mense ga le boela gae maar jy loop voor ga le ya phulong. Jy sa clever mjita jy”.

A few containers of water, including a big cut-in-half tractor wheel were placed in front of the kraal gates so that both the cattle and goats could drink and move into their respective kraals. It was in the habit of goats to run to these drinking spots. Solly was already enjoying a number of current affairs titbits from mama. This was punctuated by bouts of *ntsu* snuffing, with lots of sneezing on her part.

“How is the goromente going my child?” she said, meaning the government. “Will it be good mara?”

“No, thus far there is a sense of freedom, yes. The white people seem to be leaving their posts”.

“But my child, white people know their work. Will bo rantsho do the work tota tota”?

“Hey mama, we’ll see, but people are hopeful.”

“Well we the old people just trust that old man. He died for his swearings. He dances very good that man. No leader ever dances like him, and that makes him so acceptable. I often see my grandchildren imitating him. He is loved by young and old. But will this still remain Bophutatswana or are we now going back to South Africa”?

“No it looks like they will bring a system of dividing the country into Provinces or States. We might end up with the United States of South Africa. They are not sure yet, still at the talking stage.”

“They must build on top of what this other old man of ours did. He did good good my child. He collected all Batswana and put them in one place and gave them better jobs. But me I am afraid if they will still say Motswana one side, MoZulu one side, Mo Pedi one side Mo Tsonga one side etc. etc.” she said, demonstrating the divisions with her right hand.

“It will not solve apartheid. It will just be the same as apartheid but under black hands. Men like the old man worked for their people. By the way, most of us people of this area were working in the cities for the white man. They called us back and gave us jobs here at home. The

same work we did there we came to do here, some in the government offices, some in the houses of officials and so on. The pay was better and you were assured of medical aid, pension and other things. With the boers ...ohoo they just wanted our labour in order to frustrate us.”

“Yah mama, I think it will even be better now. This new old man will do even better. When he talks, reeds in the river banks dance to his words and the Boers just go to Tatzelaland. He is such a kind man I think we will even stop calling white people boers as much as they will stop the use of the ‘k’ word. He wants all of us black and white to hold hands and move forward as one and forget the pain of the past caused to others.”

“Yah my child, he is very good. When we voted, I just looked and said I want the old man’s face.”

“Yah mama, most South Africans did that.” Just to make the old mama relax, Solly said, “Hey mama, can you give me a bit of that snuff? Let me sneeze also.”

Mama opened the small tin and put a little bit of snuff on his left palm. The explosive sneezing made him run behind the house, pressing each nostril to violently push the snuff out.

A blob of mucus rolled on the ground and he stood there, contemplating lighting a cigarette, when a big cockerel pounced from behind the lapa and rushed to peck on the dollop: a mixture of mucus, soil and snuff. Solly’s weight was on his right foot and he moved his left in order to prevent the cockerel from eating the mess, nearly toppling over.

He polished the dollop into the dust with his left foot, but the more he pressed the mucus out of his nose, the worse it became, and the sneezing didn’t stop. At some point, free farts followed as he sneezed and he laughed liberally. Then he went back to sit with mama and laughing, he said: “Hey mama, this stuff is rather too strong for me, I nearly sneezed blood and tears.”

“*Akere* you are not used to it my child. I know men who sniff a lot of snuff in this village.”

After she had sorted the goods, Marylyn joined them on the *stoep* bringing her own chair.

“Mama how’s the waking up?”

“*Aowa*, we wake up my child at least God is still protecting us.”

“Yah, do you still have enough tablets?”

“Mhh, my child I think it is the sugar ones that are getting finished. But they are still enough to keep the days going.

“Oh, okay mama, we’ll take care of that when next we come around. For now, I brought the arthritis ones. Hey we don’t want to stay for long; Bontle should not feel too afraid.”

Though Marylyn had indicated it was time to go, Solly wanted to see the tournament between mama and the marsh mellows, and he said: “Mama, we brought you some marsh mellows. *Mmago* Bontle, please bring those marsh mellows for mama.”

“But the children will give ...”

“No, no, no, no, bring them, ma baby,” he said, making as if to stand and fetch them.

Marylyn, with surprise written all over her face stood up and said, “I’ll bring them, relax. What’s wrong with you?”

This little episode nearly brought her bladder to explosion point. She gave the packet to mama, almost dropping it on her lap.

Solly extended his hand and said, “Let me open for mama.”

He opened the packet, so that mama would not struggle with pulling them out, and then gave it back to her. All he was waiting for was to see that spectacle of the she-goat chewing. She was not in a hurry, though, and he did not know how to push her to start chewing. Meanwhile, Marylyn was dancing with infinite impatience on her chair, her pee peeping out. She held back by pressing her thighs tightly together and almost sang the national anthem of some foreign country.

The reason Marylyn did not want to use the family long drop toilet was that she had once had a nasty experience in there. This was a long time ago, when she was still a teenager, but the experience was still vivid in her memory.

She had gone to the toilet, where the door opened inwards, and settled into a relaxing number two item with her eyes closed. Then, suddenly, she heard a hissing sound on the floor and opened her eyes to a green snake crawling into the toilet from the side of the door where there was a wide gap. She screamed at the top of her lungs, continuing rather involuntarily the exercise which had brought her there.

“Thusaang, thusaaang, halp, halp, ijhooo mma wee, noga, nogaaaaaa weeee, mma weee the snake, the snaikhiiii!”

The solidish stuff that she was delivering suddenly turned liquidish and was spread liberally down her legs. She was running in place, bowed, with her legs astride the toilet seat, screaming and crying. In her fright, she pushed the door outwards and for some reason the door was jammed – or so she thought. She did not even look down when she trampled on the droppings. Her only remaining instinct was to be careful not to put her feet into the opening of the toilet, and in the end, it was the surprised Tumelo, her sister’s son, who stayed with mama, who pushed the door inwards

after hearing her screams. Marylyn jumped out of the toilet with violent force and fell on Tumelo. So careless was the jump that Tumelo hit the ground with his back while Marylyn crawled all over him. Soon, Tumelo's olfactory sense told him a story of being rather too close to human faeces. In her crawling, Marylyn had soiled Tumelo's clothes and almost left a little smear on his lips. The smear had landed on his right cheek. This experience with the snake happened some time ago, maybe ten to twelve years ago, but even though she felt that pressed, there was no way Marilyn was going visit that long drop toilet. She will hold on even though things seemed to threaten to flood over.

So, Solly said, "Let me have a taste of these mama."

He extended his hand to pull out two marsh mellows from out the plastic container. He was goading the old goat to start eating so as to watch with a real purpose from close range how she negotiated the business. After what seemed like an eternity the old woman dug in and took one to her mouth. To disguise his laughter, he started a topic on the *makhanselara*, local councillors. Marylyn was now hitting the floor with her toes. Her bladder was almost exploding.

"Hey mama, today's politicians, I saw one running past his car and dashing into the nearest house in front of him. Ma-comorate were giving him the runaway."

He laughed loud and the old woman joined in. Mama, with the sweetness of the marsh mellows sinking in, dug and laughed, her chewing exposing her black gums.

This sent him into more fits of laughter, with tears streaming down his cheeks, and after some time he said, "Eish mama, as Lyntjie says we'll have to go."

"Okay my children, all is well, go with God".

Both Solly and Marylyn stood up to leave. Marylyn rushed to the car and sat down pressing her thighs so tightly to hold the pee at bay. Solly, not aware of what was happening took his time while asking where the cowherd was. He normally gave him something in the form of tobacco or money whenever he was around.

He started the car and Marylyn urged him to "Please hurry tlhe, Bra Sol, my sweetheart".

"What's the big hurry sweetie"

"I'm pressed tlhe, so pressed I could do things in this car".

"Oh, why don't you go to the lavatory, there's no hurry, I'll wait"

"No, tlhe sweetie I can't go in there, I once had a terrible experience with a snake".

"A snake?"

“Oh, please go tlhe monna, my husband please tlhe”.

Every second delayed was like filling up the bladder to saturation point.

Drips dropped.

At long last, Solly started the car and drove out of the yard, blaring the hooter to blazes as if at a wedding.

As soon as they hit an opening at the end of the village, Marylyn screamed with grit teeth: “Stop, stop tlhe monn ‘a modimo, stooooop. I want to relieve myself.”

He almost hit a dead brake. Before the car came to a complete halt, Marylyn had opened the door with her left foot half dragging on the dust. She rushed out and was troubled by the tight jeans that she had on. As she pulled her jeans and underwear down, pee began to flow and she squatted close to the the car, but dry stalks of grass touched her thighs and some soft delicate flesh. Marilyn did an awkward jump backwards, her back hitting the side of the car. Then, suddenly, she remembered that encounter with the snake and her mind worked like a whirlwind. She fell down and soiled her bum and part of her clothes.

Solly, surprised at hearing the bump, screamed, “Sweetie wat gaan aan? Kwenzenjani?”

He made to come out of the car to check on her, but she screamed forbidding him.

Solly, nevertheless, thinking of the worst, got out of the car to check on her.

He found her in a gargantuan struggle, trying to stand back up. The struggle was exacerbated by the fact she wanted to be off the ground without even touching it, lest the snake gets her flesh. Hence, she was literally trying to fly off the ground.

The whole thing was a comical spectacle.

Instead of sitting on the passenger’s seat, Marilyn said she’d rather sit in the back. As he drove, Solly could sense that something wasn’t right, but he never asked.

When they got home, he parked the car at the back of the house, its usual spot, and made to go and collect Bontle.

Marilyn screamed at him not to leave yet. She took her bag, walked into the house, and went straight to the toilet to freshen up. After putting on fresh clothes, she took the soiled ones to the washing basins outside the house, dumped them there, and left them soaking.

Solly had seen Nkonyeni High, a theatrical production at the local Mmabana Theatre, and was completely overwhelmed by the sheer energy and professionalism of the actors. Built during the

days of Bophutatswana, Mmabana was an arts and culture institution, one of the best, that trained and produced great artists, musicians, actors, crafts people, and backstage technical personnel. Solly was almost always whistling one of the tunes from the musical. *Whirrr whi whiiii whirrrr*, he whistled, walking to the kitchen door. If there was some washing on the line, he occasionally took it off. Only occasionally, though, lest those who saw him thought he had eaten korobela, the mysterious muti that was used to purportedly live inside people and be some kind of internal remote control. Solly was sure there was no korobela inside him, he did it on purpose. That is why sometimes he just ignored it. After he had taken it off the washing line he would shout, “My sweetie, I have taken the washing off the line, a wa utlwa!” He would emphasise the last part. “Nna ga k’a ja korobela neh”, he would say, winking at his wife. “Me no eat no korobela, neh.” In response, his wife took exception and would often retort, “Aai suka wena man, I don’t know those things nna”. She would say this with a rather sour countenance, implying strongly that she knew no witchcraft. “Okay ma baby okay I emma justa kidding you ma bobos.” He would say this with a pleasant face that never impressed Marylyn. Little did he know that she had been secretly planning some marakalas of her own.

One day, Solly came back from work to find no washing on the line and he was sure that Marylyn had done washing the previous day. Neither was there anything on the kitchen sink as he entered. He went straight to his daughter’s room. He had picked up some magazines and was looking forward to pasting pictures on the wall with her as they normally did. His eyes seemed to be telling him something. Maybe he had gone blind for a while. There was nothing on the walls, only smudges remained where the pictures had been removed. Something was not okay in there. Now that the pictures were not there, he reckoned the walls needed painting, there was some glaring ugliness. He shouted his daughter’s name, more to congratulate her for having removed the pictures because the room needed new painting.

“Bontle, Bontlee, baby girl where are you?”

The eerie silence alarmed him.

He took off his pullover and headed for his bedroom. As he prepared to throw the jersey on the bed, he realised the curtains had been changed, the duvet cover was not there. Instead, there was a small blanket on top of the bed. The thick beautiful darkish floral curtains had been replaced by some shrivelled greyish ones.

He exclaimed, “Heeee banna, sweetie, sweetieeee, Mmago Bontle, Mmaaaaaabo, where are you guys? Bontleeee, haai, what’s wrong with these people?”

He opened the wife’s side of the wardrobe. Nothing. Closed it quickly. Opened his side’s. His clothes were still hanging but some hung precariously. He opened his wife’s side. Nothing. And nothing again. Closed it with a clang as if he was hiding something from his mother-in-law and rushed to his daughter’s room. For the first time he saw nothing where the Chest Drawer had been. He didn’t see that at first. He went to the visitor’s room. The bed was bare, shorn off of all blankets and things. Something was missing. He couldn’t tell what. His mind was in a tailspin. He went to the kitchen, opened the drawers. There were only three spoons, three table knives, three forks and five teaspoons. The pots; only three of different sizes left. Crockery, five plates, three cups, an old unused sugar basin and coffee container. The tea was in tea packets as bought, Joko, Five Roses and Rooibos.

He stood in the middle of the house and shouted, spontaneously, “Modisana banna, what ghost went through this house? What happened to my people?”

He went out through the back door. There was something different in the breeze, the fence was also different. It seemed to have been made of some foreign thing, his eyes were completely disoriented.

He decided to go to the police to report the matter. There was sure going to be a manhunt of unimaginable proportions. But first to tell Bra Monty, his elder next door. They treated each other as brothers.

“Bra Nde, Bra Nde Bra Monty, asseblief kom hi anekant.”

Bra Monty was a Kimberlite in origin, so he talked the lingo of the majitas, di flytaal, a potpourri of all languages with Afrikaans as the dominant makoya language. The origin of the lingo was to throw off and confuse the baas at the workplace.

“Heee jong wat gaan aan mon jou, ek het gadink ek chaya n regmaker gou gou te se ek moen so bitjie relax. Het jy n bottle jong?” he asked, rhetorically. His voice seemed to drag vowels as he talked, so that it gave an impression that his speech was slurred.

“Daar’s nie n bottle grotman, goetes is chandies hi binne bo my dladla”

“Wat se chandies goete is daes nou?”

“Kom check hi binne fast move, ek moet n spin by di gatas gaan chaya”

“Gatas? Hee jong is jy nca, jy mean police”?

“Yah, eish my grotman ek ken nie waat gaan hi aan, s’true, ek fotel jou, lyk for my daar *was a* kidnap or something like that”.

“Kidnap, ne man, jy’s nie leke bo di kop jy man, kidnap?”

They talked getting into the house, with Solly leading. He thought his family had been kidnapped or something.

“Ek se, vrou is nie hi, melaitie is nie hi, goetes is gekhothoza, check net by di drawers, kom kyk by my laitie se room. Hulle vat har mon har goetes, pictures en di hele zwap.”

Bra Monty watched all this in wonderment and surprise. His eyes were forced to take in the scene faster than his comprehension. Before he could internalize the scene, he was drawn to something else. He couldn’t comment because Solly was all over, pointing with both arms, turning around and almost hitting walls as he toppled over the little sofa in the small passage. The show stopper was in his bedroom. He went straight to his wife’s side of the wardrobe and quickly pulled the doors open. Empty! The hangers danced from side to side and clanged against each other. Something, some shocking reality seemed to hit his mind with a bang and he closed the doors with some force and looked at Bra Monty.

“Sien jy my bra, di is vrou se wardrobe side, daar’s fokol.”

“Bra Montieeee, do you think...”

He could not finish his thought. He opened the doors again with purposeful might. The hangers danced head to head, shoulder to shoulder, curve to curve and neck to neck. He looked away with shock, then back at the hangers. For the first time he noticed the red hanger right in the middle of the rest. It danced with the rest but seemed to be dancing to its own melody. The melody could only be heard by it. Didn’t somebody say, ‘unheard melodies are sweeter?’ It had its own romanticism, its own magic. Its rhythm seemed to have been constructed into some mystical syncopation. That hanger seemed to have its world that held melodic mysteries and rhythmic secrets. It spun, from back to front, front to back. It often seemed to want to stop but was pushed, actually goaded, by the others, from both sides, to dance its necromantic dance, unique in its own way. He was snapped out of the reverie by a concerned Bra Monty.

“Heee monna wee, jaanong wa re ke ‘ng jong, what’s your take?”

He snapped with a start and was confused for a while.

“Bra Monty wa bona bra, daar’s fokol jewish bo di vrou se kant.”

He said this looking at the floor, more from embarrassment than anything.

“Haai man, is it possible that die vrou het getlheri my bra?”

The question hit Bra Monty like a church bell clanging close to his heart. He thought he had seen a lorry in front of Solly’s neighbour’s gate around nine o’clock. The neighbour Moshate was always not around on Wednesdays. Working for a government Department, he was often sent to one district or another to deliver documents. Moshate called himself Mr. S.D. for Service Delivery. Bra Monty’s worst suspicions and fears were confirmed. He almost clapped Solly on the shoulders and exclaimed:

“Mosadi!” Then he continued in Afrikaans, “‘n Vrou mens”, before he hit the bed with a heavy sigh. “Ka mmao, mo go a nyewa, di is nou kak and betaaal my broer”.

He put his elbows on the knees and cupped his chin with his hands. That exclamation sent Solly to hell. A huge bolt of hotness seemed to emanate from his lower extremities while coldness enveloped him from the top of his head and was going down his body. It was as if he didn’t know where his head was or his chest or his...he was confused. There was stone silence between the two men. No word was said, nothing. It’s as if somebody had just delivered news of death of a close family member with whom they parted just yesterday.

After a minute or so, Bra Monty said:

“Monna a o bona se ke se bonang mo jong, sien jy di chandies wat hier binne gebeur?”

“Eintlik wat gaan aan my bra, fotel my”.

“Hey, monna chaya lecobla da, a k’o dire teye man, maskien onse nqondos sal phaphama *whirr whiiiiiiirr whiiiiir whirrrrrrrrrrr*” he whistled in wonderment

At this point, Solly’s knees were jelly-like. Though not knock kneed, the knees did a jelly jive and hit against each other as he walked. He had to lean against the walls to establish some progress towards the kitchen. Fortunately the kettle was at its corner and the bread bin on the opposite corner. The bread bin? His eyes reported that it wasn’t there. Where it had been was half a loaf in its plastic packet. He thought of reporting this latest discovery of the bread thing to Bra Monty but realised the futility of it all. He filled the kettle with water and spilled the water into the kitchen sink. He always believed in the philosophy of cleaning the kettle before use, lest one boiled the water with spiders and cockroaches. Some spiders, like the violin spider were extremely poisonous. In other parts of the world, entire families were wiped off the face of the earth because kettles were used without having been washed afresh. This is one of the house rules that he insisted

upon “in my house” he would say beating his extended chest. “Nakanjani, check the kettle and rinse the dirt out before filling it with water. Finish and Klaar”. His daughter Bontle would often cry, “but papa it is clean, akere we close the lid”. He would actually plead “Bontle my beauty, let’s not fight over this neh ma baby, please just do as told”.

With unsteady and shivering hands, he took two cups out of the cupboard and put them on the kitchen table. Looked for the sugar basin, found it at the corner of the kitchen unit and put it next to the cups. Took two teaspoons out of the depleted drawer, all the while wondering at what the heck was happening in his house.

“Eh bra Monty, tea or coffee”

“Lecobla”, said bra Monty, “gooi my net Rooibos my *broer*. “No milk for me please” he retorted.

“Okay.”

Solly unplugged the kettle and poured the water over the teabags. His unsteady hand spilled the water all over so much that a lot went out instead of in. The aroma of Rooibos hit his nostrils with a superficial domestic freshness and assurance. He picked the cups, one in each hand and went to the bedroom. That proved to be a perilous journey for he spilled the tea all the way to his destination. His hands shook violently, his jelly knees tottered and the tea generously spilled out. By the time he reached bra Monty, the cups were half empty. He gave Bra Monty his cup, spilling some more and settled on the only chair in the bedroom.

“Monna, shokore e kae jong, waar’s di suiker en teaspoon”.

“Oh oh Bra Nde ...eish laat ek hulle bring, hey I just forgot them”.

He went back to the kitchen and brought back the sugar basin and a teaspoon, forgetting the other teaspoons that he had prepared. When he reached Bra Nde, the sugar slipped from his hand and fell spilling out the sugar on the floor.

“Ohhhh Heere got,” exclaimed Bra Monty. “Jy’s mos in groot kak jy, lyk for my jy’s klaar gacondemn,” he said, touching Solly’s left shoulder, which was closer to him, as Solly picked up the sugar with his fingers. “Ek se ndoda kry n broom om di shandies kom af vee, wat gaan aan my buda man.”

Solly snapped out of his confusion and went to the kitchen to look for a broom. He went to the cabinet that brooms were kept in. Some precariously hanging plastic bottles and other cleaning paraphernalia tumbled out and landed on his feet noisily. This brought some alarm to Bra

Monty who screamed, “Hee jong moenie jousef hola toe vat jong, you can’t kill yourself over this”.

At this point they were sure that Marilyn was gone. Where to, he could not tell. He picked up a small broom made of grass at the back of the cupboard and went back to the bedroom. He bent down to sweep the sugar, but realised that he had forgotten something that he was supposed to sweep the sugar into. He opened his left palm and tried to gather the sugar therein. Bra Monty watched with utter consternation and thought that Solly had lost his network. He did not comment and just watched and made sounds with his tongue. After gathering whatever sugar, he went outside and rubbed his hands to clean them. At this point, he was too confused to know where the main sugar was stored. He went back to the room and sat on that chair. Realising that there was not going to be any progress on the sugar, Bra Monty settled for a sugarless rooibos. After all, Tinyiko, his one-time colleague, always drank sugarless tea and coffee and would rave and rant about: “The best taste, you guys deny yourselves, the best taste in tea and coffee. Just take them sugarless, o tla utlwa monate wa teng”. They always listened with no real interest and thought she was crazy. Some referred to her as a health freak and one colleague always said, during Tinyiko’s absence, “Ohoo, these ones like her when they get home, they drink more sugar than tea, jy kom kry half sugar in da cup and half tea water. She actually drinks a jam of sugar”. This would be said to raucous laughter all round. Though this was said in fortissimo, it was in jest. This moment, Bra Monty was faced with Solly’s situation, a sugarless situation. Under normal circumstances he would give him a dressing down, but no, no no, hokaai this was not the moment.

Bra Monty gave a cue by picking up his cup from the dressing table, one of the major pieces of furniture that remained, and started to sip his tea. Solly’s venture was a trip too far between the hand and the mouth. He did a sucking sound long before the tea reached his mouth, his hand trembling and a huge amount of the tea spilling on his thighs. Realising that he spilled the tea, he opened his mouth as wide as possible and looked like a huge peg about to clamp on an extraordinarily big garment. When the tea arrived at his mouth from its journey, his lips were wide open, but he would continue to do the slurping *sworrr sworrr sworrr* sound even when the cup was going down. There was a little whistling on the *sworrr sworrr* too... In sucking the tea, he would get a sip, but mostly nothing was brought in. His mouth, having dried up due to shock, gave him an uncomfortable feeling of something akin to hunger and extreme thirst.

Bra Monty waited until he had finished drinking his tea and took the cups to the kitchen. He felt a certain trampling of sand underneath his feet; it was the sugar. He thought about where Solly had spilled the sugar, how the floor would certainly be gluey. Then he spilled out the tea and poured some water from the fridge for both of them. This he did because he realised Solly had drunk air. One sip of the substance seemed to calm his nerves and all the hell that surrounded him began to inch its way into Solly's reality.

“Ey Bra Monty, wat is die shandies mara, dae mamajika is gone. Wa e bona dae ding mara my bra? She is gone for sure.”

“Monna ek ken nie wat om te witie, mara galyk fo my sy's anakant, gone my broer.”

“Heee, Bra Monty jy ken ek het tot gechaya hoseng so. Ek het my volle morning glory gekry en daar was nie n smok. Not even a hint te se goetes sal so is. Hey, jy ken, di is a smok my bra chandies anesties. Heee madoda, vroumense, basadi, women my broer, mhhh?”

He said this releasing a violent sound through his nose which emitted phlegm. Only after he had kept quiet for some time did Bra Monty react.

“Hee ndoda, did you say jy't gechaya nou nou this morning, you made love to that woman?”

“Yah grotman, I mean the normal phansi-phezulu ding. Was eintlik mca, ek was ook fresh by di job. Nou diri's. Haai; nxa.

“Aaeee, vroumense, you support her, you give security and most of all, jy chee haar di lekker ding, phela daar's nou di main line. O tla e thola kae, unless if sy't klaar n skelm card gaspeel. Haibo.”

At this point Solly was totally calmed down and laughed heartily at Bra Monty's 'main line' insinuation.

They kept silent for a while as if each was fishing for something to say. Only the pond from which they fished was full of mud. Soon Bra Monty gave an indication to go. Solly knew this was going to happen and he would be left in the eerie and now ghostly house alone.

He tried to open a conversation for something to hold down Bra Monty but Bra Monty soon said, “Ey mchana 'm my mamajika kom nou nou so. Laat ek dladla toe gaan, settle her a bit ek sal re-back bo jou”. Moenie worry my laitie, ek is hier, ek is mon jou kick off, half time, full time, extra time and penalties, ek sal tot hi is mon replay.”

He concluded with that soccer metaphor. Then he got up from the bed, determined to go, and realised that he had been sitting on a very comfortable bed and said.

“Ek se monna die vrou van jou los di mantofon-tofo bed net so? Yerrrr jong die bed is lekker jong”.

“Ons het gedobol hier so in the morning, Aaii,” said Solly.

Bra Monty went out through the kitchen door, a door that is used in all township houses without anybody knowing the reason why. In most households the front door serves almost as decoration of sorts, never used. In worst case scenarios, nails have pinned it permanently to the door frame so that it is un-openable. Circumstances may force that it be opened one day and it will take an odd uncle to do so. Often such uncles put conditions down before work can begin and whether or not anybody is agreeable, somebody must go get a few beers and put them down. After Bra Monty had left, Solly set to check the details in his house with a fine comb.

Some force pulled him to Marylin’s wardrobe and once again he opened the double doors. The hangers danced once again with a force engendered by the pull of the doors. He looked at all the hangers clanging this way and that but in that hurried clangour the red was not very visible. Only when the clanging subsided did the dance of the red hanger like a determined athlete on the final stretch, pulling away from the rest, show great visibility. Almost right in the middle of them all, it moved from side to side, shoulder to shoulder, neck to neck, and danced its magical offering to him. The dance, like a charm, spoke its own language, one that Solly was beginning to understand. It seemed to want to reconcile these other hangers and at the same time seemed to want to make him understand the situation in which he was. Solly, not the one to cry easily felt sweat dripping down his cheeks. It was not sweat but tears. He sat down on the bed and wept such an undignified cry that it shamed him.

He fell into a doze and woke up with a start after he had dreamt playing with Bontle, his daughter, at the park not far from where they stayed.

## THE SETTLER'S MONUMENT

Here I am again, after those many years.

The parking space ensconced in the green around it reminds me of my cousin Motlhalefi who used to work for *The Star* newspaper. Some young boys would be selling kites and flying others high above this concrete structure that's so strongly built. Motlhalefi would be all over my wife and I, hugging me feverishly and kissing her enthusiastically. During that cultural pilgrimage, The Grahamstown Arts Festival, this imposing building would be adorned with banners and pamphlets on the walls, on the floors and wherever else.

Here I am again, looking at the doors written in red, "Box Office".

We would go through these doors, either to buy tickets or just to enjoy the company and camaraderie of the other festival attendees. She would join the queues stand very close to me, at times holding my hand and saying sweet nothings. The throng of festival attendees, so very gracious and pleasant, would converse and share their experiences of the shows they'd seen. This will always remain an irreplaceable joy that will live in the most comfortable seat of my memory.

Here I am again, though not able to go in due to the Covid thing, looking at the most inspirational words by Henry Dugmore: "We must take root and grow or die where we stand." How these words inspired us in our young marriage. How we imagined growing individually and yet collectively in our marriage. Yes, we had to grow, we had to achieve and attain in our respective careers. Life was to be lived to the fullest, by the two of us. We had to invest in us. These words were meant just for us.

Here I am again, remembering an exquisitely fine and fun show that featured the diva, the late Sibongile Khumalo, performing the music of Bra Gibson Kente, with choreography done by Somizi Mhlongo. What a show! Some of the music of the band, so clear that it could be coming from a great hi-fi machine, still rings in my mind, songs from How Long, *Sikalo*, *Zwi* and many others.

Here I am again, now raking up the muddy waters of how she began to change; in the manner in which she walked or didn't walk, in the manner in which she sat or didn't sit, in the manner in which she slept or didn't sleep, in the manner in which she looked at me or didn't look at me, in the manner in which she turned at the corner towards the kitchen or didn't turn, in the manner in which she walked to her newly bought car with keys in her hands or didn't walk to the

car, in the manner in which she stood in the middle of the living room or didn't stand, in the manner in which she talked to me or didn't talk, in the manner in which she laughed or didn't laugh, in the manner in which she talked to her friends over the phone or didn't talk to her friends. There was an element of very stupid pride that was creeping in, the pride of someone who was sure that something was going to happen. What exactly, I did not know. Apparently, that was my impending death, after she should have left the house.

Here I am again, now seeing afresh how she brought police into the house to give me a damn protection order. How can I forget how that policeman asked me as to whether I had a gun or not? I mean how can I? Me? A gun? ... and she took her clothes out of the wardrobe, one by one, as she ignored the questions that I asked, about what this whole thing with the police was about. Her sister, with a face like she had drunk a combo of vinegar, cayenne pepper, crushed garlic and tobacco, sat there in the one seat sofa and looked curiously at me. Hers was a sour face, probably the face of a witch.

Here I am, outside this concrete structure, calling to memory how I saw a tall man parking in front of my gate and straightening himself as he took out a big brown envelope from the car. I just felt, all right, this is it. The man knocked and I went to open for him and he very humbly requested me to sit down, after which he told me that he had brought my divorce papers. He probably thought I was going to collapse and faint. Instead, I rejoiced and clapped, as I would do after a beautiful enjoyable scene in a theatre.

Here I am again, staring at this imposing structure called the 1820 Settlers Monument, silent like a sleeping baby, waking up all the emotions of her family which had kept silent in complicity with her. Nobody dared to talk to me, nobody dared to visit. As soon as she had gone, the story of my married life got drowned in the space between where she was and where I was.

Here I am again, seeing Barack Obama in that lonely morning being introduced as the 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States and then bursting into uncontrollable crying. The volcano that was lying dormant in my chest just blew up and all the emotions spilled out like a lava of tears. My pillow became wet and as I phoned my boss, I could also sense that he was weeping with joy for Obama as well. He simply told me to come to work when I was ready.

Here I am again, as I look at this ancient tall grey statue of a settler with a raised pick axe getting down to work, I wonder as to what happened with the deep meaning of the words: "We must take root and grow or die where we stand".

I'm asking myself: did we understand the words in the same way?

This story is too long, I'll stop here and repose on the memory that mine was an honest life but hers I doubt. It was surely mixed with witchcraft.

## FROM EMAKHISHINI WITH LOVE

They come with dried bread called dikoromola, from emakhishini. These become a relish to children in the village during the Christmas holidays. The bread has been dried to preserve its edibility. When you walk on a road from a distance and you see a crowd of people dancing, you don't hear any music, you just see bodies twisting and turning and some jumping, it creates an image of people who are mad. Somebody has bought a gramophone and records from town to bring home for entertainment.

In such moments of great cheer and enjoyment, invariably fights break out.

Those from the towns want to display the cleverness that they have gathered from the cities. Even their walk has changed: they bump up and down like tennis balls. Handkerchiefs hang out from their pockets and they call themselves by strange names. Billy would be Ou Billy Hodges, Sam, Bra Sam Ringo Star, Sidney, Sidney Sherif etc. They'd talk a certain language spoken there in the cities called tsotsitaal.

The other day Ntswai, the short one, brandished a big knife, but was nearly stabbed by it himself. After Amnini grabbed it from him, he ran like the wind and his comical short steps in his big boots created a cloud of dust behind him.

I saw bra Sheriff passing by behind our yard. He walks like he has a spring in his heels. He bumps. He always goes to see Sis' Esther. Titus saw them between the rocks by the rivulet. He said Bra Sheriff's body was bumping, just like he walks, on top of Sis' Esther. Her legs were wide open and were facing the sky. Titus, the naughty one, said we must go and watch.

Nothing happened for three days as we hid behind the big rock.

I gave up.

Ralekgwadi, the village ibangalala, was known for breaking into houses where only women live. It was obvious what he wants to do. He took advantage of his village police duties. One night, Dorika, the beautiful auntie, finished a box of matches while Ralekgwadi was at the door trying to break in. She wanted to see the person. Every time she lit one, Ralekgwadi said *ffffff* to extinguish the light. She screamed and said, "Matchese o fedile, thusang motho su o batla go tsena ka mo ntlong!"

It took a brave man, Troy, the neighbour, to go and scare Ralekgwadi away.

Friday nights at home were always time for great entertainment.

There was the Sa kosha ke lerole programme from the Sepedi Radio Bantu FM and L.M. Top Twenty from Radio Lourenco Marques. Radio was a great source of entertainment for all. There was music galore. The vernacular radio stations provided local musical hits while LM provided international hits. The music would come after the greatest entertainment of my younger times, dinoonwane, fireside folktales and dithamalakwane.

We would all participate with great enthusiasm in the spectacle. As the fireside tales proceeded, we'd be roasting peanuts in a flat big pan or roasting mielies attached to cobs. Their taste was great, even more when they were cooked.

Yah, those were the days, Christmas and Fridays or in whatever order, always worth looking forward to. Nice...

Then came urbanisation in full force, and worst of all, television and cell phone gadgets. Then, the elitism of social life, children going to schools in the cities and suburbs.

They have completely changed their mojo and way of life. They speak Setswana through their noses like it was a smelly thing. Their vernacular names are anglicised. Matshediso becomes Maysedisio, Malose, May-loss, Siphon, Siphon, etc. Life has never been the same. People are no longer with each other. Things, as Achebe has said, have fallen apart...and indeed the process is irreversible... and the 'black government', instead of reviving all the traditional and cultural things for all nationalities, is leading in erasing these beautiful things of the past...a popular South African Group, Stimela asks the question in another context, "Tell me, tell me, where did we go wrong?"

## STOKVEL

Smoke billowed from the household of Dorcas Kgasi, where the Stokvel was being held. Women members of the Stokvel were busy at the back of the house, in a ramshackle special enclosure made of poles and corrugated iron. All the cooking was done inside there and the smell of food wafted in the air, igniting the olfactory sense. Men had done their bit from Wednesday in collecting firewood and buying groceries and cooking tools such as big three-legged pots, big bowls, plates and other eating utensils. All these were collected from members of the Stokvel. There was enough of everything, particularly food. As Dorcas put it, “we dare not run short of food; we can rather be short of eaters”. As the women members did their cooking the men had relaxed under two mulberry trees that people referred to as mafatlha a mmurubele, twin mulberry trees. They had done their part in chopping wood, filling the pots with water, cutting the meat, and other menial jobs.

They were often called to assist when needed.

It was clear that the African beer that men were consuming was beginning to make noise in their stomachs and minds.

“Bona, bona wena, Short Eddie, you have on Hunter boots and not polish-able shoes. You, Bazabaza have sandals on, mara kante wat gaan aan mon julle majita” said Sweet Eddie, who was head of the Disciplinary Committee of the Kopanong Society, for that was the name of their Stokvel. Their motto was: Tsholetsa mme o Kuke, Lift and Hold High.

“But nna bafethu my left leg can’t fit into a shoe. You can see for yourself, I got injured,” said Bazabaza, pointing at the rather huge bandage that wrapped all his toes.

“Who did you report to,” asked Sweet Eddie.

“Eish, dae laitie van my is ma net hy’s altyd weg, I thought ek sal hom stuur daar bor ou Marinkie,” said Bazabaza, trying to defend himself.

“No man, dis nie aan bafethu, you could have gone there yourself,” averred Sweet Eddie. “We can’t go on like this magents, no ways. Anyway, let’s wait for the meeting, we’ll settle things there”.

Those who had defaulted in various ways knew that they would be hit with a fine. The amount charged would depend on the heinousness of the crime. When they held meetings they had to put on uniform. Men wore either khaki or grey flannel trousers, yellow shirts and black shoes. The shoes had to shine.

“You must use your shoe as a mirror; dan jy moet ken jy’s nca,” Sweet Eddie said, raising his thumbs on the word “nca”. At that point, he took out a legusha, a woman’s pantyhose, from his back pocket to give his shoes a shine.

Men have adopted pantyhose as an instrument to shine their shoes. For some reason they enjoy it the most when they hold the top end of the pantyhose where the panty is. They wrap it so that the top is where they hold. Sweet Eddie bent his head from this side to that in appreciation of his shiny Barker shoes.

The Stokvel is an old practice of either making money or saving money as investment among African people in villages and townships of South Africa. Members of the Stokvel contribute money regularly and at the end of the year share the monies to spend particularly during the Christmas season. Over a period of time, the concept has evolved into many other sub-divisions. In the distant past, when African people did not have any access to Banks, the money would be kept by a chosen member for safe keeping. Trust was of vital importance, and accountability was a top priority from those who were responsible. The concept may assume a different name in other parts of the country. In some places it is called mogodisano and others umgalelo. Mogodisano comes from the concept ‘go gola’ which means to earn and umgalelo comes from uku galela, to fill in. There was also at some point the concept gazi, a once off in which an individual or family would cook and braai and people buy food and drinks. Various other concepts have evolved, like people enlisting names of relatives who when death has visited a family, grocery items are bought to help at the funeral of the enlisted relatives. There are instances where people submit falsely about relatives who have died whereas they live. In many instances, members have a special uniform and must be spruce on the day of the meetings.

There was a big plastic container of umqomboti, African beer, in the middle of the circle that the men had formed and four gourds which were placed on plastic plates. They used the gourds to drink and did a sip and pass. All forms of discussions and arguments would arise among the men; sport (fanatical), politics (full of insults), women (pure adoration); spane or their work places (undisguised hatred).

At around 11 o’clock, a girl brought water in a small bath and a dry towel for the men to wash their hands. Not long thereafter, one of the men was called to collect a big bowl of meat. He placed it right at the centre. They were all to eat from the bowl and they fell upon the meat like a

pack of lions pouncing on prey. They ate the piping hot meat amidst cries and moans of “mmhh, this meat goes down mnandi bafethu, mmhh mmhhh mmhhh. The salting is from the heavens ... yerrrr jong.” Not long thereafter, when the stomach was hot with satisfaction, Bazabaza sang what was supposed to be Jim Reeves’ “This World Is Not My Home”. With his super bass voice, he sang, seeming to pull the lyrics of the song from all over but the song itself:

Dis wengelengs mot hoong hoo	This world is not my home
Oooh jas di phe feng fung	I'm just passing through
Ma pheseses haaii len haa	My treasures are laid up
Sam reng ma tong di huu	Somewhere beyond the blue
De enjens bakom hii	The angels beckon me
Drom helenes di rong reng rooo	From heavens open door
En I khem filla hoo	And I can't feel at home
In dis wennng anymore	In this world anymore

The word “anymore” is about the only word that he got right in that song. His mouth remained open like a donkey’s at the climax of its braying on the “more” of “anymore”. He’d continue to pile up non-existent or insignificant words as he continued to sing any song. Bazabaza loved music from his primary school days. He often said, “Pasop, if I went to school up to high school, the radio was going to take me to sing inside it, mcwi s’true my ma hoor my. Yah, de radio was *gwenn* take me.”.

He always sang at the slightest opportunity. At school, he sang in a rich, deep bass voice. School choir conductors always modelled their choirs’ bass line around him.

But before he could continue with the song Short Eddie interrupted him.

“Aai wena, suka mhan, wena you think you are Mahlatini (he meant Jim Reeves). Fokof mhan. Laat ons chaya die songs wat ons alman fostaan, fok mhan.”

Short Eddie had a short fuse, and though they were on good terms, he often had little side battles with Bazabaza. He pitched a song in a voice that was halfway between a goat’s bleat and a screech in an empty drum.

Seeing that Short Eddie’s voice was small as a rat’s and quite off, Bazabaza pitched the same song, but Short Eddie stopped him abruptly again and shouted:

“Wa bo, wa bo, wena mhan jy like goetes. Wat jy vrou mense sien, jy word bitjie anesties dan slaan jy die spring tatazela. Is jy bang for di vrou mense. O batla ho impresa di vrouens mos. Aee fok mhan.”

He said that making a vigorous circling motion next to his right ear at the same time as he knocked his knees together to indicate a shiver of sorts.

“Yerrr.... mara kante hoe’s jy nca nca ...” Sweet Eddie said. “Mo jinde ma se kind, mo jinde, laat hy somer aan gaan mon di tune”.

That gave Bazabaza a chance to pitch the song he had begrudged Short Eddie. There were two Eddies, Short Eddie and Sweet Eddie. The former, though short in stature, always started problems that were as gargantuan as the Drakensberg Mountain. The other Eddie, Sweet Eddie, was a man of sober habits who never caused any problems for anyone. His only problem was that he was married to a shrew. Her voice could be heard abroad as she shouted the blazes at her husband. Sweet Eddie would just keep quiet because trying to talk to her or calm her down just increased her volume. Rumours abounded that he had eaten the korobela often referred to as the ‘stay soft’ to quieten him. This practice is supposed to be some kind of muti that’s given to a man so that the wife can control him and drag him by the nose.

He spoke only when necessary. They all joined in with their shilling’s worth of voices. Each took part and their combined drunken voices chose either tenor or bass to sing. Bazabaza had an amazing vocal range. They sang an old folk song which was in vogue during the times when families used to intermarry. The elders would choose a wife for a man from his paternal uncles and or aunts.

Ngwan ‘a malome / Child of my uncle

.s :s.s	I d.t	:.l   - :.r	I - :-	.l :l.s	I l.l	:.s	- :.m	I - :-	.m	.m.f	I s.l	:s.s	.f	:.l	I - :-	
Ngwan ‘a malome	ntshwa -- re,	ngwana ‘a malome	ntshu --- ne	ngwana ‘a malome	ke motswala											
Child of my uncle	hold me	child of my uncle	kiss me	child of my uncle	is my cousin											
s,m	:m,m,	I r,,d,	:t,d,	- :-	I - :-	.s :s.s.	I .s :s.s	.f :m.r	I - :-	.l :l.l	I .l :l.l	.s :s.m	I - :-			
‘Kgomo di boele	‘sakeng	hao di bo	na	di goroga	hao di bona di goroga											
Cattle must remain in the kraal		when you see them as they arrive		when you see them as they arrive												
-   d,	:m	I s.l	:s.s	.f :l	I - :-	s,m,	:m,m,	I r,,d,	:t,d,	- :-	I - :-	: I	:   : I	:   : I		
Fa di tsoko tsa me	-ga tla	‘kgomo di boele	‘sakeng.													
And they shake their tails		Cattle must remain in the kraal														

“Jy sien, daar’s nou di songs van ons, nie dae weng wengs van jou, jou bleti houtkop,” said Short Eddie. The drinking continued with no worries. Sis Betty’s brew went down well. When she brewed with Mma Seloadi and Mma Swaratlhe, people knew the beer would be strong and satisfying. They continued to sing other folk songs as they drank. It was Short Eddie who kept on refilling the plastic container with umqombothi and the men began to enjoy themselves. Comments such as, “Dis di beste Stokvel van ons ouens, di ousie van hi, ou Dorcars, wa di khanda, haai, wa di busa di ousie straight” filled the air with happiness.

Soon it was time for lunch, which was dished on enamel plates. All kinds of food, salads included, were served but most men preferred pap en vleis, porridge or sour porridge and meat only. There was beef, mutton, boerewors and chicken. It was a real feast. They all ate with much relish, with some of the women joining the men under the twin trees. When they were all done and the dishes were collected Dorcas complained that the men had not eaten enough.

“I knew that mqomboti before food was going to cause this small-eating problem. Now look at all the food that has remained and is wasted. You people forget that in other parts of the world people don’t even have crumbs, yerrrrrrr. Now all of this will be dog food. Me, that’s why I’ll never own dogs, never, no, never is not”.

The men quietly looked down.

Bazabaza dared to say, “No, gooi dae left overs somewhere ons sal hulle chaya, moenie worry Mado. Di dag is nog lank”

Dorcas gave him a look whose words could fill a thousand pages. Then the women proceeded to wash the dishes they could manage.

The Stokvel meeting was being held under the trees and all of the members were present. The secretary, Dorcas, went through the minutes of the previous meeting. Only she, Sweet Eddie, and the Chairperson of the Stokvel, Sis Betty, had copies thereof. No matters arose from the minutes except for a few spelling mistakes that were corrected. Then the Chairperson gave her report.

The issue of uniform popped up, but was soon reserved for later discussion. It was obvious that punishment would be meted out to those who deserved it.

Then Sweet Eddie gave his report. He had withdrawn money and given ten thousand for the day’s expenses to Dorcas, who was heading the Catering Committee. Sweet Eddie and Sis Betty were co-signatories in the finances. They had withdrawn a hundred and ten thousand rand

minus ten for the day's expenditure. The hundred would be shared the following day. The rest of the money, including whatever would be contributed in the lead up to Christmas, would be withdrawn during the holidays.

The hundred thousand rand was to be shared very early on the morning of Sunday when all shall have reached a reasonable level of sobriety. All was hunky dory and everyone was happy. They cheered, the men whistled and women ululated and there was a great sense of celebration and camaraderie. They sang celebratory songs as is the case with African communities, but this one they enjoyed the most:

Nkabe ke tsebile      If I had known  
Nkabe ke sa nyalwa    I wouldn't have got married  
Lenyalo le boima      Marriage is heavy/sour  
Sdudla sa itlhotlhora    The fat woman shakes herself (vigorously)

They held hands as partners and danced around one mulberry tree. When they sang "Sdudla se a itlhotlhora", the women outspanned and shook their behinds vigorously at the men who looked on with lustful eyes and beaming faces. After a few more songs, it was time to go to their respective homes.

Sweet Eddie was among the first to leave - with a warning that people must come early the following day. He had neatly packed the money in a garbage bag and put it between the box spring and the mattress on which he slept. When he arrived home, he checked the money and everything was in order. He proceeded to Bra Troy's household, one of the people he trusted but who consistently refused to join the Stokvel. Then he went home and his elder son Briki, told him that Mma Eti, his shrewd wife, said she'd come back and had just hit a jikana around the corner.

Bazabaza left quite late from Dorcas' house. It was way into midnight when he stood. He would walk on the meadow that declined into a rivulet and would incline again towards his home. The sky was slightly overcast and the moon kept on playing hide and seek behind the clouds. When it disappeared behind the clouds again, he found himself having to jump over stones, for the rivulet - though dry at that point - flowed through a small mountain. He lifted his right foot to jump over, as there were trees on the side, and totally missed the footpath. The stone stood up and walked with him towards the rivulet. He was balancing precariously and was almost about to fall.

“Iyhooooooooo, iyhooo mma wee, sepoko se tshaba ka nna,” he thought, a ghost was taking him away, and he screamed himself hoarse.

Then he landed on the sand and laughed the laughter of a very drunk man when the donkey said “Brrrr” after he had been offloaded. He had scooped up a mouthful of sand and now struggled to spit it out. He also battled to stand as his hands and feet could not find proper balance in the sand and he crawled towards the rivulet bank before he stood up.

He got home without any bother from the neighbouring dogs. He went to the kitchen door at the back of the house and opened it, for it was not locked and said:

“Mma Spetla, Mma Spetla, where’s food, I’m hungry, can’t you see, mmmhh?”

He repeated the shout before his wife who was in deep sleep woke up and answered, “Jesses wena wa tena man, what time is this, your food is on top of the kitchen table.”

He patted and shook his trousers to locate where his box of matches was and found it squashed in the back pocket. He lit a match, saw the candle, and ignited it. The plate of food was there; covered but not fully. With the candle in one hand, he used the other to eat. Moths were flying about and soon one flew into the wax of the burning candle, thus dimming the glow of light. He thought he could remove the butterfly with his tongue and brought the candle closer to his mouth. His unsteady hand handled the candle to his beard and released an acrid smell of burning hair.

He screamed so loud that Mma Spetla shouted, “Hey wena, go and kill yourself where you have been. Yerr nna ska tlo ntena man.”

The pain made him fling the candle unceremoniously away from him and it landed on the table and went off. For a moment he was plunged into total darkness and didn’t know where the box of matches was; neither could he locate his plate of food. Then he found them and lit the candle and ate.

Bazabaza was not aware that, as he entered the kitchen, there was a film of small black ants that had been attracted by the fat in his food. Once they land on the food, as in honey, they fill the container and feast. They get into honey or food and get trapped and die in there.

So it was with his food.

In his drunken state, Bazabaza could not have seen them. He simply consumed the food, ants and all. When he got to his bedroom, Mma Spetla protested, “Phu phu phu you smell like a lavatory, what did you eat and drink from where you’d been.”

“It’s your food, akere. I’ve just eaten your food. Kante wena what have you cooked, aooo.”

Not long after Bazabaza had laid his head on the pillow, did Mma Spetla jump and say:

“Bazabaza, what have you brought to these blankets?”

“Aachi wena I know when you want to run away from mnandi you do this kind of bioscope.”

To which, Mma Spetla said, “Sies mnandi, mnandi what can you do o le tjena, your thing is as limp and useless as a baby’s hand. You probably don’t even know anymore where those mnandis are located. You probably would search under the armpits.”

When Mma Spetla lit a bedside lamp, she saw small ants crawling all over the cream white pillowcases and blankets. She scolded him and told him to go and wash outside while she tried to shake off the ants from the blankets. When he came back to sleep, Mma Spetla said to him, “You have eaten the grandfathers, grandmothers, mothers, fathers and children of those ants. I wish they finish off your balls”.

Sweet Eddie arrived home after he had had some entertaining moments with Bra Troy, who was a great collector of music. The children told him that their mother had said she’d come back soon. He went into his bedroom and waited a while for his wife to come back. His eyes automatically drifted towards the roof. At long last, he was going to install the ceiling in his room with the proceeds of the shared money. It was something he’d been planning for a while. Seeing that the wife was not coming back, he lifted the mattress and felt for the garbage bag. It was there and everything seemed alright. He prepared himself for sleep. If his wife came, fine, if she didn’t, well maybe she was held up somewhere and would come home eventually. He always preferred to sleep naked. He denied some niggling instinct which kept on worrying him to do a thorough check of the money; maybe even count it. He didn’t fall asleep for quite some time. After some heavy and tough debate with his soul, he woke up at around four in the morning, lit the lamp and pulled the garbage bag from under the mattress. He was surprised to see bits of newspaper falling out of it. When he spilled the entire contents on the bed, his socks, a few pairs of his underwear, and small pieces of cardboard and linen fell on the bed along with the paper. Sweet Eddie looked at all of it, transfixed between extreme shock and paralysing fear. In the midst of all that spilled onto the bed was a red pantie. He didn’t know it and it neither looked new. He picked it up and out of it fell a hundred rand note with face of the note looking up. It seemed as if that smile was specifically made to mock him. His body began to shake uncontrollably. His gut instinct told him

what he did not want to accept. He searched for his bedroom key and locked the door from the inside.

On Sunday, the very worried Stokvel members decided to send a delegation to go and check on Sweet Eddie. The very long wait, which had started at eight, was becoming rather unbearable. It was already past three in the afternoon and there was still no sign of him. Sweet Eddie's children said their father went to sleep late at night and their mother didn't come home. They knocked and knocked with no response. After a long while, they decided to break the door.

His naked body was dangling from the rafters and his bed was strewn with paper and small pieces of linen. Amidst all the rubble and dirt on the bed was a hundred rand note, now slightly concealed by a rather dirty looking red pantie. The smell of death and other things inside the room was an over bearing unpleasant surprise...

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Part B: Portfolio

**Diski 9 Nine and Other Stories (and Things)**

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

**Master of Arts in Creative Writing**

of

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by

**Stoffel Mahlabe**

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## REFLECTIVE JOURNALS IN SUMMARY

I was looking forward to travelling to e-Makhanda for the Masters in Creative Writing Course with excitement and great expectations, but during the countdown to my departure from Mafikeng I was filled with trepidation.

Arriving with excitement at our destination posed several questions, the most important of which was where to sleep for the night. There was a one night stand for they would leave the following day. We found a place which was cheaper for the three of us but a place I had to leave for another the following day.

No time to waste, Tuesday class was on. During the Reading Exercise I was knocked down with a super punch by Gayreah who read that fascinating tale of the '*Old Man of Usumbura*'. I thought I was going to read it again and she might have thought 'Stoffel I read this one, you can go to blazes'. It is such a masculine tale whose main characters are two men, one, the old man of Usumbura and another the old man of Kigali and the many sons of the old man from Usumbura. It was interesting to hear it being read by a feminine voice though in places she stumbled because of the repetition which as she confessed often confused her. In the story women are not delineated as individual characters but a collective that's called to the blood of the sons through the olfactory sense when they had gone to look for them. I think it remains one of the most interesting tales in that collection. Gayreah, congratulations, you double kicked me on that one.

I had alternatively prepared '*Waiting for the Barbarians*' which to me is somewhat of an African allegory. The masses wait and wait for people who are in exile or outside the country to come and liberate them but in the end nothing happens. This was the case in '*Waiting for the Barbarians*'. There was so much pomp which was to lead to ceremony but nothing happened in the end. The masses remain empty handed, of course in '*Waiting ...*' the Barbarians make a no show at all something which is pretty the same with many post-independence African regimes. As the state resources fill in the pockets and fill stomachs of those in power, the perpetrators of the new order disappear from the public eye.

What pleasurable re-reading I've had in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* by Ayi Kwei Armah from *The Long Reading List*. It is true according to one of my previous mentors that a well - constructed work of art is such that when you revisit it you discover new things. Another book that I have chosen from Group One is *Journey to the End of the Night* by Louis Ferdinand Celine. I don't know how that one will be accessed as I don't even have a student card yet. This time around I had to read Armah's book from the point of view of a writer and had to look at some of the following: (a) how Armah presents the story of post - independence Ghana, (b) through which characters he presents what aspects of Ghanaian life, (c) how he presents the landscape which is the setting of the story (d) how the rich and the poor engage in the new circumstances until all shit hit the fan to upstage the corrupt government.

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Kerry's exercise was as fascinating as it was funny. I saw the funny part in the N + 7 when the words of the chorus of The Beatles' 'Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds' became 'Lucy in Sky with

Diapers'. That was so terribly nonsensical and it elicited bouts of laughter. I wonder what Paul and Ringo, the remaining Beatles would say about that one. We had a few choices to write from. My choice was the evocative piece and the 'one does not start ...one cannot start ... and one starts ...' In this one, the one does not ..., Gayreah's personal tale of childbirth was such a moving story that drained emotions. By the time she finished I still wondered why she still had no drop from her eyes. Sibongakonke and Fortunate's stories had human beings cast in situations of dire vulnerability. These stories saw people's dignity and human integrity totally stripped. But when another person is exposed in situations like those, it reflects on all humanity.

My piece was a reflective experience based on the memories evoked by the 1820 Settlers' Monument which during the festival is the nerve centre of that annual pilgrimage. I had the repetitive words, 'Here I am again ...' in which I used some interior monologue to recall the good old days in my now defunct marriage.

The Seminar itself was quite interesting. I could have never thought that punctuation could be so radically used outside of its own 'established' conventions of: commas for short pauses, full stop, for longer pauses, semi-colon and colon, for anything in between the two. A text that 'hugged' me so to speak is an excerpt from *Rigadoon* by Louis-Ferdinand Celine. He is coincidentally a writer I have chosen in my reading from Group One alongside Armah.

For my written original piece I harked back to my school days and fictionalized an episode of corporal punishment that often befell us.

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Monday found us in the company of Nathan who said one of the most sobering sound bites when he said; writers should be the most affectionate readers first and went on to explain how reading is just as creative an act as writing. He was on about how a text should be read and how a text should be analysed and or evaluated. Readers come from a variety of backgrounds and may at times take the liberty to impose their biases on the text, But, hokaai, this should not be the case. Each writer has a fingerprint that he imposes from his intellect on a text. Well, that made a lot of sense. I mean so much writing has happened in this world and certainly for as long as people are born there shall be writing and more writing. He warned us to the dangers and oft times pitfalls of imposing prejudices in the form of favouritisms, predispositions and partisanships on a text.

We were then given two texts to read one of which was; *The Library of Babel*, by Jorge Luis Borges (1941)

The first sentence of the text reads as follows:

The universe (which others call the Library) is composed of an indefinite and perhaps infinite number of hexagonal galleries, with vast air shafts between, surrounded by very low railings.

Aiyaya yaya yayaaa ...I think there was an involuntary whistling from me after reading just this first sentence. My bleri goodness, what is this? We were supposed to read this, get inspiration from it and write that which we were inspired to write. Okay, okay, I thought of something quite

crazy. I wondered what could happen in the Hereafter if spirits that depart from the earth meet there and reflect about what they did in Bophelong. I really do believe that if the story could be well thought out and planned it could be something quite interesting. But what's in a story and of what value is it? What moral will it carry? Who will read it? What will be the purpose of my writing the story? Who do I as a writer expect to read the story? Arg, these are questions that I guess beset and torment all writers and thinking about them too much may end up dissuading one to write. I'm going to write the story. *Nakanjani!*

The story will surely encompass the social, historical, economic and political aspects of the Southern African region. I must design some language for the Hereafter. Surely people there cannot talk like people in Bophelong. Well, let's see what will grow out of this.

The Thursday feed - back on what we'd written was sure fireworks. Ghaireyah hit us with the Kaapse klopse, an indigenous language to the Cape Flats. So fluent in it she is that she could be a bird flying in a room, the wings never stop to flutter or flap. Once she starts reading she sings over the text. If you don't understand the words you'll understand something through the inflection of the voice. Sibongakonke pays careful attention to detail in her writing. One actually sees the things she writes about as they are carefully detailed. She becomes her characters. Fortunate's text was so sensitive and imaged of somebody being in a bowel or cage. All had great texts that were presented. Mine Nathan said could be improved and that he loved it. It was neat because I had written shorter sentences but I also needed to improve on my portrayal of Zimbabwe.

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Paul's Book Reviewing Seminar was from a challenging text entitled; *Dysfunctional Troglodytes with Mail - Order Weaponry*. This is actually a book review of Edward Dorn's book entitled COLLECTED POEMS. A strong argument may be advanced that the book reviewer, Iain Sinclair, actually loves or even worships E. Dorn. Some observation from a certain angle may suggest that the review seems to be an autobiographical text. The text is dense with examples being drawn from film, music and other texts. I do believe that anybody with the knowledge of the times of Dorn that Sinclair had, of its artistic products of books, film and music and knowledge of academia in the background will write a text like this one, *Dysfunctional Troglodytes...* The cross referencing that he did to these other art related genres is phenomenal. Paul urged us to read as many and varied book review material as we possibly could. Book reviews will be part of the programme.

*Forest of a Thousand Daemons* is a novel by D.O. Fagunwa that has been translated into English by Wole Soyinka. I went with Sabrina to collect books from the Department and I got this book and Celine's *Journey to the End of The Night*. Having read the book three quarter way, I may not do justice to an authentic literary commentary on the book. Suffice to say this is the story of a hunter, Akara-Ogun who in his expedition meets with all kinds of mysterious, unusual and larger than life creatures, some called ghommids and some related to ghommids and some having evolved from ghommids. The ghommids are neither human nor animal but have extreme characteristics that range from extreme cruelty to extreme kindness. There may not be a lot of dialogue in the book but there are often long and elaborate speeches from a variety of people ranging from kings

to subjects and heroes of communities. So many things pose danger to the life of Akara-Ogun but fate and sometimes metaphysical circumstance comes to his rescue and he survives. Of course he has to survive. He is the hero in the story. If he dies the narration will die, and the story will discontinue. Up to the point I have read, he had met perhaps one of the bravest and strongest men in the story, his cousin Kako who tackles dangerous challenges without batting an eyelid. The story has these dichotomies of victors and victims, heroes and villains, beauty and ugliness, bravery and cowardice comfort and danger, strength and weakness and also navigates between past and present. At any one stage in the story the reader cannot predict what may happen as Akan-Ogun may be placed in a situation of extreme danger that the reader may think he will die. But he triumphs over such situations to meet other challenges. On his way to the Mount of Langbodo expedition, Akan-Ogun has in his company “Olohin-iyó, the Voice of Flavour; he was the most handsome ... the finest singer and the best drummer”. This character saved the Langbodo entourage from some serious challenges. His music has charm and moves even the toughest hearts.

p79

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Mishka’s Seminar themed *Desire and Derangement* started on a musical note with the cool strains of a song entitled ‘Cherry Wine’ by Hozier. Though the song is about an abusive relationship the music through which it comes is beautiful. We read other texts that were quite philosophical in nature and therefore a bit dense. Mishka led us to an understanding thereof. Freestyle writing from the Seminar was on Desire with (lots of) Sensory detail. My Assignment was about a young man who spent ten years of study overseas. He comes home to find his family uprooted by forced removals and visits the ruins of his former home. His visit coincides with the challenge of a devastating drought and grinding famine. All is essentially lifeless, man and beast alike. He longs for the pure and pristine past.

My piece received positive feedback from all with Nelia saying it is the best thing that she thought I’ve ever written. I was cautioned by Fortunato to use simple language. Mishka indicated that it had some amazing detail as in ‘...branches were like tumescent veins on a bodybuilder’s hand’. Gaireyah said she often taught with a photograph by saying the learners must walk through the picture with their eyes and try and see movement through a still photo. My piece was like that. She thought though short it had a lot of detail. I was advised to clean the piece by discarding some words in order to keep it as simple as I possibly could. Others said the piece was different from my ‘normal’ writing and it actually showed my versatility.

I had chosen for my Tuesday Seminar, *The Milka Cow*, a light hearted story whose narrator is excited from the beginning to the end. The story is comical as it goes with the narrator and his dancers through a roller coast of fun and laughter. From the discovery of a ‘Boeing 747 ... in the courtyard of my hut’ - an implausible feat – the narration unfolds with a plot that is unpredictable. Surprise after surprise follow with the discovery that the Boeing seems to be actually tailor made for the narrator and his troop of dancers. It is ‘like a suite in a thirteen-star hotel’. As he pilots the plane to Yaounde running over things like hens, ‘the sun – which has barely risen – goes back to sleep because it suffers from hypersomnia’. Such jokes propel the narration and keep the attention of the reader at high alert. This style of writing in which the reader is kept ‘awake’, though difficult

as Paul indicated is great because the narration is “unputdownable” even if it could be a longer work, a novel for instance. Once started it is attractive enough to draw in the reader. Some of the images used in the narration either defy convention or are completely unconventional.

Paul cautioned all of us to examine how the stories were told and if we could adopt some style of the writing in ours. He told us to put our opinions, whatever they may be, aside and let the story ‘have all the say’.

From the anthology *The Bizarro Fiction*, I was drawn in by a story by Alisa Nutting entitled *Ant Colony*. Nothing could sound more bizarre than a woman saying “... I sought out a doctor who, for several thousand dollars, drilled holes into my bones to make room for an ant colony”. From this point onwards the doctor literally takes care of the ants even more than the host. It is amazing how through thorough detail the narration is made real. Nutting writes with incredible candour and gives life to something that is totally non-existent. This is most probably what writing should do, create new lives, new modes of being and explore the most unlikely scenarios. That’s why it’s referred to as being creative, writing must create new things. I would definitely want to create something like this.

Another cute story told with much relish and excitement is the one of Jim in *Fire Dog* by Joe R. Lansdale. Though he had applied for a dispatcher post at the fire department, Jim gets the job of a fire dog. He must put on the appropriate attire for the job which lets his ‘stuff’ to hang out. The twist in the story comes when his wife undergoes transformation and symbolically becomes a dog herself; “[t]hey went at it. You know how I want it, she said. Yeah. Doggie style. Good boy”. These are types of stories that need a real fertile imagination to conceive. I really think I can write such and will in my writing career attempt a few. They tell unlikely but stories that have some form of credibility. There are times when I think the world is tired of crime, dirty political stories, disputes of all kinds and many other maladies of this world. This type of story, entertaining in its own way takes the attention off from challenges of the world and reminds people of the simple things of life.

Bardamu of Celine’s *Journey To The End Of The Night*, is central to the story. As such like a soccer ball, he is right where the action is. This is a First Person narration but he also assumes a Third Person narration status. He can go right in the centre of the action but at the same time stand back and manipulate the action through his omniscient preponderance. He can comment about the colonial officials, (at times disrespectful to them at their backs), his women (hopelessly involved with them) and the natives (barbaric, primitive and totally un-resourceful). The narrator’s stance is such that he is free to comment and manipulate the story in either the ‘I’ narration or the Third Person narration. This brings forth the effect of an all knowing but still all involved narrator. Nothing escapes his eye and body. Using both narrative stances the reader is exposed to some spectacular landscapes which are often life threatening. The reading of this one still goes on.

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At long last we arrived at the much heralded Poetics Of The Wor(l)ds We Live Seminar. Paul alluded to the Seminar earlier in the year when he referred to the Poetics Seminar as a Reading Seminar and should/will be about 'writers (not critics or academics) writing about writing, exploring the words and the worlds we live'. He then cautioned that when we finally arrive at the Readings we must find/identify: ideas, concepts, experiences, images, moods or emotions. The seminar was split into three basic sections or phases:

1. The Reading Sessions
2. Writing a Draft Assignment based on the writings chosen
3. Submission of the Final Assignment after it shall have been reworked.

1. The Reading Seminars

We had Marathon reading Sessions from Monday the 22<sup>nd</sup> March to Friday the 26<sup>th</sup> March. The readings were from all over the world and spanned generations of writers across time, age and gender.

We had to highlight any words, 'ideas, concepts, experiences, images, moods or emotions' that leapt at us or impressed on our imaginations. Of course it meant that we 'practice' separately i.e. away from class, to read our pieces specifically so as to acquaint ourselves and work through difficult words. I also read pieces by other classmates and waited for the class readings to make the marks or highlights. So by the time we got to the readings I already had an idea about the issues attended to. Ideas expressed in the writings differed from amazing, brilliant, radical, and highly informative to surprising. Basically the writings explored - through or by the writers themselves - various aspects and levels of inspiration that visit them during the writing process.

From the readings I was then faced with the daunting task of writing the Draft Assignment. To discuss how these writers express their ideas about their writing was a daunting task. In the first place who to choose and who to leave out was the question. I could have written about anyone of them but I rather chose those whose sentiments echoed closer to my emotions. The feedback from Paul was suggestive that I needed to clean up the rather stilted formatting and write an essay format. To have gone through these essays is to have experienced a variety of sentiments and feelings about how people, writers attend to their writing. It was a great exploration of those chosen people who dwell in my sphere; writing.

I must say to redo the final draft was a great challenge that left me with a tension headache. I swallowed numerous tablets in a bid to get the headache down so that it could give me some respite to do the essay. In the end I believe I have done some justice to it. I must mention this problem in me because I want to get rid of it. I always had the problem of attending to things in the last minute. As much as my intellect stands on tiptoe during the last minutes I don't think I am as fast as I used to be. I must do assignments in time, to always get a chance to reflect on them, play around with them until I really get satisfied that what I send represents me.

I am still slugging it out with my colleagues as we get introduced to various forms of writing. I must keep thinking as a writer in anything I do, be it writing and reading. When reading I must

always check, as to why the writer has chosen things to be the way they are presented or said, what effect/impact does that have on their writing and how that influences or improves my writing? The Poetics Assignment, in which we read about writers talking about their own writing, was a virgin territory to engage with and the readings still echo. As much as they talk about themselves with such eloquence it challenges one's own desires, designs and intentions about writing. It was fresh and challenging and the copies read are a lifetime treasure.

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We started the week with Chwayita under the theme 'Experimenting with Sex'. Several sex fetishes were shared including Actirasty, Spectrophilia and Katoptronophilia to mention but three. We were to write stories in which any of the ten fetishes featured prominently in our stories. I chose the latter and wrote a story about two people who meet in a conference and get involved in passionate love making whilst they watch themselves in mirrors, on the ceiling and on the sides in a wall. This exercise gave me an opportunity to slough off my conservatism and inhibitions about experimenting with sex in my writing. The feedback session on Friday was quite exciting and very engaging. We are to knock together ideas that were suggested for the final products.

On Monday afternoon we were introduced to Writing in Community Seminar by Vangi. She has initiated a collaborative effort with the Creative Writing students of the CUNY LaGuardia Community College in New York. We are to group ourselves into three and choose readings that we will engage on with a group of Course 2 students. I am in a group with Fortunate and Sabrina. We'll use texts from Southern Africa, West Africa and East Africa and will work around the umbrella theme of 'writing under harsh conditions' but will also incorporate folk tales/fairy tales. We must compile a reading pack. We already have an idea of what to work on. We will split the forty five (45) minutes time into fifteen (15) unit segments that we'll share. It looks like we are in for some exciting times and are sure looking forward to it.

The veritable reading programme on Tuesday was run by Stacey. It follows the same trend as that we have been doing. However we are supposed to bring our reading suggestions/packs and work on them in class.

In my search for the readings in addition to Raymond Federman's *On Never To Have Been*, p96 from PP/FF, ed. Peter Connors, I also chose Can Themba's, *The Suit*, p285 and a folk tale/fairy tale, *How a Woman Tamed Her Husband*, Egypt, p193 from *Voices of Twentieth Century Africa*. ed. Chinweuzu. The latter has qualities of a fairy tale in that as Kate Bernheimer says, 'the language of fairy tales tells us that first this happened, and then that happened. There is never an explanation...' We know how the woman tames a lion by taking 'three hairs from [its mane] but are never told how she succeeded in taming her husband, only the title does tell. Federman's *On Never To Have Been*, has autobiographical snippets of his *A Voice Within a Voice* Poetics essay, the duality which he calls 'Schizophrenic bilingualism', his ambidexterity of left and right and his mixture of French and English. He tells his story in a very quaint way of numerating through numbers, i.e. first this, second that until he gets to the twenties. He piles up a ladder of detail that

makes up the story. Themba's *The Suit* is presented with searing irony through the theme of Adultery. I hope this will make for some great sharing.

I am currently reading a book entitled *Blindness* by Jose Saramago. The characters are not assigned names, instead it's doctor, his wife, the driver, the thief, the man who was robbed of his car etc. In a traffic light cars had stopped and this one lane did not move. It happened that the driver of the car right at the front had gone blind and people go to help with one volunteering to take him home. The volunteer is a car thief and after dropping the man whose wife is not home drives away with the car. He also becomes blind. The doctor who treated the man who had stuck in the traffic gets blind as well and then people randomly become blind. The rate with which people become blind is so rapid that they are isolated and quarantined in an old military building without being given proper care.

Now, I was reading the book whilst cooking and I think I touched a part of my right lens of reading glasses with something that made it misty. As I went back to the book to continue with the reading the misty or foggy part obstructed my view. I have never been so scared and shocked. I took the reading glasses, threw them away and walked a bit around the room because I thought I was also getting blind. Not sure about my visibility I went outside where there was a faint darkness. I could still see, but Phew, that was close, I thought. A successful story has that kind of impact or effect on the reader.

There is absolutely no dialogue in the book. All detail is reported. It's a different kind of telling a story. The writer is obviously well acquainted with eye diseases as he mentions and explains them with accuracy and ease. Dialogue helps in unravelling character, but in the book the absence of it makes it for them to be equal. There is no low or high character in status. It is unfortunate that the Ministry of Health has given instructions that they be killed where they are quarantined when they digress and or misbehave. But the soldiers who kill them also get affected by the contagion. This one is still unravelling.

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The week started off with Carol who handled one of the subjects that is quite difficult: Death and Dying. I fictionalised a piece about my own sister to whom I was very closely attached. We almost had the same personalities and loved the same things, particularly music. We often visualised ourselves performing duets on the world stages. She gave birth to a daughter with whom I share a birthday; I believe that's how the gods sealed our relationship. Then we met with Vangi and Dr. M. in the afternoon for the American programme. Dr. M linked up from America. We discussed how the programme that we will run with the Level 2 or Course Two students from New York will run. We were to compile readings i.e. Tuition Material and Contextual or Supporting material and are to present this on this coming Monday. We may face challenges of time that is at our disposal and consequently we may not do justice to the wonderful enterprise. We have split into groups of three. Group work has its own dynamics. We must work together for the success of the group first and for the programme to progress. A huge amount of cooperation is needed among group members. Everyone must be on their toes about what is to be done; from the chosen materials to

how they will be delivered. The experience is worth venturing in because done properly it will be an entirely enriching experience. Only if there was enough time ... but our group, the entire MACW group might probably be the only one in the world afforded this opportunity to work with students abroad using the convenience of technology and we must push as much as we can to see to its success. Thank you Vangi.

I am currently reading a book in which I find a lot of freshness in the use of language. Sentences like; 'Ansigie unreeled the tale of his tribulations, thoroughly ransacking the truth and then dipping into the bag of embellishment and sprinkling with a free hand' (p17) and other delightful word combinations dot Karen Lord's *Redemption in Indigo*. It is a Caribbean fairy tale or folktale told in the mould of Tutuola's style though it is not as wild as Tutuola's. Ansigie is said to be a man who has a 'roaring appetite' (p10) who often had 'pangs of fear and frustration hit his belly'. (p11) This one is work in progress.

*Blindness*, Jose Saramago's *Blindness*. Wow, what a book. As the book progresses Saramago uses his own style of punctuation. The conventional boundaries of full stops, commas, quotation marks are not used. Instead sentences are end-stopped with commas but the context makes perfect sense and still conveys full meaning. In a book where dialogue should dominate due to the physical state of the characters i.e. blindness, there is none. Characters must communicate in the dark world or rather the white world, as the illness is referred to as white blindness, into which they have been plunged. This story of real blindness is offset by a man behind whom traffic jams because he can't go forward after the traffic light has lit go. '...cars behind him frantically sound their horns. Some drivers ... got out of their cars, prepared to push the stranded vehicle to a spot ...' Characters have no names and this man is to be referred to as the first blind man. The doctor who treats him with all professionalism also goes blind and is to be referred to as the doctor. A whole lot of people go blind but Saramago gradually focuses attention on a few ones around whom he propels his story. These are; the first blind man, the wife of the first blind man, the doctor (who treated him), the wife of the doctor (the only one character not to go blind throughout the story), the girl with dark glasses, the boy with the squint, the man who stole the car of the first blind man, the old man with a dark patch and later the blind woman who suffered from insomnia.

In this story Saramago has shown that the power of narration under a creative hand can be captivating. Apart from the innovation of punctuation he has also demonstrated that any subject can be used when telling a story. His story is so controlled and told with very economic embellishment, most important of all it is a credible story that could have really happened in one corner of this world. I definitely would love to write stories like this one. If for instance the doctor could be used as an example, his wife was raped and made to do some dirty things, but in a very disciplined way, the doctor is kept silent in the narration.

I found his Outlines and Terminology, p12 very applicable to the cinematically told *Crawfish Noon*, a story that we did in one of our Reading Seminars with Paul Wessels. Vogler proffers that a story must have, Act One, Act Two and Act Three. The first paragraph of the *Crawfish Noon* is Act One and is referred to as *Ordinary World*. Seven - leg and his crawlers are in camp in East Texas taking it easy. Then he gets a *Call to Adventure*, still in Act One when he has to trail Willy who betrayed him on a deal. He does not refuse the call and wills to pursue him. This is part of

Act One and him with his troop *Cross the First Threshold*. In Act Two, which according to Vogler consists of *Tests, Allies, Enemies* they battle it out with Willy and his gang and get the *Reward*. Then in Act Three which is *The Road Back*, Seven –Leg goes to set camp elsewhere. I find this book very informative and never thought I would get it from the library. I must have my own copy of the story. One of the most attractive things about the book is that it's written in 'manageable' paragraphs which are short and most definitely attract the reader to 'come on, read me' kind of invitation. It's a great story.

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We kicked off Monday with Henali. We were to write something that is simple and had to write two things. One a very short story of five sentences and another a longer story. The question about the story of five sentences was, is five sentences five lines or five end stopped lines? Well, in the longer piece I had to meet a challenge that one of our mentors, Paul dared us. We once in the reading groups read a story entitled *The Gladiators* by Alex La Guma. It is a story about boxing. The accuracy of the description of the action in the ring prompted our mentor to say those kinds of stories were difficult to write. He then challenged us to attempt writing such. I wrote a story about a soccer match. I realised in this particular instance that for people to appreciate or understand such writing, they must have a working knowledge of the sport. For instance some of my colleagues felt that there was a lot of kicking of soccer in the story. I had to explain that when two teams of soccer trot onto the field to play they did so to do nothing but only to kick soccer. Just like in boxing, the two gladiators spend a lot of time crafting their bodies to maximum fitness just so as to go *moer mekaar* in the ring. But of course in the end they shake hands and hug, just like soccer players hug and shake hands in the end. It was quite difficult to explain.

I think my attempt at writing a piece about a soccer match was not a bad one. It was not a blow by blow account but I took the highlights of the game, at that the most exciting ones. Thanks to Henali for giving me this opportunity. It was great I now know that I can write a story maybe of a different vein about a game of soccer. Yeah ...

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This week started off with Masande's 'Voice' seminar. We had missed him the other week. The seminar turned out to be very interesting. We were given examples of 'Voice' in writing with examples from La Valle and Masande's own stories with Bisho as the setting. Then we had to take an already written piece and adjust it and imprint in it our own Voice(s). When things are separated and teased out like that one starts to realise the intricacies of writing. Just there it occurred to me whether 'Voice' and 'Style' were any different. I asked about these during the seminar and there seemed to be no answer. Of course we are not supposed to have answers in the seminars as research is an on-going phenomenon. We must find answers. It was Xolani who at the end of the class dropped a teaser by saying that 'Style' can be improved with time but 'Voice' remains constant. That, to a certain extent makes sense but still needs some examination.

I worked on a story that I had written some three years ago entitled *The Dancing Red Hanger*, at that the first two pages of the story only. I submitted this story as part of my Portfolio of Evidence. In the story Bra Sol the protagonist arrives home one day only to find his wife and

daughter gone, as in for real gone. Now that we are immersed in the craft and art of writing, I need to rework it and clean it up. We were talking 'Voice', so I had to make adjustments to the story, twist some sentences and put in some township lingo. I have often heard my colleagues say, that is so you Bra Stoff, in previous seminars. I must have imprinted my 'Voice' in my writing and I did not feel like this particular piece carried that 'Voice'. One of the most amazing writings came from Xolani who wrote a short poem that was so cool and sensitive in its quietness. Compared to the stuff that came from him previously this was far different and sweet. I quote Xolani's because it imprinted on my memory and seriously so, but the rest of my colleagues are doing well. We are all doing our best as writers. I always admire Stacy who addresses us as writers.

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Henali's Monday Seminar was about over-writing. We were supposed to take an already written piece and cut out the excess writing in it. In the second submission we were to write something that did not have plot, development of character and other literary conventions. I took my fetish assignment – which was on sex with mirrors referred to as katoptronophilia - and cut it from almost four pages to two. My colleagues had complained in the original that I took too long to get to the thing, that is the sex. A few other points were suggested to make it tighter. We did that fetish Seminar with Cwayita.

In the second assignment I wrote memoirs of village life during Christmas during the olden days of my youth. The spirit of conviviality infected the atmosphere with palpable joy to all, young and old. The paragraphs were not necessarily connected in chronological narrative form. It is as if the assignment was preparing us for this week's assignment on Fragments. More and more we are getting sh

## COIL REPORT

Collaborative International Learning (COIL) Programme

Participants: CUNY La Guardia Community College

2<sup>nd</sup> Year Creative Writing Students and

Co-ordinators: Dr Allia Abdullah-Matta (CUNY) and Ms vangile gantsho (RU)

One of the vernacular languages of South Africa has a saying actually a proverb that goes; “*moengnyana pele lobone lwa waabo*” which loosely translated means the one who visits new places ahead of his or her kith and kin is the leading light that will open up possibilities to benefit from networks that will be built. As such, those that will follow will trample on the same paths as the one who has led the way and benefit. This has been very true of sis vangile gantsho a lecturer at the Rhodes University’s Masters In Creative Writing (MACW) Programme who made important networks with Dr. Allia Abdulla-Matta of the CUNY La Guardia Community College in New York City. She thought about her MACW students of Rhodes University and made connections for them to engage in an important pedagogical and mutually beneficial exercise with the second year Creative Writing students of the CUNY La Guardia College. With the benefits of technology, such an exercise was made possible with ease.

The usual practice for the Masters students of Rhodes is that as part of the programme they had to find a group of people that they could teach reading and writing either as individuals or a collective. Unfortunately the devastating scourge of Covid 19 made that venerable exercise impossible as contact would demand close contact and the CUNY La Guardia turned out to be a very best option, both in terms of teaching and facilitating key networks even for the future. The Masters students are nine (9) in number and were to break into groups of three to embark on the project. This would end up with each group having three members. They were given the latitude to choose material of their own that they would teach within forty five minutes. This broke down the time to fifteen minutes each individual person in the group.

In my group we decided to teach material from Southern Africa, West Africa and East Africa. But we soon realised that it was too broad a scope and we had to whittle it down to South African texts only. We used as our theme of focus;

### ❖ Writing Under Harsh Conditions Brings About Stylistic Innovations.

We chose writers from the sixties’ *Drum* Magazine Era, E’skia Mphahlele, Lewis Nkosi, Dennis Brutus and Can Themba and from the seventies often referred to as the Soweto writers (wrongfully or rightfully so) or the *Staffrider* literary magazine writers, Mongane Wally Serote. As fate would have it our group was the first to start with the teaching. The texts of key focus that we used are:

- The Master of Doornvlei; a short story by Es’kia Mphahlele
- Mating Birds; a novel by Lewis Nkosi
- The Suit; a short story by Can Themba and
- City Johannesburg; a poem by Mongane Wally Serote.
- Nightsong City; a poem by Dennis Brutus

How my group divided itself into the fifteen minute slots is as follows: I was to give a historical background of grand apartheid since the ascendance into power of the Nationalist Party. Fortunate was to give a blow by blow analysis of the texts and Sabrina was to explain the assignment. We had several energy sapping meetings in a bid to distil our focus into a manageable piece of work.

In my presentation I showed a video of the aftermath of the victory of the Nationalist Party in 1948 which brought mayhem on black people, specified as African, Indian and Coloured as it cemented Grand Apartheid with racist and exclusionary laws such as:

- The Group Areas Act
- Suppression of Communism Act
- Separate Amenities Act
- Immorality Act and
- Bantu Education Act

All people who stayed in the same townships such as Sophiatown in Johannesburg, Marabastad in Pretoria, Cator Manor or Emkhubane in Natal, Lady Selborne in Pretoria, District Six in Cape Town were separated. Each group was allocated its own separate 'location' under the Group Areas Act. People who lived as brothers and sisters beyond the race or ethnic colour were torn apart.

The Suppression of Communism Act was a broad sweep under which any political activity was viewed as a Communist activity. This Act effectively staved off all political meetings or mass gatherings in which people could plan their political activism.

In its mad career for separatism the Separate Amenities Act forced all 'races' to stay apart and not share recreation facilities such as stadia, restaurants and other amenities.

The Act of Immorality was to prevent all love affairs and love-making between black and white.

The Bantu Education is perhaps the cruellest of them all as it emasculated the intellectual development of black children. Black children had to receive a watered down kind of education that did not assist them in the development of their intellects.

But, even if these laws were promulgated, people lived beyond them. Some people were killed, some persecuted but the struggle went on.

The video showed scenes of violence from the police beating and humiliating black people in general but men in particular. There is a scene where men, elderly and young are naked in front of young white police who are purportedly searching them even in their anuses.

Fortunate then showed the stylistic devices that writers used. These stylistic devices were mainly used to hide the political messages that the writings carried. *The Master of Doornvlei* explores the theme of master – servant relationship in which the black man is always the servant and or the underdog. The story is set in a farm and plays itself out between two animals. One animal belongs to the master and the other one to the servant. The animals fight a bitter battle. The outcome of the fight is that the servant's animal which is a bull gores the master's stallion and the stallion has to be killed. The master, Sarel Britz is aggrieved and gives the servant Mfukeri the gun to kill his

bull. Mfukeri refuses and both Mfukeri and his bull must leave the farm. But the veiled message is that the underdog has won the battle.

Mongane Wally Serote's *City Johannesburg* illustrates the black people's continuous everyday travel between the township, a residential area for black people and the city, a residential area for white people. Black people have to travel to the city in order to work in the kitchens, gardens, factories and other places for white people. They have to carry a pass which has to bear a stamp of authority that sanctions them to be there. Failure to produce the pass results in arrests and incarceration in prisons. The imagery used in the poem is instructive. Serote writes that the blacks travel in 'an iron breath' that goes into the cities in the morning and gets out in the afternoon. This iron breath is the trains, cars and taxis that travel to Johannesburg or any city. The blacks have to call their male masters *baas* and their female mistresses *misses* or *missus*. The servants who are always black are humiliated denigrated and demeaned.

In *Nightsong City*, Dennis Brutus refers indirectly to the riots that ravaged the townships of Port Elizabeth, currently known as Gqeberga. The townships serve as a microcosm of the larger macrocosm that is South Africa. The poem, silent with its beautiful diction depicts the township residents embroiled in war with police during the day and have to rest during the night. He then depicts the country, South Africa as a baby who is to be lulled to sleep and rest as she has been hectically involved in a fight during the day. The words, Sleep well, my love ... signify the attachment and love that the protagonist have to his country.

Sabrina then explained the assignment to the students. They had to write of a situation in which they were discriminated against or demeaned and how they survived such a situation. The essays or responses were great except for one which was totally irrelevant. The student from Haiti had instead written about his own personal problems of truancy at school and general disregard and disrespect for his elders. He did accept that this situation led to him losing time and delaying him in his progress in life. He was told how irrelevant he had responded to the assignment and had to go and rewrite. Unfortunately there was no time to follow up on all the assignments as the time slot was limited.

The second group which was Group B dealt with the themes of Silence, Quietness and Stillness. They used pictures to teach and one was of animals drinking either in a river, pen or well. The background was the hue of a setting sun and the picture generally depicted silence. We were students in the class and I wrote a poem for the assignment:

The next class was that of Group C whose theme was Surrealism. The incessant and undignified power outages made it impossible for some of us in Grahamstown/Makhanda to finish the class. But for the assignment thereof I wrote a story of a man who had been to a *stokvel*, a South African way of pooling resources in which members contribute some amount of money and then share the spoils at the end of the year or buy big groceries which last for months. In the process of raising funds, members host 'parties' in which liquor and food is sold and the proceeds go into the coffers of the *stokvel*. In the story the protagonist Bazabaza drinks himself to a stupor and goes home at night to demand food from his wife. The food is on the table in the kitchen and Bazabaza just ploughs in. The food is pap and goat's tripe. Small ants have made a beeline for the food and

Bazabaza who eats in the dark eats the ants as well. This is discovered by his wife when he goes to sleep as the ants, having clung to his beard run amok on the pillows and blankets. He tries to push them out through his mouth and later resorts to farting thinking that if he can't get them out through his mouth, then the exhaust system down there will get rid of them. The story ends with his wife saying ' *Sies*, I hope they finish off your balls'.

The general overview of the programme is that it is a wonderful programme in which both students benefit. Both vangi gantsho and Dr. Alia Abdulla-Matta have done something that is quite rare. Their instant connection, understanding and selflessness was for the benefit of other human beings whom they work with. It is rare for people to think futuristically like they did. As for my colleagues, my MACW classmates, we gave it our best and at the end were extremely tired. We had to be given a week off by Paul, our Course Coordinator to catch our breaths. Stacy had pleaded on our behalf.

I will never forget those smiling faces on the other side of the Atlantic who interacted with us within an atmosphere of love and friendliness. Surely one day some of us will meet with some of them somewhere.

A great programme, that one is. It is only time that was too short.

## Poetics of the wor(l)ds we live

### Sananapo

This assignment was submitted before and I was not pleased with the way I had presented it. Writers here talk of the same thing, the craft of writing, though they do so from different perspectives. Though different, the written pieces flow in and out of one another, and that's what our mentor said. In the first assignment that I presented there was no cohesion as I jumped all over the place. The contents might have been all right but sequentially it did not make sense. I have now tried to impose some logic so that there is some form of continuity and order. From Kate Berheimer who extols the virtues of fairy tales/folktales we sail into Tamiko Beyer who believes that language tends to mask racism. Raymond Federman stretches the question of language slightly when he refers to bilingualism which would be the same as multilingualism. He can produce written works in either French or English. So the literature that he writes chooses the language through which it should be birthed.

Dambudzo Marechera's writing is concerned with conscience, i.e. writing should reveal the truth because otherwise it assumes the label of propaganda. It is here where I refer to how the language train left the vernacular languages of South Africa behind in the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging. Bettina Judd refers to how writing must depict relevance of the circumstances in which it is produced. Referring to herself as a black woman in the USA she nurtured her spirit with the books that she read. This she says gave her perspective. Christina Rivera Gaza relates how a writer's imagination can bring together disparate elements as a piece of creation. A writer can create a country or rather a new world all together.

Njabulo Ndebele having grown up in apartheid South Africa believes that the spectacle that was born by the apartheid machinery tends to influence writing. That he says should be done away with. Rather, writers should rediscover the ordinary and write simple stories devoid of spectacle. Taiye Selasi says a writer is a writer, *finish and klaar*. Nationality and race should not be referred to when writers are spoken about. He also bemoans the lack of publishers in many African countries that do not have publishing companies or houses. Federico Garcia Lorca refers to 'that thing' that seizes an artist to make him/her do extraordinary things. He refers to that as the *duende*. This he believes makes artists to perform, at times far above their abilities and or capacities because superior inspiration from deep within their bodies has ignited something special.

Long, long time ago, there was a princess called Sananapo. She was the most beautiful girl in her village. So beautiful was she that her peers were extremely jealous of her beauty. They contrived a plan to go fetch wood in the forest. Sananapo had a dog that she loved very much and the dog loved her too. It followed her wherever she went and it accompanied her in this expedition. Whilst there and after they had gathered enough wood, the girls made fire and said they should jump over it. They wanted to see as to who would jump the highest, they intimated. They jumped continuously but at some point when it was Sananapo's turn, they threw her into the fire. She burnt to death. They then gave her dog a bone to eat. The dog was in deep pain about the demise of its owner and did not eat the bone. The girls conspired to keep the death of Sananapo a secret

amongst them and said they would report that she got lost in the forest. The villagers were bewildered when they heard a plaintive and mournful melody about Sananapo.

Sananapo Sananapo	Sananapo Sananapo
Ba mmolaile Sananapo	They have killed her Sananapo
Ba mpha lesapo Sananapo	They gave me her bone Sananapo
Ba re ke le je Sananapo	They said I should eat it Sananapo
Nna ka le gana Sananapo	I refused to eat it Sananapo
Ga ke je motho Sananapo	I don't eat flesh of a human Sananapo
E le mongwa me Sananapo	Who is my owner/mistress Sananapo
Thebe tsa kgosi Sananapo	Shields of the king Sananapo

The melody goes as follows in Tonic Solfa Notation :

| :r'.r' I d : s.s |f.d' : s.s I f.d : s.s | f.d': s.s I f.d : s.s | f.d' :s.s I f.d: s.s| f.d': S'nanapo  
 S'nanapo, Ba mmolaile S'nanapo Ba mpha lesapo S'nanapo Ba re ke le je S'nanapo Nna ka  
 s.s I f.d :s.s | f.d' :s.s I f.d :s.s I f.d' :s.s |f.d :s.s I f.d' :s.s | f.d  
 ka le gana S'nanapo Ga ke je motho S'nanapo E le mongwa me S'nanapo Thebe tsa kgosi  
 :s.s I f : - | - : - I - :- |  
 S'nanapo |

'Oh how I love fairy tales' says a sub-heading in Kate Bernheimer's '*FAIRY TALE IS FORM, FORM IS FAIRY TALE*'. This title of her piece is in itself a triumphant celebration of the form. Bernheimer says 'fairy tale ... is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind'. I agree with Bernheimer. Fairy tales are the first form of literature that I came across or that any child is supposed to have come across. In this instance I use the word fairy tale interchangeably with folk tale. Fairy tales like folk tales are (beautiful) stories best told rather than written. The story above is a fairy tale that like many fairy tales has endured time, place and space. Fairy tales came before the invention of printing tools hence the truism; passing of information by word of mouth from generation to generation. In African societies this holds true even to this day as writing is not so much in vogue. However modern contraptions like cell phones and television have taken the space of folktales. In his interview with Robert Berold, Lesego Rampolokeng says "[t]he oral word preceded the printed ... I believe that even if paper stops being recycled, and trees stop being chopped down and all the books in the world are burnt, the word will still be alive ...". Rampolokeng, speaks from the point of view of a 'spoken word poet'. But in this hour and time the stories have to be written.

When told, a lot depends on the story teller, the change of voice to depict different characters, the change of pace in other parts of the story, the way songs are presented if there are any in the story like this one above, the facial expression of the story teller in different aspects of the story, the actions, i.e. ability to demonstrate. A story teller can tell the story many times over but many times over can the story be different but it will retain what Bernheimer refers to as the ‘four elements of traditional fairy tales, flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic and normalized magic’. The story will retain its basic content, irrespective of whom or how the story is told.

In some instances events in the story in one telling may be different in another telling but that ‘artistic dexterity’ as Bernheimer says, will not affect the contents of the story. Bernheimer goes on to say ‘in its survival of mutation ... the form is adaptable to a diverse range of narrative styles and shapes. Fairy tales magnetize writers who identify themselves as realists, along with surrealists and dadaists and modernists and existentialists and science fictionists and fabulists ...’. So diverse is the influence of fairy tales that Bernheimer says the history thereof encompasses ‘the history of myth, printing, childhood, literacy, violence, loss, psychology, class, illustration, authorship, ecology, gender ...’. Through folktale/fairy tale Kate Bernheimer has taught me that when stories are told, nothing has to be explained or justified. For instance in this story we don’t have to wonder or ask about a singing dog. This is how the story is told and it tells the truth that human beings would not have told.

This fairytale/folktale of Sananapo was best suited to women storytellers due to its doleful song. My maternal aunt told it best because she had a sweet soprano voice with a scintillating vibrato. Songs being easy to remember, whenever she or anyone told the story we’d sing with them. Men also told the story by the way. My aunt’s beautiful soprano would reverberate around that thatched roofed hut as fire smoke would go into our eyes and make us teary. The beautiful thing about songs in a folktale/ fairy tale is that when it would be told the third or fourth time, the audience/listeners would sing along, the participation of which made them belong to the narration. This would be indelibly etched on the minds of the listeners as songs are not easy to forget.

Another person who told stories beautifully is my grandpa Oom Piet or Ompiti. As for Oom Piet the drunk he was, the most humorous the stories came out of him. He also had a wealth of folk tales. We just did not know how to get him drunk so that we could laugh our lungs out. There is this immortal story of *Tselane le Dimo*, Tselane and the Giant. Tselane is captured by Dimo for whom he will prepare fire to cook i.e. Tselane. But Tselane’s mother makes a plan to take Tselane out of the sack and put in a swarm of bees and a mad dog. Unbeknown to Dimo, he closes and locks all doors and opens the sack haphazardly and is stung by the bees and bitten by the mad dog. The moments during which Dimo gets stung by the bees and bitten by the dog are the most hilarious the way grandpa depicted Dimo. Grandpa was very versatile, he would jump and scratch himself and roar in a big voice then change it to a female’s, meantime dancing all the time and using the scratching as rhythm. Dimo the giant would suffer as he deserved. This way of telling folk tales so imaginatively, I believe built my imagination. When I started to read books like Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, my imagination created all the scenes of the island that the story suggested. In the descriptive passages I could see with the eye of my mind how things were unfolding. This has taught me that nothing should be left to chance.

I write freely, and just let go of wild and spectacular scenes and plots that twist and turn. This is narration. At times the actions in the stories make me really laugh as they entertain me the writer and I hope they will be as much entertaining to the reader as they are to me.

From the oral to the written language; it is true that the written word reaches a bigger audience. The four skills of language learning are: Acquisition through Listening and Reading and Production through Speaking and Writing. Tamiko Beyer says something that plunges us deep into the politics of language. In *A Slanty Kind of Racial(ized) Poetics*, Beyer says something quite controversial; ‘we function in a society built on institutionalized racism where white privilege is hidden and masked, particularly by language’. On a very basic level people have languages so that they can communicate, animals do not. The world has as many languages as there are people. World War 1, we are told happened because people could not understand one another as they spoke different languages and that is why in the League of Nations, predecessor to the United Nations, English was adopted as the *lingua franca* of the whole world. Practically there are languages like English and French that will always dominate in big international events, but do they dominate for better communication or for sustained domination through which other people’s languages are trampled upon. In South Africa, African languages were symbolically left out of the language equation after the Anglo – Boer South Africa War around the negotiation table at the Peace Treaty of Vereeniging. That symbolic exclusion still haunts South Africa to this day in issues of language.

This throws me into the den of African languages in South Africa. From the dance of freedom in 1994, South Africa, more out of irrational anger (for lack of a better expression) than reason, negotiators brought to the post – apartheid ‘table of peace’ eleven (11) official languages. How do these eleven official languages play out in present day South Africa? The answer is muddy and murky. The ingrained geographical and regional spaces that defined apartheid South Africa are still in place, including spaces where different racial groups stayed. Townships, villages and farms are still as they were then. The ‘iron breath’ in Wally Serote’s *City Johannesburg* poem where the cities breath in busses, taxis, cars, trains that ferry people to the cities to go to their workplaces is still in place. These places also define what languages are spoken and where. Black people leave their abodes in the morning to go to the cities, and that is where they also leave their languages. They will collide with their languages when they go back in the evening. During the day at their workplace they speak a different kind of language, practically so. The workplace is a space of power and the language used there is as Beyer mentions, radicalized power .

I speak several languages. The environment in the villages and townships is set up in such a way that different tribes live apart in keeping with the separate development philosophy of apartheid. This often causes conflict among the people though since the seventies the conflict was diminished by the Black Consciousness philosophy. But, people learnt languages of other people, though at a functional level. In some cases writers choose as to what media should be used in the writing of their books.

It surely is of great advantage to any writer who is bilingual or multilingual as compared to unilingualism. Raymond Federman is bilingual. He writes in both French and English. In his delightful essay entitled ‘A Voice Within a Voice’ he refers to himself as having ‘schizophrenic bilingualism’. Rather than wrestle with each other the two languages in him speak and play ‘hide

and seek' to and with each other. He says outright that he may not speak "French and English well ... [b]ut I am also a bilingual writer" that often catches the two languages having 'wild intercourse' behind him. That is how the languages play out in his mind, they are intimately bound. As a writer this is one of the issues that will concern me i.e. the medium through which I will write. It will not be such a head scratching issue for me. It is only that I feel certain issues must best be told/narrated in the vernacular language. My father is Motswana, my mother Mopedi. Having grown up in a Setswana environment I speak that the language thereof as my first language and Sepedi is a cousin to Setswana. I use the concept, first language more in its text book context and sense for I have a fair command of the English language and in fact, truth be told, I am more fluent in English than in Setswana. I also have a functional knowledge of other vernacular languages of South Africa including the unlegislated but quite popular *isicamtho* or *tsotsitaal*. However, even in a South Africa with eleven official languages, the position of the vernaculars is insignificant and almost non-existent. It was more a political than practical decision taken in the euphoria of the moment when the legislation about eleven official languages was promulgated. There are no systems and tools in place to grow the vernacular languages. If there are any, they are as conspicuously silent as the masses on issues of corruption in government.

Federman is not necessarily in a dilemma about his bilingualism. He says he has placed French, his native tongue in parenthesis. He acknowledges however that the quarrel inside of him as to what language to choose when he writes a new book rages on in perpetuity. In the end it is English that wins the battle not the war because presumably he is most comfortable in it. Language and culture go together and bilingualism and biculturalism go together as well in Federman's case. He has gone through a process of acculturation in America but never forgot his native tongue. An Afrikaans expression which I heard from an Afrikaans professor says, "*so veel talle man kan praat, so veel malle ben hy man*" which loosely translated means, the more languages a man (person) speaks, the easier and spontaneous they assume the nationality of that language, i.e. if one speaks Afrikaans, they become Afrikaner, if they speak French, they become French and so on and so forth. I was once gobsmacked by a South African professor who read a paper in French in Lausanne, Switzerland. The late Professor Andre Brink who was then based at University of Cape Town is of Afrikaans extraction but has written novels in English, one of which is *A Dry White Season*, a book that predicted the emerging South Africa. Do people such as him have a dilemma about what language to use in what situation in their writing? He read the paper in a French speaking environment. French chose that paper to be written in French. Federman however at times wishes to juxtapose the two languages, a sample of which is a poem at the end of his essay.

If I were to write a book in Setswana, I, like Federman or the Kenyan writer and academic Ngugi wa Thiong'o would always self-translate to the other language i.e. either English or Setswana. Three years ago I started writing a fictionalised account of my mother. The Setswana language had chosen that the book be written in Setswana. Though I was struggling with fluency I was greatly assisted by my colleagues. An unfortunate incident happened and the manuscript was lost, but my mind still has the horizons of the story. Is bilingualism an advantage to writers or not? If such writers write consistently in such languages I think it is more than advantageous because the windmills of creativity will never stop but will roll forever as creative pieces will be blown onto paper.

Dambudzo Marechera the Zimbabwean writer who many proclaim to be a rebellious genius says in *'Beneath reality is always fantasy: the writer's task is to reveal it [i.e. reality], to open it out, to feel it, to experience it'*. Marechera, in this statement goes right into the conscience of a writer. In other words, what writers present is a microcosm of the macrocosm. He says towards the end of these extracts that some writers write because they do so for certain people, organisations or institutions and some 'are free to develop their own personality'. These sentiments echo Bettina Judd's when she says she writes about race because other people choose to write about 'God, or nature ...'. Those like Marechera and Judd who develop their own personalities obey their consciences and answer to their calling. To write for other sources is to follow instructions as dictated by the master. The phrase 'His Master's Voice' is most relevant in those circumstances. Such writers as Marechera implies, do not answer to the dictates of their consciences but rather record on paper things that will not reflect the lives of the people to whom they are indebted, to echo the sentiments of Christina Rivera Garza who I shall refer to below.

The very first book with a protest inclination that I read is E'skia Mphahle's *Down Second Avenue*. Of course the book had been banned even when I went through that copy. In that book and many of its ilk the English language has been deployed in a very different setting and context to portray with great accuracy the conditions of black people in the ghettos and slums. It is possible that if the English language could talk it would express shock at what it was used to say in those and many other books written in the post- colonial frame of reference. Such writing according to Marechera and Judd is 'the' writing that they vouch for. It speaks to the people and of the people. My own writing reflects on the daily lives of people I wake up with, meet in the streets, talk to and enjoy life with. We watch soccer and attend festivals together. These are people in my environment and they are amenable to going to extremes of human emotion, bitterness and anger, love and hate and happiness. They have their own flaws, fights in which they quarrel and cry and throw each other with objects and injure one another. But they will still wake up the following day to talk and laugh with each other and go on with their lives.

My encounter with English Literature was at school. I read *Treasure Island* in Form One and the wonderful *David Copperfield* in Form Three. These were stories written but I already had an experience of stories told by the fireside i.e. folktales. I could say at the point of reading stories, my imagination had been developed by folktales/fairy tales. The material conditions under which Marechera grew up were different. Zimbabwe was a colony of Britain and there was never a war of languages there as there was in South Africa. He was exposed to the English language through books in a healthy environment in which the English masters obviously wanted 'their subjects' to know and speak English well. In South Africa there was a war of languages which literally exploded in the battle between colonial forces to dominate and ended in the Anglo - Boer War also referred to as the Anglo Boer South Africa War (ABSA War). The war was described by one of the generals as 'a white man's war' and I must add in a black man's land. At the end of the war the talks which were concluded in Vereeniging, the black man was locked outside. Consequently his languages were to assume a silent if not inferior status in his own land. The vernacular languages were locked outside with him. A cover in one of Solomon Thekisho Plaatje's *The Mafeking Diary* is sub-titled 'A Black Man's View of a White Man's War'. That was pretty the

situation then, blacks on the side-lines while whites fought it out for land in a black man's land, so to speak.

The issue of language in South Africa came to a boil in June 1976 when students took to the streets as they rejected Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in schools. I should know; I am a product of that system of Bantu Education. I did Landbou, Agriculture in English and Rekenkunde which is Arithmetic and some did Wiskunde, Mathematics, all in Afrikaans. We struggled with the language before we could grapple with the content. Come June 16 1976, all hell broke loose and we threw stones in protest against Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. To learn to speak three languages at the same time is a daunting and disastrous task. When the system is built in such a way that there are no resources to reinforce the learning of such, it is worse. The extremely worst is when such learning is controlled under the hideous system of Bantu Education. I write in Setswana and English but not Afrikaans. But I could also write in Afrikaans if there could have been pillars of support for proper learning to ensue. The nearest I can get to Afrikaans with any modicum of fluency is the amoeba like *isicamtho* or *tsotsi taal* language popularised mostly by the townships' underworld. I agree with Marechera, literature is 'a unique universe that has no internal divisions'. Reading and writing are in a symbiotic relationship, an input – output kind of situation, input, Listening and Reading and output, Speaking and Writing.

I also liberally spray my writing with *isicamtho*, *tsotsi taal* or *flytaal*, an unlegislated popular language that used to be in vogue strictly in the underworld. The inclusion of the language in my writing is not planned but happens spontaneously. It chooses its speakers/users or characters in the stories. These have their own idiosyncrasies and some kind of specialised manner of dress. The other day the president of South Africa used *isicamtho* when he announced that he was going to choose as one of his ministers a lady who had been running as his adversary for the presidency. Though his tongue was as stiff as an Afrikaner dominee trying to dance *kwaito*, he spoke the language. Ike Mboneni Muila feels strongly that 'writing becomes banal' if it does not dip into the writer's roots. Thus he regards *isicamtho* as some kind of universal South African language in its own right. He intimates that there is no corner in South Africa where *isicamtho* is not spoken. Though each form of the language has its own characteristics, the users thereof will communicate. He is also a spoken word poet and says he 'created this *isicamtho* with the audience in mind'. He says the language fulfils him because he becomes one with the audience'. 'I am a proud multilingual tsotsitaal poet', he concludes. I share Muila's sentiments about *isicamtho*. I somehow feel half naked if I have not portrayed South Africa holistically and have left out an *isicamtho* character or lingo.

In *Writing About Race*, Bettina Judd posits an argument that is both realistic and practical. She says '[w]riting is attached to the body' meaning, she can never write about anything that is outside of her life experiences, meaning therefore that her environment having shaped her – will therefore influence her writing. I agree with this argument. Judd, an African – American who identifies herself thus; 'Black woman' and 'US born' feels that she cannot 'separate mind from body and spirit'. Her environment, the historic, social and political conditions in which she grew, is reflected in her writing. Judd says 'my mother is very politically minded and therefore fed me books on race'. The operative word in the sentence is 'fed' as opposed to 'gave'. She was nourished by the

books that she read and these added to her intellectual growth which influenced her writing in a positive way. She is unapologetic about her writing.

She says that her writing 'is in and around me like air and it is in my presence of mind and memory'. She is grounded in this resolve and her writing certainly reflects the realities of where she is and lives, how people interact in their daily lives, in their joy, follies, disappointments and triumphs. Her writing probably reflects how children play, attend school and grow under those conditions within the racial prism that is America. Therefore through her books the world is bound to understand her background, beautiful or ugly as it might be. Being an African – American it is also obvious that her writing draws from her legacy of slavery. Judd's essay rings vividly in the mind Margaret Walker's poem, *For My People*.

Compared to me, Judd had books that she read which spoke to her soul. My youth environment had no books. It was bare. The majority of books that were in my home as I grew up only served a decorative purpose. I was told that the set of books written Encyclopaedia that were somewhere in a corner had belonged to a teacher who after purchasing them could not pay them off. He requested out of shame that his friend, my father pay them off and own them. I don't remember seeing anyone actively reading or referring to them. I used to admire the pictures and was fascinated by the fact that the contents were arranged alphabetically. Much later, my youngest brother Frank read the books as well. But it was more for a lack of 'better' reading material. His young mind could not grapple with any comprehension the stuff in those encyclopaedias although he would explain the meanings of concepts such as Psychology etc. Frank published a short story 'A Day in My Life' in a children's magazine when he was seventeen. He won a prize. Given 'relevant' literature at that age, he could have developed into 'something' as a writer, much along the lines of Bettina Judd. An environment of books and other reading material like in Judd's case assists in personal and particularly intellectual growth. Her mother as she says 'fed' her books and these were relevant to an extent that she could relate to them. *Drum*, that revered magazine of the fifties and sixties made a lot of sense to me. I also admired the fact that the stories in the magazine were written in English by black people. But, having lived in a village, the magazine was not readily accessible and as such I cannot say it made an impact. Some of the writers from *Drum* went on to publish exciting, inimitable and enduring stories that exposed the tale of apartheid South Africa.

To write a story, a novel a poem is to create a new world. A writer creates kings who have subjects and a whole worldview of people from different standings in the society that he creates. Writers create countries, villages, a whole new world with vast expanses of space. This is what Christina Rivera Garza means in her essay *The Unusual : a manifesto*. She says, 'writing is a community – making practice. If we write, we write with others. Inescapably, if we write, we write about others, even when we write about ourselves ... constantly borrowing from the language we share with entire and varied communities at once, when we write we acquire a debt – a real, material debt with practitioners of such a language'. Stories cannot be written in a vacuum as they reflect life experiences of people, places about whom and which they are about. Judd says writing cannot be outside of her life experiences and Garza says when we write we write with and about others. For instance when I wrote the story of my mother it reflected everything about where we lived, what

we ate, the inside of our home, the people we interacted with i.e. adults and children, my playmates. For the story to have had any vestige of credibility it had to have a community of people and other living beings that surrounded me such as goats, cattle and the like. I read a great book entitled *Blindness* by Jose Saramago in which a whole community in a town is afflicted with blindness. This is what Garza refers to when she says “writing is a community –making practice”. Saramago created a whole new community in that book.

During the days of grand apartheid books that criticized the system of apartheid were banned wholesale and the writers gagged. Those books like *Down Second Avenue* by E’skia Mphahlele, the stories of Can Themba that were later to be collected in *The Will to Die and The World of Can Themba*, Bloke Modisane’s *Blame me on History*, *Chocolates for my Wife* by Todd Matshikiza, to mention but just four were banned. This period of grand apartheid was a period of ideas under arrest. The books portrayed the lives of people in the black areas, townships, villages and farms and looked at apartheid from a critical standpoint. Some of these were written in Drum magazine as the reporters exposed the ills of apartheid, in the churches, in the exploitative farms and so on. So, when Garza says, ‘If we write, we write about others, even when we write about ourselves’ she refers to humanity’s interconnectedness between children and adults, the rich and the poor blacks and whites and all that exist in the world.

At some point in our lives in the townships, we talked of ‘relevant literature’ which is literature that reflected our lives truthfully and as I said such literature was banned. But we still managed to get those books even if we had to read them under the beds and hidden corners. The reading of literature gave us perspective about ourselves and the world.

Apartheid has during its course left a lot of scars on society. Njabulo Ndebele believes that because of the way in which everything was done in such a spectacular way during the days of apartheid, writers tended to write in a spectacular way.

He reminds us that writers must rather rediscover the ordinary way of telling stories and not dwell in the spectacle that was engendered mainly by apartheid. He says ‘everything in South Africa has been mind – bogglingly spectacular: the monstrous war machine developed over the years; the random massive pass raids; mass shootings and killings; mass economic exploitation...’ These remarks Ndebele mentions in; *The Rediscovery of the Ordinary: some new writings in South Africa*. His focus is on the stories that he feels have less spectacle. These include Joel Matlou’s *Man Against Himself*, a story that we once read in one of our Seminars. This story and others that he refers to differ from the stories that were written in the fifties and sixties that he refers to as protest literature. At its very basic Matlou’s story is told in simple terms with a clear delineable plot in which events unfold causally.

To ‘rediscover’ is to find or recall something afresh and ‘ordinary’ is of the common mould or that which is not complicated. To him to rediscover the ordinary and for writers to follow the trend of writing about the ordinary is a better option of story - telling than during the days of grand apartheid. Apartheid to Ndebele was not only a hideous system but gave rise and was a springboard of all spectacles. Ndebele may say this, but I love spectacle. I want to write stories that have a huge display of spectacle. I enjoy it when characters push the limits of possibility because in that way

the stories are memorable. However in my case, spectacle will choose stories. There will not be spectacle in all the stories. It is not that a story that offer less spectacle is not memorable, but colourful characters in dress and manner are to me the ultimate. Of course not all characters in a story will display spectacular traits but those who can display it should go all the way. Ndebele also alludes to the spectacular journalistic way in which writers or journalists of the fifties and sixties used to expose 'the gross ugliness of economic exploitation in South Africa'. Lines were blurred according to him between 'the language of exposition on the one hand, and the language of creative writing on the other'.

But I just love spectacle. I admire characters like the tsotsi in Can Themba's, *The Dube Train*, Aunt Dorah in Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue*, the various characters in Casey Motsisi's vignettes. Though the tsotsi in Themba's story is a bad disrespectful bastard, one cannot help but admire his swag. Close to fifty years since I read Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*, I still remember the voluble, spectacular and bombastic Mr. Micawber. For instance talking about Uriah Heap, Mr. Micawber said; 'villainy is the matter, baseness, fraud, deception and conspiracy, are the matter, and the name of the whole atrocious mess, is, Heap'. I still recall this quote almost fifty years since I read the book. It's in my mind. I haven't referred to the book. That's the beauty of spectacle. The fight between Aunt Dorah and Abdul in Mphahlele's *Down Second Avenue* with all the humour that the episode carries is still vivid in my mind. As Aunt Dorah tackled him, the surprised Abdul not knowing what to do just heaped insults on her shouting 'Dolla, Dolla, you are a bloody kaffir bitch' or something to that effect. That spectacle was very humorous and Aunt Dorah as the underdog was favoured to *bliksem* Abdul.

Ndebele's essay probably vouches for a cooling down of emotions that were stirred by apartheid. Writers directed all the venom at that animal. But, South Africans are faced with another animal now. The era of disenchantment has set in. The ideals of the struggle for freedom have been betrayed. We sang idealistic freedom songs with those who are now in top positions in government but when we meet with them today, they look the other way. Government resources are plundered with wanton abandon and greed, one could as well say, in 'a spectacular' way. People get killed when they dare to raise their voices about those who are corrupt. People wallow in poverty. Right now tertiary students do not have funds to pay at institutions of higher learning but individuals in government have millions of rand which are kept in their houses. I know of a 'politician' in the North West who purportedly has millions stashed in his house in a hastily built underground room. The fences around his house are high and the money is often sprawled on the turf outside to give it fresh air for it not to go mouldy. What bullshit??

One of the problems that plaques African writers today is access to publishers when creative material has been produced. In his piece entitled *Stop Pigeonholing African Writers*, Taiye Selasi poses several questions; 'Who is an African writer? What should the African writer write? For whom is the African writer writing? These questions by Selasi are brought to his memory by Chinua Achebe's assertion that the definition of what 'African literature is' has not been properly and adequately addressed. Of course Chinua Achebe founded the African Writers Series and he put on a pedestal many writers who might not have enjoyed seeing their books published. If Achebe could be stuck with the label of the founding father of African literature, it would fit. To

write is a natural process that comes from deep within a writer, but having written, a writer needs exposure, that is; a writer must be published. Selasi refers to the fact of his having struggled to have his book '*Ghana Must Go*' published in Africa. Ghana, the country he says 'has no credible local publisher'. He also alludes to Adaobi Nwaubani who in an article that she wrote for *The New York Times* expressed 'frustration with Africa's publishing industry'. There is a shocking sentiment therefore that Africans because they are mostly published in Europe have grown a European audience more than an African one. There is a whole value chain that a book must travail. Having been published books must go to the Bookselling outlets. I wrote somewhere that during the days of the *Staffrider* magazine there were certain bookshops that had to disguise themselves as selling other things and sold the magazine. Also for the *Staffrider* magazine there had to be a dedicated publisher, Ravan Press to see to the publication of the magazine. Bookselling outlets like the CNAs and Van Schaiks could not sell the magazine because they had to comply with apartheid's restrictions. Otherwise those who sold the magazine risked their shops being closed or they being arrested. Literature is a universal phenomenon. Do I personally want to be regarded as a writer or as an African writer? In the case of Africans or black people, will I be a Motswana, or Mopedi or uMzulu or uMxhosa writer? The more one ponders on these things the more nonsensical it gets.

If these questions were to be answered, is there anything that will differentiate somebody else's writing from another's. Yes. In terms of a whole range of literary referents, setting, names of characters, themes, and perhaps register. In several other issues literatures of different countries will differ. Selasi's title, *Stop Pigeonholing African Writers* is very interesting and instructive. It is inter alia an appeal that African writers should not be discriminated against. Yet, maybe the word discriminate is too strong. Literature being about the experiences of human beings is universal, and therefore can writers be international? 'I never think of myself in terms of any classification. Literature doesn't have a country' says Selasi. This sentiment is expressed by several African writers including Ben Okri who Selasi quotes as having said 'I never think of myself in terms of any classification. Literature doesn't have a country'. I agree with this assertion as I can attest to the fact that I have read many books from across other lands and I found myself in those stories. I want to be a writer, *finish n klaar*. Anybody who will pigeon whole me will do so at their own discriminatory peril.

The next step after a book has been written is to publish it as I have indicated somewhere. Who will publish it? Will it bring any profits? These are questions that need answers and are not easy. Everything today is determined by market forces.

In many books and other written material there are those lines and passages that are spine chilling and hair raising because of their exquisite and descriptive beauty and may often bring tears to readers' eyes. Such passages may have come from the writer when he had received moments of extreme inspiration. I have often heard artists, the late bass guitarist Siphon Gumede is one example, saying, there are times when he listens to his own music and cannot believe that he is the one who composed it. Writers as well often have those moments of, is it me who wrote this.

*Federico Garcia Lorca* refers to such a 'that thing' as the *duende* which he says Goethe while speaking of Paganini defined as 'a mysterious force that everyone feels and no philosopher

explained'. He differentiates the *duende* from the Muse. The Muse he says is external while the *duende* rouses from the deepest 'habitations of the blood'. The *duende* takes hold of a performer and makes him/her do things that they will later ask, 'is it me who did that'? The *duende* afflicts all the performing arts including I believe sports. When Ndebele talks of the spectacle in football in which individual talent is often 'more memorable, more enjoyable, and ultimately, even more desirable than the final score' he is talking of the *duende*. When a team scores a goal after it was trailing, one or two individuals will be afflicted with the *duende* and their feet will often think things that their minds cannot. I once watched a performance of *Sarafina* in Klerksdorp over a period of two weeks. All performances were beautifully presented but the very last day the *duende* arrived in the lead actress and one of the musicians, the keyboard player. I could compare because I had watched the performances over a period of two weeks and those were different from the rest.

When I read Alex La Guma's *A Walk in the Night* I came across a passage that I later referred to as a symphony of smells. In it La Guma tells about a soft breeze that descends from Table Mountain and gathers in its wake all the smells from various sources, garbage, rotten fish, human faeces, rotten vomit that smelled of cheap wine and many more. This smell ends in the nostrils of the poor who live in the tenements down there. So beautiful is that passage that I believe La Guma had a moment of *duende* when he wrote it though he speaks of something so negative, he dresses it in the most beautiful words.

Yes, when writers talk about their writing they shake the domes. In this instance so many writers from so many different backgrounds reinforce the idea that for as long as there is humanity, books in the form of novels, poems, dramas and other literary genres will be produced. Though there are various problems the process of writing and producing books will never stop. The story of Sananapo at the top fits the mould of a fairy tale anywhere in the world. It fits within all the theoretical framework of Kate Bernheimer, who is the guru of fairy tale/folktale literature. Though today's gadgets like television, cell phones etc. have taken people away from these forms folktales, fairy tales will endure.

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## BOOK REVIEWS

Blindness by Jose Saramago.  
Harcourt, 1998.

The book *Blindness* written by Jose Saramago is as riveting and intriguing as it is upsetting, nauseating and attractive to the reader. It is an allegory that has been written with great delicacy and care. It is a third person narration and centres on characters that have gone blind with a sickness called 'white blindness'. Those afflicted see nothing but whiteness. No cure can be found as the disease even afflicts a reputed ophthalmologist. Only one person in the book who is on the narrative stage throughout is a female character known as the doctor's wife. She must pretend to be blind just so as to be with her husband, the ophthalmologist to take care of him, but eventually takes care of the other blind people who were the first to be held in an old barracks but abandoned building. All have no names and are recognised within their anonymity as;

- the first blind man,
- the doctor who treated him,
- the doctor's wife (not blind but wanted to be with her husband),
- the boy with no mother,
- the man who stole the car of the first blind man
- the old man with the black eye patch,
- the girl with dark glasses, and
- the dog of tears.
- The wife of the first blind man gets reunited with her husband later in the narration.

These characters are the main focus of the narration. Later a whole lot of other people do come including hooligans who invade the barracks and impose a new life order in and violate others people's rights. Their violation is extreme as it affects collective and individual rights. Of the internees they find inside the barracks already.

From the moment the first blind man turns this way and that inside his car as he shouts "I can't see, I can't see", Saramago's book becomes a rollercoaster of intrigue and wonder. The rest of the cars behind him cannot move because he has blocked the traffic. Almost each word, sentence and or paragraph that follow the words, 'I can't see' become a twist in the plot or changes the angle of narration. The man is taken home by one with sinister motives who ultimately steals his car but subsequently goes blind himself. As from that moment Saramago offers no clue as to the cause and the origins of the disease. Neither can he fathom what the cure might be. The doctor, ophthalmologist who is among the first to be affected tries his all to communicate with the apparent naïve and apathetic government officials but all is to avail. The first blind man had stopped at a traffic light in the throng of traffic. The light had gone red thus prompting all traffic to stop. But when the light changes to green, he cannot move for all he sees in front of him was whiteness. All drivers behind him get impatient and blow their horns in apparent impatience.

When reality dawns to officialdom about this incident which ultimately becomes an event, the government, afraid of an impending epidemic collects all and quarantines them in the barracks. The old unused building is guarded by crude and panicky and super trigger happy soldiers who are themselves apparently very afraid of being infected by the disease. More people who catch the disease which is apparently not a contagion arrive. These are kept in separate rooms from the original key characters. Among them is a group of hooligans who upon arrival impose a rule with doses of cruelty and crudity. Saramago's imagined world in *Blindness* is credible every word after word. The story is clinically told with innovations on punctuation as well. The normal marks that go with Direct and Indirect Speech are not used and the normal boundaries of dividing sentences are also not observed.

With a sharp and keen narrative scalpel, Saramago's story prises open layer upon layer of the goings on in the holding camp. The behaviour of the soldiers who guard the place suggests that the building was not valued. Food in the building which is sourced from outside becomes a key commodity. The soldiers abandon the food somewhere in the passage and it has to be fetched. The hooligans after arrival take over the rationing of food and henceforth disturb the hitherto established routine among the early comers. The leader of the hooligans who has brought a gun inside the building becomes the ultimate number one threat to all. He however meets his demise and gets killed when the wife of the doctor stabs him with a pair of scissors that she had kept discreetly. The gang leader had made the wife of the doctor to do the most obnoxious act of sucking his penis after he had had sex with another woman.

Saramago says about the food; 'Each time those sent to fetch the food return to their ward with the meagre rations they have been given there is an outburst of angry protest' p146. This, the denial of food to the internees becomes another threat to their survival. This also gets coupled with the natural biological functioning of the body. The blind people have to use the same ablution facilities which they cannot see initially but are guided by the doctor's wife and thereafter have to follow their instincts to locate them. The place becomes a mess when piss and shit is trampled upon as they cannot see. Some, even among the after comers, die and have to be buried in the grounds of the compound. At some point it may seem as if one may not read on due to the dire situation of filth and smells and the general suffering and mayhem. But it is the style that Saramago uses in narrating the story that keeps the reader at the tip of the chair. Relief of moving out of the compound comes after one of the blind people burns beds that were packed up to the roof. Those beds become a pyre. The original internees in the compound escape and remain in solidarity as they find a completely changed world outside. The city is full of dead bodies that dogs tear and ravage. The sight makes the doctor's wife nauseous and sick as she vomits liberally. She however assists the gang in hustling for food as the rest of the city is in dire straits. Shops have been emptied or looted of food supplies but because she sees she can actually go to the innermost recesses of the shops and supermarkets to access food. At the end of the book the group hears people shouting outside 'I can see, I can see' as their eyesight returns to them one by one. The allegorical qualities of the book are highlighted and heightened by the doctor's words after he has regained his eyesight when he says; 'I think we are blind. Blind but seeing. Blind people who can see, but do not see'. Miraculously, it is the doctor's wife who becomes blind at that point.

In *Blindness*, Saramago has written a classic that will remain as such for a long time to come. His is vision of an artist who has created his own world of blindness as if he went through the experience of blindness and came back from it to tell the world about it. It is said Jamie Foxx blindfolded himself for several months when he prepared to act in a starring role as the blind Ray Charles. This, Foxx did to have experience of things from inside. One wonders as to what Saramago did to depict the state of blindness of so many people with such great accuracy. This book *Blindness* proves that indeed artists are creators. One wonders as to how this analogy would fit into Plato's theory of art. To Plato art is three removes from the real thing, but here is Saramago who goes right into the world of the blind and depicts them in such natural a form as he does.

It is amazing the way Saramago sort of airbrushes seriously queasy and despicable scenes of people trampling on shit as they sometime may not reach the toilets on time, and how when they dig the graves and cover them he does not provide detail. He leaves that to the imagination of the reader. Of course this is a narration of his own making and he may choose how to write and or present it. Only the doctor's struggle with the ablutions is put on the narrative stage for his wife to take care of him and clean him. The scene is one of the most distraught in the book because it shows how human dignity can be completely stripped off a person due to circumstances. The conditions in the barracks are so extreme that they may actually be worse than some of the worst prison conditions. At least in those dark and cruel prisons people see unlike here in the world of total darkness.

## Second Book Review

African Women's Writing – ed. Charlotte H. Bruner.  
Heinemann African Writers Series, 1993

The book, *The Heinemann Book of African Women's Writing* is a compilation of stories written by women from Western Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Africa, and Northern Africa. The outside cover of the book is a painter's impression of a collage of faces of women, African women of all hues in different head styles and headgears and rings, either on the ears or noses. Some are Muslim while some are probably Christian, some have their mouths open in apparent scorn or protest while some are serene and calm. The title of the book is imposed on all these faces. They are all looking sideways with somewhat unhappy, forlorn and sad expressions on their faces. None of them express happiness and or contentment in the form of a smile or laughter. The editor states in the main Preface (each section has its own preface that explains the current status quo of the region) that "the new writers or hitherto unpublished ones ... were recording the new African a ... new generation ... since independence, since modernization, since the feminist movement". (v)

When women tell stories, a perspective that was unknown emerges. All through history, patriarchy dominated the narrative discourse of storytelling or more appropriately writing stories. It was the result of patriarchy that Mary Evans had to publish her books under the pseudonym George Eliot. All this because it was believed then that women were not supposed to be deep thinkers, to put it in simple terms. Needless to say there are some quarters in society who still believe that. This woman who wrote such classics as *Silas Marner*, *the weaver of Raveloe*, *Adam Bede*, *The Mill on the Floss* etc. is supposed to have been weak in thinking. Yet she was one of the leading lights of the Victorian Era. Going through the stories of these women writers, one wonders as to how certain scenes and or themes could have come out of the pens of men. For instance several stories have the theme of woman abuse or gender based violence (GBV) as it's referred to in the modern parlance. Just how would male writers depict this being abusers themselves?

In the story *The Pay packet* (pp15 – 25) by Ifeoma Okoye of Nigeria in Western Africa, conflict arises when the husband demands his wife's 'pay packet' at the end of every month. Bertrand the husband who is referred to in his social circles as the 'perfect gentleman' for his "... laid back façade ... civilised, suave, courteous and kind" personality or idiosyncrasy is "no better than a brute" at home "for to her [i.e. Iba, his wife] "any man who beat[s] his wife" is a brute. He abuses his wife Iba, beats her up if she cannot produce the money. In the prefatory note the editor points to the great changes that have come over society in general with post - independence namely, "establishment of elementary and secondary schools and ... local universities [that] makes it more possible for women to receive higher education". Though men surely enjoy their social independence which can really only be oiled by money, women are not supposed to. Iba like many of her colleagues has to hand her salary wholesale to her husband. Non conformity to such a demand of her money ends in physical abuse from the "six feet tall and 80 kilograms of him as compared to her five feet four inches and 55 kilograms".(18)It turns out that many of her other colleagues in the teaching field are going through a variety of such financial abuse. Phoebe, Ida's

“classmate at the teacher training college “tells of how her husband “insists that I use my salary to feed the family” and “argues that he is responsible for the rent ... and paying the children’s school fees. Men are terrible. Either way, they cheat you”.

This sentiment from Phoebe about men strikes an echo with one of Iba’s girl pupils who said, “Boys always fight for things that are not theirs ... I dislike them – they’re all horrible”.p16 The girl had been bullied by a boy who had taken ‘five kobo’ from her. He received his punishment from Iba. The twist in the tail however comes when Bertrand’s friend Maka had visited them after Bertrand; the perfect gentleman had beaten her up for having used the money without his consent. Though Maka noticed Ida’s state, Ida hid the truth from him thus saving Bertrand the blushes of being found out as the abuser of his wife that he was. It is only then that the truth is known that it is Ida’s father who had been receiving the money. In total embarrassment and in an uncharacteristic subdued manner Bertrand explains to Iba this state of affairs.

In addition to all the other man-problem that men behave the way they do is the problem of extra-marital affairs. Elizabeth in the story *Workday* by Awuor Ayoda from Eastern Africa in Kenya has a husband whose extra marital affair seems to be a right to him i.e. Peter. The husband does not come home early and that subject is obviously taboo. When Elizabeth says: (y)ou know very well that I know about that woman ... Why do you come home at all? Why don’t you screw her until you get it out of your system?” (51) All of this gets a stern “Shut up! ... Don’t question me as if you were the man in this house”. (51) Patriarchy is so ingrained that men get things their way and will always depend on force as ‘a resounding slap on the side of her face’ is meant to always silence her.

The other problem seems to be the way the system has been built. All of these happen and there will be no intervention from society. When men have stolen cattle from others for instance, then a court will sit. But domestic affairs between men and women in which women are victims seem to be ignored. This following confrontation between Bertrand and Ida is typical in households in which men exert brute force and brawn instead of brain:

‘Where’s the money’? asked Bertrand.

Iba feigned ignorance, what money?

‘Your salary, of course. What other money?’ (22)

That is followed by three slaps ‘on the right cheek’. She’s slapped again on the mouth until she tasted blood.(23)

These are the experiences of African women told by them in this book. The fact that women are resourceful in working to support families is not seen by men.

Otherwise men’s relatives prove to be a nuisance. This is found in *New Life at Tandia*, a story by Aminata Maiga Ka, from Senegal in Western Africa. Rokhaya is happily married and is exposed to comforts hitherto unknown to her. Her husband, Baba Kounta spoils her with gifts that can only really increase her happiness until Baba Kounta’s elder brother Omar Kounta visits. ‘When he came he had planned to stay only a few days. But the good life which he experienced at his

brother's home made him 'inclined to prolong his stay'. (42) In spite of all the comfort and courteous treatment that he receives from Rokhaya his brother's wife, he becomes a nasty fault finder in her. The climax of his insults behind his brother's back is: 'You'll never know maternal love, barren woman that you are.' (43) All of this ill-treatment Baba Kounta is not aware of. But Rokhaya, who has been suffering in silence in either fear or respect for Omar Kounta, silently seeks help from Mother Dioulde, a neighbour who mixes potions for her to drink. She soon conceives.

The domestic violence that men perpetuate in their homes is just the microcosm of the macrocosm of what they do to their nations and countries. Mozambique is one country that has never seen peace since independence from Portuguese rule. The story *Madalena Returned from Captivity* is set in the Cabo Delgado area where guns still blaze even today and have turned the area into killing fields. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) has been sending soldiers there to keep the peace, but to no avail. In Lina Magaia's *Madalena Returned from Captivity* "a child of fourteen suffering from rickets and malnutrition" (81) is returned home after a stretch of time (14 years) from captivity by bandits. Her condition is sub-human as "she has lice all over her head, her body and her clothing". (81) All she does after being found is to tremble and shiver continuously from the trauma that she had gone through. She was "made forcibly into a woman for the bandits". Her tender little body and health condition are not good at all. Her eyes collect tears that will not flow and her "hands end in nails that are overgrown". It will indeed take a long time for children like these to get adjusted back to normal life. Young boys are also kidnapped and are made soldiers. One of the most heart rending comments is from Madalena's maternal grandmother 'with wrinkles on her face, wrinkles on her arms ... who cries 'Nwananga mina, Nwananga mina u buyile! Yho nwananga ...' (My child! My child, you've come back! Oh, my child ...') Madalena's mother cries 'Bernado my beloved ... how shall I find you to tell you that your daughter has returned?' At that point as she weeps, 'many of the women are also weeping'. This part of the story shows just how women suffer from the deeds of men, how they suffer from patriarchy at times silently.

Perhaps one of the weakest stories is from Southern Africa's Bessie Head's entitled *Woman from America*. It is one dimensional with no real character development or thematic exploration. The story coming from such a prolific pen is dull and unimaginative.

The women writers of Northern Africa seem to shy away from calling or referring to their men by name. Possibly this is due to a comment in their preface which refers to 'cultural and religious constraints' on them. But the stories, almost all strictly culture bound are as fascinating as the rest in the book.

All of these stories and others from the continent are contained in *African Women's Writing* as edited by Charlotte H. Bruner. If anyone wants to understand African women's experiences which are still under strict patriarchal control, get this book and read it. The true meaning of 'igama la makhosikazi ma li bongwe will be truly appreciated and that women are rocks who though they still suffer from the yoke of patriarchy remain uncrushed.

### Third book review

The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born by Ayi Kwei Armah.  
Heinemann African Writers Series, 1988.

The quote from The New York Times on the front cover of Ayi Kwei Armah's *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is probably an accurate reflection of how the book got to be received by the reading public, "... in the first rank of recent novels anywhere...". By this quote The New York Times is as in the case of the hits of musical/record ratings, placing the book on par with the best in the world. The comment from The Times Literary Supplement on the back cover sums the book thus: '... his central story of an upright man resisting the temptations of easy bribes and easy satisfactions and winning for his honesty nothing but scorn even from those he loves, is most vividly conveyed.'

The book captures the story of Ghana, formerly known as the Gold Coast, the first country that emerged out of the claws of colonialism. Ghana is the first country to attain independence from colonial rule under the leadership of Osagfeyo Kwame Nkrumah. The high expectations of social, political and especially economic change by the citizens about the new ruling elite are soon dampened and sobered by the wanton abandon on the elite of neglect for the rule of law. Things slide gradually into unstoppable corruption, nepotism and the plundering of state resources. The quote from the Times Literary Supplement refers to 'an upright man' who is simply referred to as 'the man' in the book. Armah probably names this character thus to indicate that he represents every person in Ghana, every ordinary person, man and or woman. The Ghanaian society is thus divided into the ordinary people, the hoi polloi, as represented by 'the man', the new elite, represented by Koomson and his ilk, and in between those who plunder the state resources by pushing corruption like the man whose 'mouth was a wolf shape' p27. His name is Amankwa and he desperately wants to bribe the man to do somebody else's work in an underhand manner.

The heart of Armah's narration however is in a passage on p92 which is said by Teacher, the man's friend:

I saw men tear down the veils behind which the truth had been hidden. But the same men, when they have power in their hands at last, began to find the veils useful.

So there are those, the new elite who do not appear on the narrative stage with glitz and glamour but of course they are represented by Koomson and his wife. In fact Osagfeyo the president is referred to in blah blah blahs. These at that, said over the radio are mentioned as 'all the ritual bits of praise that seemed to be all the news these days'. Ghana being the first African country to attain independence sets the scene for all other following African countries that attain independence thereafter. Her state resources are captured to push propaganda for the ruling elite. Koomson's wife rather rubs 'their riches' on the noses of those she is close to in huge doses. She is the real Ms Razzmatazz. These are the ones who have been privileged to go beyond the torn veil and

discovered what they found and hid it from the masses by ‘find(ing) the [very] veils [that they had torn] useful’.

Apart from Oyo, - the man’s wife – who wants to imitate the elite, the man remains morally upright. At some point during Koomson and his wife’s impending visit to the man’s family, Oyo insists on them buying expensive spirits i.e. liquor for the occasion. Of course the man remains his simple self. However Estella Koomson, the party man’s wife demonstrates during her visit with her husband her status when she comments about the quality of local beers;

‘This local beer’, she was saying, ‘does not agree with my constitution’. As if to rub it in more she continues; ‘Really, the only good drinks are European drinks. These make you ill’. The man, in a demonstration of the two sides of the quotation of the veil above, says;

‘As for me,’ said the man, raising his mug, ‘they do not make me ill. Perhaps in the pocket, but nowhere else’.

When the man and his wife visit the Koomsons, they are just overwhelmed by the extensive luxury that they see inside the room they ushered into; ‘[t] here ere things here to attract the beholding eye and make it accept the peoer of their owner. Things of intricate and obviously expensive design’. During the coup, Koomson the Party man is so overcome with fear that his bodily smells turn into an overpowering and unbearable rot exacerbated by the foul smell from his mouth and the free farts that issue from his bottom. He has to escape from the hole of the bucket latrine and be washed over by shit to escape to freedom.

This is a fascinating book which demonstrates the reality of the new oppressors of Africa’s children. They end under miserable circumstances and rejoice when their lives remain intact. Get the book and read it, it will fascinate you with its well written narrative shifts and realistic scenes of an Africa that is at war with itself..

## Fourth book review

Fools and Other Stories by Njabulo Simakade Ndebele.  
Ravan Press, 1983

The outside cover of the book *Fools and other stories* is a colourful artwork of a young man and an elderly man shaking hands. The young man has his left hand in a sling. He was stabbed assumedly in a brawl at a drinking spot. These two are the main characters in the title story; *Fools*... The book was recommended to me by my mentor Masande Ntshanga. The young man is ZaniVuthela and the elder is 'Panyaza' Zamani, referred to as Panyaza because of his continuous and incessant blinking of his eyes. This is part of the title *Fools and other stories* and is the title story that is fairly long and stretches between pps 152 to 280. These two had an unlikely chance meeting at Springs train station one morning and are inauspiciously fated to be knotted together in a narration full of colourful characters and twists. The first impression about Zani, the young man that Zamani, the elder and teacher tells Pikinini, the taxi driver is that he i.e., Zani has 'a worm under his tongue'. As the story progresses it becomes clear that the elder man accommodates and tolerates the young man in his space and that he compromises his professionalism and ethics as a teacher for him. There is a reason for that and as it turns out Zamani had impregnated Zani's sister, Mimi some time ago. The story is told in the first person, that is from Zamani's persona.

These two meet at an unlikely place; the train station and reluctantly engage. Zani is preoccupied by his pomposity of someone who knows it all. He is restless and 'he paced up and down [and] he also kept looking at his watch, muttering to himself as he did so.' pp (152 -153) Zamani is going to school. As the story progresses the two get on well though it is clear that Zamani tolerates the young man Zani. Being at an 'angry young man stage', he thinks the world can just turn around with a twitch of his fingers under his unrealistic ideals. He rudely intrudes into Zamani's class one day and tries to conscientize the children to his politics. It is clear at this point in the story that there is a dichotomy between the two. There is a difference between young and old, inexperienced as opposed to maturity. The young man is idealistic as opposed to being realistic. Zani is obsessed with turning the hitherto ingrained cultural calendar dates and events and practices of the country by challenging the day which was then referred to as Dingans's Day. His naiveté is exposed on the posters that he has written; 'DAY OF THE COVENANT: STAY HOME AND THINK, and on others: DINGANE'S DAY: STAY HOME AND THINK'. (p211) But the interesting part is how Zani tells Zamani about how he will invade his that is Zamani's class as recalled by him:

'I want to address your class next Monday,' he said. His arm was in a sling. And I could smell soured beer in his breath.

'Address my class?

'That's what I said'

'About what?'

‘About life’

‘About life?’

‘That’s what I said’

‘Well these are mere primary school children.’

‘That’s the point. They must be caught young.’

‘Caught young?’

‘That’s what I said ...’

It is clear that the young man either does not understand the rules of protocol pertaining to the rigours and practices at school or is a downright stupid upstart. In the end however when the whiplashes from the Boer crashes on the human body during a picnic held on Dingaan’s Day Zani runs ‘up the hill ... much faster ... despite his arm that that was still in a sling’(p274). The whiplashes end on Zamani being heavily punished but his will totally shut out pain until the Boer faces defeat and cries out of frustration.

If Zani portrays the characteristics of someone who should be understanding issues of the world but does not, two children Vukani and Teboho in *The Music of the Violin* struggle with their middle class parents who want to flaunt them, particularly Vukani like a pet trophy for friends. Enrolled for a violin class something which is obviously outside of the school curriculum, he is often forced to abandon his homework and play for his parents and their friends. He is bullied by his peers in the streets who want him to play the current township ditties; ‘Can you play Thoko Ujola Nobani?’ p140. The township rough necks do not even understand the difference between the music of Mozart and Mahlathini. The parents, especially the mother, have set high standards for the family, for Vukani and things like household material. When a ‘china pot’ breaks she shrieks at Teboho, Vukani’s sister and claims that there’s nobody ‘white and black, [who] can boast of owning such a set ... a genuine set’. Teboho reminds her mother how she has ‘been showing more interest in your dishes than in your children’. It is things such as these that Ndebele exposes to demonstrate how families, neighbourhoods, communities, societies and countries fall apart. People don’t take care of the smallest things that are the foundations of society, but to build foundations in the branches of the trees up there.

## **Response to the Reader Report**

I received the Reader Report with great joy and humility. I did not have the vaguest inkling that what I was writing would be viewed in such a positive light by my mentors. To quote from the first paragraph of the report, I am said to be having ‘...a fine ear for how people speak coupled with sharp powers of observation and the prose skill to concisely set down what [I] see”. The report quotes from my abstract and very accurately refers to my indebtedness to my young days when we would listen to folkloric material in the form of folktales, dinoonwaane and riddles, dithamalakwane. These were stories narrated by word of mouth, in other words ‘written’ from mouth to ear and passed on from generation to generation. But later through schooling I was introduced to reading books, newspapers and other written material. Among the material that I read of stories and tales, some were narrated in the same way as the narratives I had heard from my elders in my younger days. Due to the fact that my imagination had been shaped by the folklore material, it was easy to follow the stories written. Listening to stories being told is more human and has the extra quality of being nearer to the action as compared to reading which may often be a lonely though enjoyable activity.